



Holler If You Hear Me: Searching For Tupac Shakur

By Michael Eric Dyson

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Acclaimed for his writings on Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as his passionate defense of black youth culture, Michael Eric Dyson has emerged as the leading African American intellectual of his generation. Now Dyson turns his attention to one of the most enigmatic figures of the past decade: the slain hip-hop artist Tupac Shakur. Five years after his murder, Tupac remains a widely celebrated, deeply loved, and profoundly controversial icon among black youth. Viewed by many as a "black James Dean," he has attained cult status partly due to the posthumous release of several albums, three movies, and a collection of poetry. But Tupac endures primarily because of the devotion of his loyal followers, who have immortalized him through tributes, letters, songs, and celebrations, many in cyberspace. Dyson helps us to understand why a twenty-five-year-old rapper, activist, poet, actor, and alleged sex offender looms even larger in death than he did in life. With his trademark skills of critical thinking and storytelling, Dyson examines Tupac's hold on black youth, assessing the ways in which different elements of his persona—thug, confused prophet, fatherless child—are both vital and destructive. At once deeply personal and sharply analytical, Dyson's book offers a wholly original way of looking at Tupac Shakur that will thrill those who already love the artist and enlighten those who want to understand him. "In the tradition of jazz saxophonists John Coltrane and Charlie Parker, Dyson riffs with speed, eloquence, bawdy humor, and startling truths that have the effect of hitting you like a Mack truck."—San Francisco Examiner "Such is the genius of Dyson. He flows freely from the profound to the profane, from popular culture to classical literature."—Washington Post "A major American thinker and cultural critic."—Philadelphia Inquirer "Among the young black intellectuals to emerge since the demise of the civil rights movement...undoubtedly the most insightful and thought-provoking is Michael Eric Dyson."—Manning Marable, Director of African American Studies, Columbia University

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

A poor, urban, high school dropout and book-devouring autodidact who'd quote Shakespeare in conversation, Shakur would also sing along to Sarah McLachlan. Dyson (*I May Not Get There with You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr.*), a Baptist minister, reveals the complexity of Shakur and shows why even five years after his death his records, poetry and films continue to sell. "He was not hip-hop's most gifted emcee. Still, Shakur may be the most influential and compelling rapper of them all," writes Dyson. "He was more than the sum of his artistic parts." Complementing Dyson's articulate perspectives on the short life and extraordinary impact of the icon are his emotive interviews with writer Toni Morrison, actress Jada Pinkett Smith (Shakur proposed to her, but was turned down), rapper Mos Def and more than a dozen others. Most striking are the conversations about and with Shakur's beloved mother, a former Black Panther and ex-crack addict. Dyson uses themes in Shakur's raps to examine the larger ills of hip-hop culture such as misogyny and the new hostility between youths and elders without neglecting the rapper's positive acts and intentions. Shakur wanted to "combat the anti-intellectualism of hip-hop," Dyson persuasively writes. (Sept.) Forecast: This book will sell, for Shakur has a huge fan base that has only grown since his death. But more than a music bio, the book will draw the attention of socially conscious readers who are interested in how hip-hop affects society.

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From Library Journal

Ordained Baptist minister and DePaul University professor Dyson (*Between God and Gangsta Rap*, LJ 1/96) here analyzes the life of rapper/actor Tupac Amaru Shakur (1971-96) as a microcosm of black American life and culture. Placing gangsta rap in social and historical context, he thoroughly and thoughtfully considers its key elements as evidenced by Shakur's music and videos, exploring issues like machismo, the simultaneous contempt for and adoration of black women, and black-on-black violence. (Shakur himself was shot to death in a still-unsolved murder.) Dyson discusses these sensitive, controversial subjects with such noted cultural analysts as Khephra Burns and Stanley Crouch, creditably balancing the opinions of rap's supporters, rap's critics, and rappers themselves. Though marred by a few minor errors, this well-written, intelligent, and energetically investigative work will make a valuable addition to academic libraries. The extremely high level of writing renders it unsuitable for fan-oriented biography collections, for which *Tupac Amaru Shakur, 1971-1996* (Three Rivers, 1998) is more appropriate. Bill Piekarski, formerly with Villa Maria Coll. of Buffalo, Cheektowaga, NY

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From [The New Yorker](#)

Ever since the rapper Tupac Shakur was shot to death, in 1996, he not only has been kept in the public eye by numerous posthumous releases but has become, for many young African-Americans, a full-fledged martyr. Dyson's book, a mixture of biography and polemic, examines Tupac both culturally and spiritually through a loosely organized series of meditations that begin in Tupac's childhood (his mother, Afeni, was a Black Panther who later fought a vicious addiction to crack cocaine) and move through his manhood (as a young student, Tupac read voraciously, from Aldous Huxley to Teilhard de Chardin). Occasionally, Dyson's claims for Tupac are a bit grand, but his eclectic reportage—he interviews a wide range of people, some famous, some not—paints a nuanced picture of his subject while illuminating the effect hip-hop has had on

America.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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