

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
Abbes Laghrour University-Khenchela
Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of English



Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Degree of MASTER
Option: American Civilization

TITLE:

**Hip-Hop and Resistance: The Case Study of Tupac
Shakur Against America**

Submitted By:

Nadia Hamidani

Malika Rebbouhi

Supervised By:

Dr. Khaled Chouana

Board of Examiners

Examiner: Dr. Walid Kefali

MCB

University of Khenchela

Supervisor: Dr. Khaled Chouana

MCB

University of Khenchela

September 2021

Dedication

We dedicate this work to our family members and to our friends.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank our supervisor Dr. Khaled Chouana for his guidance and support throughout this research. Also, we would like to thank the professors who served as members on our master committee. Finally, we want to thank our family members who have supported us throughout this research.

List of abbreviations

N.W.A

Niggaz Wit Attitude

THUG LIFE

The Hate You Give Little Infants Fuck Everyone

Abstract

This research aims at exploring the way Tupac Shakur addresses social and racial issues of the African-American community. Also, the dissertation examines the social and political activism of the American hip-hop singer. Our research concerns itself with analyzing some songs of Tupac. A content analysis of the songs has been carried out by focusing on the lyrics, the cover arts, the music videos, the literary motifs and tropes of the songs. We have also paid attention to the reception of the songs by relying on several reports written by music critics. We want also to examine the way hip hop music is used as an effective tool to reflect on the social conditions of African –American community. By the end of this research, it has been emphasized that protest music in general and hip-hop music in particular can be viewed as an adequate tool to stand against inequality and segregation and can help people cope with daily life problems.

Key words: Tupac - hip-hop - activism - segregation - police brutality

المخلص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى استكشاف الطريقة التي يعالج بها توباك شاكور القضايا الاجتماعية والعرقية للمجتمع الأفريقي الأمريكي. كما تتناول الأطروحة النشاط الاجتماعي والسياسي لمغني الهيب هوب الأمريكي. يهتم بحثنا بتحليل بعض أغاني توباك. تم إجراء تحليل لمحتوى الأغاني من خلال التركيز على كلمات الأغنية، وغلاف الألبومات، ومقاطع الفيديو الموسيقية، والمحسنات البديعية والأدبية. كما حرصنا على استقبال الأغاني بالاعتماد على عدة تقارير كتبها نقاد الموسيقى. نريد أيضاً فحص طريقة استخدام موسيقى الهيب هوب كأداة فعالة للتأمل في الظروف الاجتماعية للمجتمع الأفريقي الأمريكي. بنهاية هذا البحث، يمكن القول أن □ موسيقى الاحتجاج بشكل عام وموسيقى الهيب هوب بشكل خاص □ يمكن اعتبارها أداة مناسبة للوقوف □ د عدم المساواة والاقصاء ويمكن أن □ تساعد الناس على التعامل مع مشاكل الحياة اليومية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: توباك - هيب هوب - النضال - الاقصاء - عنف الشرطة

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Introduction

1. Background and Preamble of the Study

Citizens all over the world express their dissatisfaction with their politicians and decision makers by protests. Similarly, some singers of different genres convey the anger of these people through their songs and engagement in political and social activism. Thus, these singers express their anger and criticize politicians and officials through the messages they communicate in their protest songs.

Music then can be viewed as a powerful means to engage in political and social activism. As a matter of fact, we notice that in the United States there is a numerous number of singers of hip hop, rock music and folk music, to name but a few, who sing protest songs and express the disappointment of the people. Because, the ordinary people are desperately unable to convey their dissatisfaction with their politicians and cannot convey the hopelessness they undergo due to their difficult social condition.

It must be recognized that hip hop music emerged in America of the 1970's as a kind of street music mainly among African -Americans who lived in the ghettos of New York City. This genre of popular music became an important means of expression used by singers such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, Lovebug Starski, Keith Cowboy, DJ Hollywood and Afrika Bambaataa, to name but a few. These artists denounced and addressed the hardships African-Americans faced. We must not forget that the African-American community of the 1970's lived in ghettos and people had to deal with poverty, social inequality, police brutality, and racism.

The idea of working on Tupac emerged as we have been studying the course of American studies during our Master 1 year. Our teacher focused on protest music in general and hip hop in particular by introducing several singer such as Bruce Springsteen, Childish Gombino, Pubic Enemy, Joan Baez, and Bob Dylan, just to

mention a few. These artists have been committed to social and political activism in the USA.

We have then decided to focus on the case study of Tupac Shakur as one of the African-American famous singers in America. It must be said that no Algerian master dissertation of the English department has dealt with the work and artistry of Tupac. We therefore felt that our topic is very relevant as our supervisor encouraged us to engage in a reflection about the artistry and activism of Tupac.

2. Research Problem

The research problem of this study has to do with investigating the different artistic strategies adopted by Tupac to address the social and political issue of America of the 1990's. We must not forget that Tupac was born in 1971 and died in 1996 when he was assassinated in Las Vegas because of a drive-by shooting. Therefore, it should be noted that much of Tupac's music of the 1990's has been addressing social issues of inner cities and in a sense he can be viewed as a symbol of activism against segregation and inequality.

In this context, we are going to ask the following questions:

- What do the protest songs of Tupac Shakur deal with?
- Can the songs of Tupac be considered as an effective medium of resistance?
- To what extent can we view him as an artist and activist who can affect the African-American community?
- Was Tupac engaged in social and political activism?
- Did he participate in meetings that raise awareness about gang violence in neighbourhoods? Did he care about human rights and civil liberties?

Within the framework of this dissertation, we are not going to analyze the complete discography of Tupac; rather we have decided to select eight songs in order to

analyze them and examine the activism of Tupac. The reception of the songs of Tupac by his listeners is undoubtedly the most important factor of our analysis. Therefore, we are going to give importance to the reception of the songs we have chosen to analyze.

3. Aim of the Study

This research aims at exploring the way Tupac addresses social and racial issues of the African-American community in addition to examining the effectiveness of his songs and activism. Our purpose is to prove that Tupac had had a great impact on the African-American community and particularly after he passed away when he was shot in Las Vegas in 1996.

Throughout this research we are going to examine the most important songs, comments, actions and activism of the hip hop singer. Also, our study aims at focusing on the iconography and symbolism that were generated after the passing of Tupac. We cannot deny the fact Tupac has become an iconic figure for millions of youth all over the world. It will be then interesting to analyze the way he has become a symbol in America and all over the world.

4. Literature Review

We have examined the state of the existing literature and searched for scholarly books, dissertations and theses that have dealt with the artistry and activism of Tupac.

Bryan John McCann completed a PhD at the University of Texas at Austin in 2009, entitled “Contesting the Mark of Criminality: Resistance and Ideology in Gangsta Rap, 1988-1997”. This thesis is very relevant and particularly its fifth chapter entitled “Thug Life: Tupac Shakur and the Messianic Politics of Gangsta” (pp. 182-215).

McCann contends that Tupac’s lyrics are messianic as they urge the African-American community to rebel against the American system of injustice and ask for rights.

Two other master dissertations deserve to be mentioned here. The first one was written by Scott A. Mitchell in 2014 at the Illinois State University. Its title is “Hegemonic Resistance in Hip-hop Music: A Gramscian Rhetorical Criticism of Tupac Shakur”. In this thesis, Mitchell applied the thoughts of Antonio Gramsci who criticized the capitalist society and its hegemonic institutions and made a link between the Italian philosopher and Tupac. The second master dissertation belongs to Christopher Darnell Campbell and was written in 2002 at California State University, San Bernardino. It is entitled “A Stylistic Analysis of 2pac Shakur’s Rap Lyrics”. Campbell used Paul Grice’s theory of implicature on the songs of Tupac by showing their rhetorical importance.

Several other books analyzed the artistry and activism of Tupac. Tayannah L. McQuillar and Fred L. Johnson wrote a relevant book in 2010 entitled *Tupac Shakur: The Life and Times of an American Icon*. The authors profiled the hip hop singer and looked into the history of his family by paying particular attention to the political background of his mother, Afeni, a former Black Panther. The book offers insightful reflections about Tupac’s life and activism.

Also, Jamal Joseph’s *Tupac Shakur Legacy* (2006) offers a realistic and vivid account of the life and artistry of the hip hop singer by tracing his early childhood in Harlem, to his emergence as a young artist, through his incarceration, release, and last his dramatic death.

Finally, the *Rolling Stone*’s article of Kevin Powell simply entitled “Tupac Shakur: 1971-1996” and which was written on October 31, 1996, reveals the story on the short life and violent death of the hip hop icon.

All in all, it can be said that this dissertation on Tupac is the first one to be written by Algerian students of EFL in the English department of the University of Khenchela.

5. Historical Background

Hip hop music can be traced back when we examine slavery in the USA. In fact, slaves from different African countries, tribes and cultures used singing as a way to communicate between them during the long journey of labor on the fields of cotton. They used songs to look for kin, countrymen and women. Music was a way for slaves to express their feelings whether it was sorrow, joy, inspiration or hope.

Slaves used drums to communicate coded messages for revolt and escape. When they didn't have drums, enslaved people played drum patterns on the body. Hands clapped, feet stomped, bodies swayed and mouths provided sophisticated rhythmic patterns.

Songs were passed down from generation to generation throughout slavery. In the fields of cotton as slaves were working, people could hear those singing songs to pass the time. These songs were a way for them to share their life stories. Later, many slave owners began to forbid their workers from using their own languages to chant or use drums. Owners believed this was a form of communication, getting the message out to other slaves about impending escapes or rebellion. Before the abolition of slavery in 1865, slaves sang work songs to help them through the hard work of their everyday life. They sang religious spirituals for moral support.

During the 20th Century, African-Americans developed different genres and subgenres of music including gospel, rumba, blues, R&B, soul, funk, and others. Hip hop music started in the African-American areas of the Bronx, New York City, in the late 1970's.

Young people of the Bronx started creating their own cultural expressions which reflect their real life. These forms of expressions would come together to form the four pillars of hip hop which are deejaying, rapping, graffiti painting and break dancing.

The first major deejay was Dj Kool Herc , an 18-year-old immigrant who introduced the huge sound system of his native Jamaica to inner city parties using two turntables. He melded percussive fragments from older records with popular dance songs to create a continuous flow of music.

Other collected Djs, Mcs, B-boys and B-girls and Grafitti artists aimed at spreading hip hop across the country. Since the period, hip hop witnessed its first records and started to expand.

During the 1980's, several hip hop artists became well known and people all over the world started to listen to hip hop music. In 1980, Kurtis Blow released a single entitled "The Breaks", which became the first certified gold rap song. "The Message" was released in 1982 by Grandmaster Flash and the furious Five. Their song was one of the first hip hop protest songs that provided a social commentary. The lyrics of the "The Message" describe the stress and hopelessness of inner-city poverty.

Other hip hop groups such as Run-DMC with their song "It's Like That" (1983) and Public Enemy with their song "Fight the Power" (1989) also addressed the social issues of racism and segregation.

The early 1990's saw the emergence of gangsta rap or gangster rap, a subgenre of hip hop music whose lyrics assert the culture of American street gangs. Gangsta rap became very popular among youngsters because its lyrics focused on drugs, violence, money, and misogyny. Early famous artists and groups of gangsta rap include Ice-T, N.W.A, MC Hammer, Snoop Doggy Dog, and Tupac Shakur, to name but a few.

Today, we can see that hip hop has become a fashionable music because of its commercial success all over the world. Artists such as Jay Z, Lil Wayne, Kanye West have become very known hip hop icons and are followed by millions of people.

6. Definition of Concepts

This master dissertation needs to be clear and therefore we are going to define some concepts that we are going to use throughout the research. Our goal in here is to develop a logical and a coherent conceptual framework.

Hip hop music is mostly known as the genre of music that originated in the Bronx of New York City during the early 1970s by African-Americans to express themselves over topics that matter their everyday life.

Hip hop music can be also defined as “a lifestyle with a developed and colorful culture, its own language, and fashion style, specific kind of music and thinking which is constantly developing” (Fiedler 11). It means that hip hop reflects African-Americans’ lifestyles, culture and express their thoughts.

When we speak about resistance in relation to American history, it can be directly linked with African-American resistance. Resistance notes the Cambridge Dictionary is “a situation in which people or organizations fight against something or refuse to accept or be changed by something.” The term then can be defined as African-American strength, opposition and refusal to comply with the hardships and difficulties of their everyday life.

Hip hop music is undoubtedly linked to activism whether it is social or political. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, activism means “the use of direct and noticeable action to achieve a result, usually a political or social one”. Activism consists of efforts to intervene in social, political, economic, or environmental reform with the desire to make changes in society toward a perceived greater good.

Protest music is also a means of engaging in activism. It played an important role in the history of the United States. Louise Haynes defines protest music as “songs whose lyrics convey a message which is opposed to a policy or course of action

adopted by an authority or by society as an institution.” (247) A protest song is a way of complaining, challenging and opposing any social, political system or situation in a peaceful way using songs.

The St. James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture identifies gangster rap as “the most controversial type of rap music, having received global attention for its vivid sexist, misogynistic, and homophobic lyrics, as well as its violent depiction of urban ghetto life in America.” Gangster rap initially was called reality rap, a subgenre of hip hop music that emerged in the mid-1980s as a distinct but highly controversial rap subgenre, whose lyrics assert the culture and values typical of American street gangs and street hustlers. It has widely become associated with the West Coast, particularly Los Angeles.

The last concept we need to define is “police brutality”. It is another permanent form of abuse, mistreatment and discrimination that African- Americans still suffer from in America. Allyson Collins states that “police officers engage in unjustifiable shooting, severe beating, fatal chockings and unnecessarily rough physical treatment in cities throughout the United States.” (1) It is the extreme and exaggerated use of force, violence and persecution by the police against African-Americans and it is a civil rights violation.

7. Primary and Secondary Sources

After giving some definitions of key terms, we have to examine the sources we have relied on to conduct this research.

Concerning primary sources, they include all first-hand documentation produced by Tupac Shakur including songs, interviews, and music videos.

Secondary sources include books and articles on the artistry and career of Tupac as well as academic works in various disciplines. We have examined academic works

on hip hop music, its history and also on protest music. Additionally, we have consulted references in American politics, American culture and its myths, as well as books about popular music, philosophy and literary criticism. To these must be added several biographical accounts and American novels that we have read in addition to articles written by journalists of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and by rock critics.

The books on Tupac address several aspects of the singer such as his life, his political and social commitment. The biography of Tupac written by Michael Eric Dyson and which is entitled *Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur* (2006) is very relevant and has helped us significantly. Dyson uses Tupac's life as a prism through which he examines African-American culture, racism, segregation, and the American society of the 1990's as a whole. The book also explores the legacy of Tupac, the folio of his music, the women in his life, and the lyrics of this gangster with a thug life.

Another secondary source that deserves to be mentioned is the article of Karin L. Stanford "Keepin' It Real in Hip Hp Politics: A Political Perspective of Tupac Shakur" (2011). The article examines Tupac's distinct political ideas and identifiable activism and asserts that Tupac has contributed to the African-American fight against racism and injustice.

8. Approach and Method of the Research

The central issue we want to address in this thesis concerns the fact that Tupac used several artistic strategies to address segregation and racism in his country and by doing so he became a symbol and an iconic figure of the African-American communities.

To investigate the different strategies adopted by Tupac, we are going to follow an approach that can be viewed as multidisciplinary. The thesis encompasses musical, sociological, political, philosophical, cultural and literary aspects. We have examined American society, its classes and the sociological and economic aspects of the United States through the songs of Tupac and through the writings of some sociologists and economists to the extent that our thesis addresses those issues.

To answer the questions raised in the beginning of this introduction, we have decided to start a content analysis of 8 songs. The following table gives an overview of the 8 songs which have been selected for the analysis. The methodology of the table does not follow a chronological order. The songs are classified according to their themes and have been categorized according to their chapters (see below).

n°	Song	Album	Year	Theme	Charts
1	“So Many Tears”	<i>Me Against the World</i>	1995	Hopelessness – gun violence	Album peaked at number one in the USA (<i>Billboard 200</i>)
2	“Cradle to the Grave”	<i>Thug Life Vol.1</i>	1994	Incarceration – Thug life	25 th on the <i>US Hot Rap Singles (Billboard)</i>
3	“California Love”	/	1995	California – life party	Single peaked at number one in the USA (<i>Billboard Hot 100</i>)
4	“Hit Em Up”	/	1996	East Coast-West Coast hip hop rivalry	Certified triple Platinum by the RIAA
5	“Trapped”	<i>2Pacalypse Now</i>	1991	Police brutality	13 th on the <i>US Top R&B/ Hip-Hop Albums (Billboard)</i>
6	“Words of Wisdom”	<i>2Pacalypse Now</i>	1991	Gun violence - ghettos - poverty - segregation	13 th on the <i>US Top R&B/ Hip-Hop Albums (Billboard)</i>

7	“Changes”	<i>Greatest Hits</i>	1998	Drugs - poverty - ghettos - segregation	The song peaked at number two in the USA (<i>Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs (Billboard)</i>)
8	“Brenda’s Got a Baby”	<i>2Pacalypse Now</i>	1991	Poverty - drugs - exclusion	13 th on the <i>US Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums (Billboard)</i>

9. Outline

Our outline has been developed by dividing it into three main chapters based on the artistic strategies of Tupac.

The first chapter will deal with songs that portray the gangster rappers’ life. In this first chapter, we are going to talk about the life in African-American street ghettos, which is characterized by special street code. The songs deal with crime, drugs, and the use of profanity words to establish and reinforce a social identity of the African-American community.

Chapter two is entitled “addressing social and racial issues” and will shed light on Tupac’s songs about social issues and songs of segregation and racism. The second chapter will focus on the themes of lack of opportunity, poverty, hopelessness and police brutality. In this second chapter, we will see that Tupac raps about his personal experiences of the ghetto. He sings about different social, economic and racial topics that hurt the African-American people.

The third and final chapter will introduce Tupac’s social and political activism. This last chapter deals with Tupac Shakur as a socially conscious artist who made great contributions in the fight against racism and injustice in America.

Chapter One: Singing about the Gangsters' Life

"I have learned more in the streets than in any classroom." – Don Vito Corleone

"Gangsta to us didn't have anything to do with Al Capone and stuff like that. It's just about living your life the way you want to live it. And you're not going to let nothing stop you." – Ice Cube

*"Gangsta rap was the most important movement since the beginning of rock 'n' roll." – Jerry Heller to
Los Angeles Times, 2001*

The first chapter deals with Tupac's strategy of singing about gangsters' life and the conditions of the African-American youngsters in the streets of the ghetto. Their life is characterized by crime, violence and struggle against racism, segregation and poverty.

Tupac's strategy of singing about those issues is considered as a relevant account which reflects what African-Americans witness in the ghettos of the inner cities.

The chapter will give a clear idea about how Tupac's songs depict the life of those gangs. As a matter of fact, Tupac celebrates in his songs the gangsters and their lifestyle as contended in the above quotation of Ice Cube.

1. Gangsters and Thug Life

The late 1980's and the beginning of 1990's witnessed the birth of gangster rap in Los Angeles. This genre of music allowed African-American young people to narrate

their own stories and experiences about their real lives. They use drugs, are involved in criminality and gang violence and face poverty. Since its early pioneers were gangs, gangster rappers started to sing about matters that were related to their life experiences and their lyrics portray gang and ghetto life from a gangster's point of view.

Tupac himself, as a gangster rapper who was considered as the product of that environment in which he brought up, sung about the gangster's life in several songs. While singing about gun violence and shootings that occurred between gangs, Tupac gives his audience an image about those gangsters who spread violence in the streets of the ghetto.

The existence of the gangs led to a great rivalry and competition among its members. This violence became known as black on black crime and gained dominance in the African-American communities. P. Ray Kedia contends that "Black-on-Black crime has spread throughout America as an epidemic, a contagious sickness which has gripped the country with fear and frustration and anger." (15) As a matter of fact, when people live in segregated neighborhoods and face exclusion and poverty, they become involved in crime by aggressing their own people.

So, gangster rappers started to portray those images from their lived realities in the lyrics of their songs as a message to convey the exclusion and violence of the African-American inner cities.

The term "thug life" is very common in hip-hop culture. According to the *Online Slang Dictionary*, thug life refers to a "philosophy of taking tremendous risks in terms of lifestyle, with the concept of making a plethora of money and dying young." It becomes clear according to this definition that African-Americans who live in the ghettos are determined to succeed in life by taking risks despite the fact they face racism and injustice.

By the 20th Century, the “thug” word started to take another meaning. Being a “thug” meant rebellion and resistance of African-Americans in the inner cities against the hardships and oppression they faced in the ghetto. The concept “thug life” has been popularized in several songs of Tupac. It refers to both his hip-hop group and his album *“Thug life” Volume 1*, released in 1994. Tupac, then, established his “Thug Life Code” to organize the life of African-American teenagers in the streets of the ghetto. Tupac’s “Thug Life Code” was set as a way to control and organize life of those gangs in the inner cities of the Bronx. The hip-hop singer stated: “I think even gangs can be positive. It just has to be organized the OG’s in the Coast East and West Coast and penitentiaries to come up with codes of ethics for criminals”

Tupac wanted the life of those criminals and gangs to be structured by a code of ethics. Tupac further said: “Yes, we go by this code. We gonna be against attacks on people that are not involved with the street gang, with the drug trade, or the illegal business at all. You know all that kidnapping and shooting drive-bys out the car, we against that” (Afeni Shakur 125). Tupac who lived a gangster life did not want his people to face the violence of the gangs and become victims.

According to Tupac, the acronym THUG LIFE stands for The Hate You Give Little Infants Fucks Everyone. “Thug life” was tattooed across the stomach of the hip-hop singer and was meant to be a warning message to the society to bring up children in a positive environment without racism, violence and oppression. “Thug life” became also a reflection on the African-American criminality and a symbol of the gangster life.

This is what Tupac refers to in his song “So Many Tears” (1995), which sums up the singer’s thoughts on social, political, institutional and environmental issues. Tupac sings about that tattooed “thug life” in his body and explains why he did so:

Inside my mind, couldn't find a place to rest

Until I got that thug life tatted on my chest (2-3 from the 2nd stanza)

For Tupac being a “thug” in the ghetto is highly required since this reputation enables those thugs to live in peace, and rest through gaining the respect of people and avoiding street persecution and disturbance.

Thug Life Volume: 1 is also a name of Tupac’s only studio album with his group Thug Life, which was released in 1994. The ninth song of the album, “Cradle to the Grave” (1994), was received positively.

The video of the song starts with a scene of an African-American family sitting together, around a table, praying and a baby in his crib, synchronized by Tupac’s laughter that seems to be more sarcastic and tends to convey a contempt and dissatisfaction about African-Americans’ life. Then, that scene is followed by Tupac’s voice reading the chorus of the song “From cradle to the grave, life ain’t never been easy in the ghettos.”

Then, the scene goes on to show Tupac and other African-American people in dungeons in prison. With other scenes of the same persons, when they were out prison, Tupac’s song gives a short description of how African-Americans live in the streets of the ghetto.

The scenes together with the repeated chorus indicate that life for African-Americans is so difficult and in most times ends up with being in prison.

In the 10th verse of the song, Tupac raps “*my first words were thug life*” which indicates that starting from their infancy, little children in the ghetto are being raised on how to combat, strive and confront the hardships of the ghetto. In fact, they need to learn how to be powerful, violent and even how to become hustlers and gangsters. This is what Tupac refers to when saying:

My first toy was a gun

I got sprung and learned to love weapons (17-18 from the third stanza)

The above verses refer to the state of being gangsters and having weapons. The image of a child having a gun or a weapon in his infancy instead of a toy is so powerful. Children are supposed to live their innocent childhood being surrounded by toys and love, but in the world of Tupac children learn how to become man and though in a very early stage of their lives. They follow the thug life code and become mean in order to survive in the hostile neighborhood.

It must be noted that Fagan and Wilkinson claim that as a result of worsening conditions, guns have become an everyday accessory in the ghetto. Their study found that most young males carry guns and describes them as central to their socialization (107). It means that while living in the streets of the ghetto, youngsters had to carry guns. This is what Tupac meant when saying: “Never live home without my sugar, I’m have to plug a nigga” (verse 9 from the third stanza)

Tupac is comparing his gun to something very sweet or something that he likes so much. He wants to indicate that he likes his gun and that he never goes out without it because he might need to use it at anytime while being out, in the hostile streets.

Since the ghetto streets are very harsh to live in, one need to be powerful or simply a thug. Tupac contends that:

Never, never die I’ll be a hustler mothafuckas

And makin’ thugs out you suckers from cradle to the grave

From the cradle to the grave. (20-22 from the first stanza)

Those lines also indicate the necessity of being a gangster while living in the ghetto.

Tupac is urging African-American teenagers to be hustlers and thugs in order to be able to face the violence and the hardships of the ghetto streets.

Gangster rap gained much reputation of rapping about the different socio-cultural and political difficulties related to life in the ghetto, besides to being misogynistic and focusing on masculinity. Gangster rappers always tend to highlight the typical image of gangsters that involves gun shooting and gangs' rivalry. However, when it started to flourish, other aspects of life start to grab the attention of rappers and appear in their lyrics. Rappers started to show creative freedom to make more money with big records and gain more fame when they started to sing about women. Tupac once claimed "If you want to make your money you have to rap for the bitches. Do not rap for the niggas," he added: "The bitches will buy your records, and the niggas want what the bitches want." (Westhoff, 288) Thus, money and fame started to attract the attention of most gangster rappers. This is what the following lyrics from "Cradle to the Grave" note:

But now I'm through with money

and through with street fame (19-20 from the third stanza)

Tupac asserts that in addition to the need of having weapons, money and fame are necessary in a gangster's life.

Tupac's strategy of instigating African-Americans to resist and stand against those unbearable conditions is a reflection to Tupac's mindset, as being a gangster. As the following lines suggest:

Do or die. Nigga pull the trigger don't give a fuck

You'd rather be in jail than get your ass bucked (9-10 from the fifth stanza)

The acronym NIGGA in the African-America language of Tupac stands for "Never Ignorant Getting Goals Accomplished". Tupac is urging his gang members to use their gunlock and never fear because life in the ghetto is similar to death. So, they had better work for improving their life situations even if they were jailed.

Tupac also adds in “Cradle to the Grave” the following lines:

Keeping murder on my mind and my tec-9

I got nothing to lose, paying dues, nigga you wanna die? (103-104)

TEC-9 is a type of guns which had developed a negative reputation for its association with organized crime, street gangs and mass shooting in the USA of the 1990's. In addition, the term “paying dues” indicates that it is high time African-American gained their rights in the United States as they went through slavery, then segregation to reach the point where today they are deprived from their basic civil rights and also opportunities in terms of housing, jobs, and health care.

Tupac sings about gangster life and this is clearly embodied in other song where he celebrates life of gangsters.

“California Love” (1995), is a very famous song which has become an iconic track depicting the beauty of living in California of the 1990's. The song also gained a high commercial success. “California Love” was released after Tupac's release from prison, reaching number one on the Billboard Hot 100 for two weeks (as a double A-Side single with “How Do U Want It”). The song also topped the charts of Italy, New Zealand, and Sweden. It was nominated for a posthumous Grammy Award for Best Rap Performance by a Duo or Group (with Dr. Dre and Roger Troutman) in 1997.

The video of the song takes place in a desert. The scene shows different artists with different and strange appearances; some of them are having horns and are accompanied with a group of women. All of them are dancing and singing in a weird way in that California's party till it ends up with Tupac's waking up as if all the desert festive scenes were a dream.

The song was released during the height of the rivalry between the west and the east coast in the mid 1990s that ended up with the death of Tupac and his competitor who used to be his best friend New York rapper The Notorious B.I.G.

The East Coast-West Coast hip-hop rivalry was an infamous hostility between artists and fans of East Coast and West Coast hip-hop scenes during the 1990s and ended up with the death of its famous rappers Tupac in 1996 and Biggie in 1997.

In 1991, angry at record companies' rejection of East Coast artists and the increasing popularity of West Coast hip-hop, Bronx rapper Tim Dog decided to express his anger on the Notorious disc track through his song "Fuck Compton" which was pointed to several artists from Compton such as N.W.A.

One of the responses to this single was of one Compton rapper called Tweedy Bird Loc, who released a record "Fuck South-Bronx". These two songs were enough for causing this inter-coastal conflict.

"California Love" meant to be far from violence and wanted to represent California as a place that "knows how to party" (2-3). It was a huge commercial success. According to the lyrics of the song, California is a place that deserves to be visited since it is the land of pleasure, opportunities and women. The song is a reflection on the life of gangster rappers and aims at presenting Tupac and gangster rappers as hedonist persons who believe that the pursuit of pleasure is the most important thing in life. Hedonists therefore strive to maximize their pleasure and happiness, and minimize their pains. Gangster rappers in general are pleasure seekers. They tend to please themselves and through the way they live.

Tupac asserts that California is the best place of having parties as he uses the vocabulary of parties: "bomb-ass hemp be", a slang for the good marijuana; "dance floor busy with bodies"; and "hoochies" meaning young women who have many casual

sexual partners. The phrases used by Tupac embody the idea that California is a land of pleasure where people go to parties and have a good time.

The music video of the song clearly depicts the celebration of a party through the different scenes which show the actors singing and dancing. Tupac adds that “The track hits ya eardrum like a slug to ya chest” (verse 3 from the 1st stanza). These words are a beautiful metaphor that implicitly refers to the singer himself. It describes him as a gangster who shoots the audience with his powerful lyrics and hits just like what a bullet does.

2. Street Code, Violence and Drugs

Singing about gangs’ life is a constant theme in Tupac’s songs. The life of the gangs is characterized by a special street code that governs the way they organize themselves in the African-American communities and control their behavior. Kurbin states that:

This street code articulates powerful norms and characterizes public social relations among residents, particularly with respect to violence. Neighborhood structural conditions generate the subculture, so cultural differences reflect adaptations to structural inequality. (363)

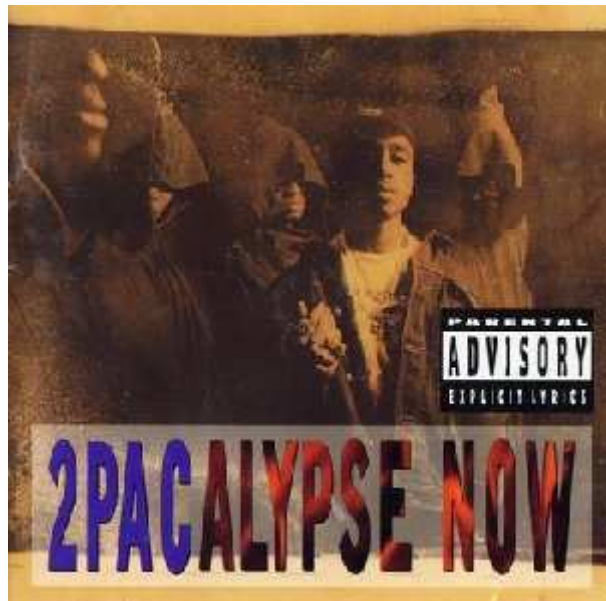
Respect and social identity are the key elements of street code. This respect cannot be easily obtained for the African-American members of the gangs, unless it is linked to violence and sometimes crime. Anderson states that “one way to acquire respect is by developing a reputation for being violent, by creating a self-image based on juice.” (72) In this sense, violence becomes an unavoidable matter in the inner streets of the ghettos and it can be said that gangster rap lyrics are recognized as a medium for transmitting this image.

In his 1994 BET interview with ED Gorden, the hip-hop singer said, “we as rappers brought that violence, we brought the violence we seen in the street put it in our

records” (Tupac). A person in the ghetto needs to be violent and dangerous to keep others away and to deserve respect as well. So, the rap lyrics mostly focus on explaining the important rules that should be followed. Although those rules are usually illegal to carry out, they are necessary in order to survive in those communities.

Tupac’s song “Trapped” (1991) is his solo debut single from *2Pacalypse Now*. This debut album peaked at number 13 on the US Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums charts. Also it was certified gold by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA).

The cover art of the album is worthy to be examined (See below).



Cover art of *2Pacalypse Now* (1991)

The picture shows Tupac along with his band members who are staring at the camera. They are very cold and look very dissatisfied and angry. Perhaps, it is because of the status quo in the African-American ghettos. Also, we must add that the cover art includes the Parental Advisory label which is a warning placed on audio recordings to alert parents of material unsuitable for their children as they include lyrics which contain profanity and inappropriate references. The informal language used by Tupac in

his album contends the idea that he is angry about inequality and injustice in the African-American inner cities.

The song “Trapped” addresses violence, racism, and police brutality that are prevalent in the inner cities and which Tupac had been trying to escape. It is considered as a symbol of resistance and activism since it highlights the African-Americans struggle against violence in their society. The following lyrics indicate how much violent are the ghetto’ streets:

Nine millimeter kickin’ thinkin’ about what the streets do to me

‘Cause they never talk peace in the black community

All we know is violence, do the job in silence

Walk the city streets like a rat pack of tyrants (5- 8)

The above lines convey a direct declaration that African-American community streets lack peace and tranquility. In addition, people who live there are sometimes obliged to commit crimes. The verses mean that killing, shooting and guns are very common things in a gangster’s life.

Gangster rap lyrics focus gangster lifestyle and street codes. Additionally, the spread of drugs in the streets among African-Americans is another issue that is highly stated in the gangster rap. Drugs increase violence among African-Americans and create friction among the different gangs and groups in the neighborhood. Kirbin asserts that “the prevalence of drugs- and of crack cocaine in particular- generates more than increased illegitimate opportunities. Crack and the drug trade create neighborhood battles for the control over markets where violence is used as social control.” (363) Thus African-American communities are controlled by gangs who are involved in drug dealing and who want to impose their codes and governance over the street. This is what Tupac refers to in “Cradle to the Grave”:

Penitentiary chances was an all day thang

The only way to advance, and if you slang (8-9)

Tupac means that through the thug life, one needs to use drugs in order to go to the penitentiaries, a required reputation for one's successful life in the ghetto.

Like many songs, "Changes" (1998) is also another relevant song by Tupac. The song highlights the singer's anger and frustration about the African-American communities whose lives are prevailed by racism, police brutality, drugs and gang violence. Besides, Tupac wants to express the idea that changes need to be made and African-Americans have the right to live in better conditions.

The following lyrics refer to the use and the spread of drugs in the African-American communities in addition to crime and violence within the same community.

First, ship'em dope and let em deal the brothers

Give 'em guns, step back watch em kill each other (9-10) [...]

'Cause both black and white are smokin' crack tonight (37)

The lines indicate the availability of drugs in the streets of inner cities and among its people. They can use it or sell it and it seems that drugs create a big problem for African-Americans. Tupac's above verses could be interpreted as a conspiracy that aims at aggravating the criminal activity in the inner cities. Since drugs are available for African-American members, police and authorities know that they will not ask for rights or disturb order.

3. Profanity Words in Gangster Rap Lyrics

Hip-hop singers in general and gangster rappers in particular are said to use some of special verbal forms of expressions. They use impolite, insulting and violent words. Also, they use non-verbal forms of expressions that are mainly related to their bodies' movement and the gestures they make while singing.

These forms of expressions are recognized as distinctive features of gangster rappers, who have been raised in streets, and sought to building their identities through their songs.

It is quite remarkable how much gangster rap lyrics become full of shameless, taboo and profane words which are part of the African-American culture. Harkness states that:

The N-word was a part of street language before hip hop ever existed. Given sociologist Charis Kubrin's finding that commercial rappers inject linguistic cues from street language into mainstream rap songs, it is not unusual to hear black and Latino rappers utter the n-word onstage, in the studio, and in conversation. They apply the word to people of all races, including whites, most of whom are reluctant to use it themselves. (39)

We can see that profane words are considered by rappers as a suitable way to transmit the lived realities of youth in the ghetto streets. According to Moloney and Sylva the profane words or language can be classified into two main kinds:

- “a) General swear words and those clear links to body parts, sexual references and offensive gestures, and
- b) Specialty discriminatory language whether related to older people, group of people of a particular or religion, people from an ethnic minority.” (5212)

Swear words are seem widely used by artists who tend to justify the use of such words by the fact they are just describing the reality of inner city life and the aim behind using such language is to make the songs understood by that unprivileged African-American communities riddled with violence, crime, drugs, poverty and illiteracy.

Profanity is a communicating tool which allows the rappers to express frustration, anger and also hope of the African-Americans members. The listeners of the songs are affected emotionally as they hear their idols using informal language of the streets

where they live. This is what Bahri and Saragih note, “these words can be used for a variety of reasons include to achieve specific reaction from others. Swearing injects a direct, succinct emotional component into the discussion, usually in order to express frustration, anger or surprise” (5)

Most of Tupac’s songs include profanity and swear words. The table below represents a collection of swearing words used by Tupac in the eight songs we have analyzed together with the number of their occurrences in the lyrics.

Swear Words	Number of Uses
Nigga	27
Fuck	10
Ass	6
Motherfucker	6
God	4
Bitch	3
Damn	3
Hell	3
Shit	1

We can see that the most common profane words used by Tupac are: *fuck*, *nigga*, *ass*, and *motherfucker*. Nigga is from the latin word “niger” which means black. This word becomes later “negro” and was mainly used by the white men in the Southern plantation to address the slaves. It stands as a symbol of their racism towards those people who have a black skin.

The word “nigga”, also means men or friends, it is widely used in rap lyrics and among African-American youngsters as a street code, slang language, a term of

endearment used to show their proud of being black. The term nigga then becomes very important term in hip-hop in general and it is widely used by African-American rappers.

“Fuck”, “fucking” and “fucked” motherfuckers or motherfuckin’ are more offensive and are widely used in Tupac’s lyrics. They are used to call for enemies. In fact these words can refer to places, people or things. Tupac used these words to demonstrate his anger and annoyance about the miserable condition of African-Americans.

In his songs, Tupac addresses social issues as he describes the lives of his people who lack a good level of education and who are brought and raised up in streets. His songs express his anger about the social, economic and political situation of the United States of the 1990’s. Besides, the stories he tells and the images he creates in his songs become a motivating tool for African-American youngsters to resist and better understand their position within their culture as well as the social milieu around them.

“Hit Em Up” (1996) is full of vicious insults and f-words because it was deliberately directed to several East Coast rappers. The song exacerbates the rivalry, led to Tupac’s death three months after its release. The song is also considered as one of the greatest because of its explicit lyrical content and the seriousness of violent intent expressed by Tupac and his colleagues of the West coast towards their rivals of the East coast.

The music video of the song starts by showing Tupac, half naked, with an athlete body, wearing a golden watch, a bracelet and chain in his neck. Then quickly the second scene is divided into two sections. The first section shows Tupac holding money in his hands as the same repeating the chorus “take money”. Behind Tupac, we can see another scene showing Tupac’s crew gathering around a table. The video shows some

Tupac's solo snaps rapping the lyrics of the song, and then other snaps of Tupac with a group of African-American people all singing and repeating the lyrics of the song.

"The fire" scene in the video may be as a sign to the hostility and feud of Tupac with his rivals from East Coast mainly Tupac's former friend Christopher Wallace, better known by his stage name the Notorious B.I.G.

Talking about the ghetto, one can never deny the hardships African-Americans face in the streets. Drug, violence, gangs, and shooting are some issues that Tupac's lyrics highlight just to give a glimpse of how hard life is for those African-American youngsters.

Tupac's strategy of singing about gangsters' life, violence and drug is a description of how African-Americans live in the inner cities. They try to live in a hostile environment in the ghetto streets among gangs by being more violent whether through their behavior or their language.

Tupac's lyrics illustrate the difficult condition of the African-American community which still lives in poverty and faces violence and brutality. It is a community that still resists in order to end racism and also to gain more rights and opportunities as White Americans.

So, the songs of Tupac call attention to the different social and racial issues which hinder the African-American people to realize their dream of being normal American citizens who enjoy a decent life. Thus, poverty, lack of opportunity, police brutality, racism and homelessness are crucial issues in African-Americans' life and they deserve to be discussed in the coming pages. In the next chapter, we are going to deal with the songs of Tupac that address social and racial issues.

Chapter Two: Addressing Social and Racial Issues

*“My music is about the oppressed rising up against the oppressor. The only people that’s scared are the oppressors. The only people having any harm coming to them are those who oppress.” – E! News
Interview of Tupac Shakur (1992)*

*“(The police) are a very real menace to every black cat alive in this country....But I know, too, that if he (police) don’t know that this is Jimmy Baldwin and not just some other nigger he’s gonna blow my head off just like he blows off everybody else’s head. It could happen to my mother in the morning, to my sister, to my brother... For me this has always been a violent country – it has never been a democracy.”–
James Baldwin (Dick Cavett Interview, 1969)*

From the very beginning hip-hop music emerged in the United States as a tool to resist against social and racial injustice. It is considered as a medium to voice the consciousness of the African-American community. Hip-hop music appeared in the African-American context as a part of the responses to racism, deindustrialization and alienation.

Hip-hop has been integrated among the African-American youth as a reaction to illustrate and transmit the pain of people in the inner cities from the ethnic exclusion in different stages of their lives for many years.

The majority of hip-hop artists are members of the oppressed community who share the same harsh conditions; they choose the music to transmit the messages of those marginalized people in a hope to make a change.

Joyce argues that “the music of black folk has always been the magnifying glass that illustrated the traditions and struggles of black people, thus music is the quintessential medium through which the artist can liberate the black masses.” (75)

According to Joyce, the lyrics of the hip-hop singers reflect the pain and the terrible inner city’s social conditions shared by the members of the African-American community. It becomes clear that rappers seek to bring changes and liberate the ghetto community from isolation and segregation through conscious songs.

1. Singing about Social Issues

1.1. Lack of Opportunities

Numerous hip-hop songs deal with social issues of the African-Americans who have been facing segregation, unemployment, lack of housing and health care for many decades. In their songs, hip-hop artists always try to give a deep view about the social condition of the African-American people in the country of opportunities and in a land whose name is much more linked with “The American Dream”. This latter is rooted in the Declaration of Independence and in numerous works of art and literature. It can be said that hip-hop singers express their resistance and stand against the harsh socio-economic conditions African-American members face in the inner cities.

Hess notes in his book *Hip Hop in America* (2009) that: “American rap artists emphasize representing the places they come from.” He then argues that most of African-American singers try to depict real life and the bad circumstances related to those communities in their lyrics.

Hess's view point is also shared by LeRoi Jones also known as Amiri Baraka who contends that:

It seems possible to me that some kind of graph could be set up using samplings of Negro music proper to whatever moment of the Negro's social history was selected, and that in each grouping of songs a certain frequency of reference could pretty well determine his social, economic, and psychological states at that particular period. (65)

The main conflict that African-Americans face when dealing with White Americans is the lack of opportunities. They have tried for a long time to find opportunities to become autonomous and realize their dreams, but unfortunately it was difficult for them to assert their existence as they struggled to make a decent life in segregated ghettos.

In his songs, Tupac raps about racial and social disparities as African-Americans do not have the same opportunities as White Americans in terms of jobs, houses, and access to wealth. He sang about the lack of being accepted among white Americans. In "Words of Wisdom" from *2pacalypse Now* (1991), Tupac raps:

*This is for the masses the lower classes
The ones you left out, jobs were givin', better livin'
But we were kept out
Made to feel inferior, but we're the superior
Break the chains in our brains that made us fear yeah
Pledge allegiance to a flag that neglects us
Honor a man that who refuses to respect us
Emancipation, proclamation, Please!
Nigga just said that to save the nation
These are lies that we all accepted
The war on drugs is a war on you and me*

And yet they say this is the Home of The Free

But if you ask me its all about hypocrisy

The constitution, Yo, it don't apply to me

Lady Liberty still the bitch lied to me (20-36)

Tupac used the term lower classes to say that there is a stratified classification; it means that in America there is a poor category of lower class and the high class embodied by the rich ones. The singer directs a speech to African-Americans who live in exclusion and deprivation. Tupac tries to say to his audience that those entire social problems come from the lack of opportunities in the excluded neighborhoods. For the singer it is not fair that there are two Americas, one of the Whites who enjoy a good life and one the African-Americans who live a nightmare.

Tupac, as all African-Americans, asked the country's policies about those positions from The American Dream, those rights from the civil rights proclamation. He sings about the racial segregation of the African-Americans.

Tupac asked the government about the promises made to the African-American members. Tupac attacks the constitution by saying that it gives nothing for them. All promises made to African-Americans people are lies.

1.2. Poverty and Hopelessness

Poverty and hopelessness are the most relevant themes of Hip-hop songs. Rappers rely on the lyrics of their songs to portray the hardships that African-Americans face in the ghetto.

Poverty is an issue caused by the African-American's lack of opportunity to access to work and rise up economically. It is an issue which took its roots from the problem of the racial discrimination in job faced by the American policies.

Hopelessness, on the other hand, is a theme which can be featured on the lyrics of rappers. It appears through the words of the singer and it consists of their hopelessness from those bad social, economic and political situations.

Tupac said in an interview: “I don’t want for me; want for my people. I want for my young black males.” It can be said that the songs of Tupac give an overview of the bad condition of the African-American community and in a sense they inform the American public opinion that something is wrong in the contemporary American society and that something must be done to really find a solution to those sensitive issues of the ghettos.

Tupac’s song “Changes” which was released in 1995 is considered as one of his major successes. It represents an overview of what African-Americans live in the inner cities of the Bronx starting from poverty and racism to violent treatment, and police brutality. The first line of the song reads:

I’m tired of bein’ poor and even worse I’m black

In this verse, Tupac illustrates how difficult life is in the ghetto. He relates this bad condition to the color of the skin of African-Americans. For him, the color of his face is the only cause of making him poor. Throughout the song we can see that Tupac’s hopelessness is embodied when he says: ‘I’m tired of bein' poor’. He talks about the bad effect of racial discrimination. In the same song, Tupac says:

We gotta make a change

It’s time for us as a people to start makin’ some changes

Let’s change the way we eat

Let’s change the way we live

And let’s change the way we treat each other (171-175)

Throughout his words, Tupac speaks about a hope to cut the routine of living poorly and being marginalized in all domains of life. Tupac appeals his audience to try for making changes on those lives by saying “we gotta make a change”. It means that he seeks for a new prosperous life by encourage them to resist this discrimination.

Tupac also demonstrates the defeat of living in the ghetto in his song “Trapped” released in 1991. He says:

You know they got me trapped in this prison of seclusion

Happiness living in the streets is a delusion (1-2)

Tupac sings about the experience of being trapped in the inner city of the ghetto. For him the word ‘trapped’ has two meanings: being trapped in the ghetto, and trapped in the prison. For him being in the ghetto or in the prison is the same thing because nothing will be changed.

2. Songs about Racism and Police Brutality

2.1. Addressing Racism

Racism is another theme that has exacerbated African-American masses. Racism according to the Oxford Dictionary is defined as the belief that certain people are superior based solely on their race.

Hip-hop singers expose those sentiments in music by placing racism at the central focus of their lyrics. It has always been a very thoughtful topic rhymed by rappers.

For Tupac racism is one of the basic themes that we can find in the majority of his songs. He released a song capturing a sentiment echoed by many who appealed for living in equality. In his song of “Trapped”, he contends that:

Why did ya lie to me?

I couldn't find a trace of equality

Work me like a slave while they laid that (52-54)

Tupac states his hopes of living as equal as other Americans. He dreams to be treated all equally. Tupac depicts his suffering from racial discrimination. The African-Americans are treated for many years like slaves only because they differ from the white's faces color. He claims they have the right to live in a just society of equality, where each citizen is given his or her substantial rights.

Tupac, in this first line of the song, says that "I see no changes" means that the struggle of the African American residents has a long fought for realizing the equality among the white Americans. It existed since the civil right era and is still present in the 21th century.

In his lyrics, Tupac challenges institutional racism and tells listeners that he seeks a new life in America.

Tupac's iconic song "Changes" can be considered as one of his famous songs because it tackles different complex issues and it contains themes of poverty, war on drugs, racism and police brutality.

2.2. Dealing with Police Brutality

During the civil rights era, African-American people suffered from racial discrimination imposed by white Americans. The result was that African-Americans suffered from poverty and lack of opportunities.

The Kerner Commission on Civil Disorders, appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson to look into the cause of the urban rebellions of the 1960s, reported in 1968 the following:

We have cited deep hostility between police and ghetto communities as a primary cause of the disorders surveyed by the Commission. In Newark, in Detroit, in Watts, in Harlem—in practically every city that has experienced racial disruption since the summer of 1964—abrasive relationships between police and Negroes and other minority groups have been a major source of grievance, tension and, ultimately, disorder. Police misconduct— whether

described as brutality, harassment, verbal abuse, or discourtesy—cannot be tolerated even if it is infrequent. It contributes directly to the risk of civil disorder. It is inconsistent with the basic responsibility of a police force in a democracy. Police departments must have rules prohibiting such misconduct and enforce them vigorously. Police commanders must be aware of what takes place in the field, and take firm steps to correct abuses. (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders)

Police brutality is the excessive and unjustified use of force by law enforcement. It is a form of police violence, and is a civil rights violation. It also speaks of a situation where officers exercise excessive power against a person.

Police brutality is one of the greatest issues that irritate African-Americans in past and present days. It is known as a harsh physical and psychological handle from the American police against African-Americans.

Police repression in United States became a major issue for African-Americans. One of the best known incidents was the beating of Rodney King on March 3, 1991. He was an African-American citizen and became a famous figure during the last 20th century because of the greatest bloody events that took place in Los Angeles. The riots of Los Angeles occurred when the photographer George Holliday posted the video of Rodney beaten by four LAPD officers. The incident later ended by a major riots on the American State when the officers were acquitted.

Indeed, race continues to be a sensitive issue in present America. Also, police brutality in the United States is considered as a very sensitive and problematic issue because African-Americans are aggressed by police officer simply because of the color of their skin.

African-Americans still suffer from the human rights violations; they are hurt by the harsh and deadly treatment from the American police. We can mention for instance the shooting Sean Bell in New York City (2006), shooting of Michael Brown in

Ferguson, Missouri (2014), shooting death of Keith Lamont Scott in Charlotte, North Carolina (2016) and the recent event in 2020 when George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was killed by a police officer.

As a reaction to rebel against the unjustified use of force, singers choose those voices to satire and resist the American police violations. It is the case of Hip-hop group *N.W.A* when they rapped versus police department by choosing the title “Fuck Tha Police” (1988). The song contains plenty of strong words against police.

Tupac has been discussing police brutality in his music. In his song “Trapped” he sings about the negative relationship between inner city community and police officers.

He raps:

*They got me trapped
 Can barely walk the city streets
 Without a cop harassing me, searching me
 Then asking my identity
 Hands up, throw me up against the wall
 Didn't do a thing at all
 I'm tellin' you one day these suckers gotta fall
 Cuffed up throw me on the concrete
 Coppers try to kill me (32-40)*

Tupac captures the intense impact of police brutality against him and against his brothers and sisters in the ghetto. He narrates his personal experience with the worst handling from police starting from the city streets to the prison. His song is not about himself; he was just an example to illustrate many of the same instances that occur all over the ghetto life.

To conclude this second chapter it can be said that Tupac's songs addressing social and racial issues are considered as a magnifying glass of the African-American's inner city community. Tupac sings to portray his personal experience as a young African-American male living in United States in order to present, explain, and resist huge situations he has faced. He raps to represent the difficulties of life in the ghetto and explains how people suffer from racial discrimination and police brutality.

Tupac is a conscious rapper who tries to represent the meanness of the American system. He brings reflections to his audiences in order to resist these harsh situations.

Chapter Three: Tupac the Activist

“We talk a lot about Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., but it’s time to be like them, as strong as them. They were mortal men like us and every one of us can be like them. I don’t want to be a role model. I just want to be someone who says, this is who I am, this is what I do. I say what’s on my mind.”

Tupac Shakur

Tupac’s revolutionary mindset was clearly stated whether through his songs or his speech. He was considered as the spokesman of the members of his community as he voiced their problems in his songs. In his lyrics, the hip-hop singer has been denouncing racial discrimination, violence, and police brutality, to mention but a few. Tupac believed that he had a mission to fulfill for his community and a duty to accomplish. He followed the path of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X who strongly engaged in political activism to get civil rights to the African-American community.

1. Tupac and Political Activism

Tupac’s life is a symbol of resistance and determination for the African-American youngsters. His activism started at an early age as he was born at the period

that followed the civil right movement. He was raised in an atmosphere imbued with Black Panther's principles.

Tupac grew in a radical household that shaped his world view. Although at birth, he was named Lesane Parish Crooks, Afeni eventually changed her son's name to Tupac Amaru, in honor of an 18th century Incan revolutionary of Peru killed by Spanish priests. Tupac's mother, Afeni Shakur, was a very active member in the Black Panther Party. His step father Mutulu Shakur was a member of the Black Liberation Army. This made Tupac surrounded by political views and consequently he developed a sense of consciousness and awareness besides to his art of self expression. Edward notes that: "from the beginning, he [Tupac] was immersed in the culture of African American urban working class while simultaneously being influenced by the political views, militant passions, and wider social exposure of his mother and her Black Panther colleagues." (24)

Tupac developed a political and social consciousness and started to believe that the voice of African-Americans should be raised to call for equality and more rights. In 1991 Tupac said:

I came from a long line of revolutionaries, a long line of Panthers and strong fighters and soldiers who fought for social change and for the betterment of their people, and I said, well, what better way for me to have a career than to make my mom proud, make my people proud and speak out, you know what I'm saying? Be a part of the solution.

As a young boy, Tupac was in support of Black Nationalism which is mainly considered as the political belief and the practice of African-Americans as a distinct people with a distinct personality who politically defended the rights of African-Americans.

In 1986, Tupac and his family relocated to Baltimore where he noticed the dire circumstances of African-American people living there. He noticed: “As soon as I got there being a person that I am, I said ‘no I am changing this.’” (Qtd. in Stanford 9)

Tupac organized campaigns like stop killing campaign that aim to denounce the misery of African-American people there and ask for better conditions of life. In high school, Tupac started to plan events and organize people and raise their awareness.

At the age of 19, Tupac became an active member of the new African Black Panther, a group which contained 7 to 10 young persons aged between 13 to 25. Then quickly he positioned himself to become the chairman of the movement which was composed of activists who participated in different activities for social and political change. They engaged in community control and tried to stop police abuse and support for the release of political prisoners.

By identifying with revolutionary nationalism and supporting its teaching, Tupac strive to build a society that would not treated by oppression and racial prejudices.

Being a famous gangster rapper, Tupac’s activism was found even in the ghetto streets when he encouraged young people through his lyrics. Tupac wanted to involve them to ask for more changes. Stanford asserts that “Tupac also endeavored to generate activism among inner-city youth by developing an ideology that was not foreign to their circumstance and could possibly create a desire for political engagement” (16).

Tupac’s lyrics are a medium to express his resistance, activism and refusal to accept segregation in the inner cities. Campbell claims that “through his music, 2pac would effectively imply various political ideas and social issues that made people from various background take heed to his lyrics by rebelling against social injustices” (7).

Most of Tupac’s songs tend to be more revolutionary than those of any rapper of his time. When comparing Tupac’s song to other rappers, Westhoff states that “Tupac

transcended music to become something of a political prophet. Admirers pore over his lyrics, letters, and interviews like those of famous revolutionaries.” (277)

Tupac himself as hustler and a thug in the ghetto street showed his rebellion, resistance and activism against that life which had greatly shaped Tupac’s personality and formed his views. Stanford claimed that “Thug life philosophy was shaped by Tupac’s experiences of living in a dysfunctional home, with a drug addicted mother and no support from a father. These experiences led Tupac to seek refuge in the ‘streets’.” (16)

“Changes” (1998), follows Tupac’s most common musical themes which explores African-Americans struggle in the ghetto as it is characterized by injustice, inequality, and police brutality. As its title indicates, the song manifests Tupac’s and his community desire for change. This is what Motavalli suggests, “the song displays Tupac’s inner desire for change and incarnates the voice of his community. It shows also Tupac’s activism and inspiration through the message he send during time of the Gulf war and inner-city turmoil.” (12)

Besides, the lyrics were a reflection to the life inside the ghetto and a portrayal to different political problems African-Americans suffer from.

The title of the song is so meaningful and indicates how Tupac wants to change his life and the life of African-American people and urge them to make those changes. In this song, the singer uses satire to talk about racism, and criticize those racial practices that often lead to crime and worsen the African-American people’s life.

Cops give a damn about a negro

Pull the trigger, kill a nigga, he is a hero (1-2)

Tupac speaks about the issue that African-American people have no rights to protect their lives because the juridical system is unfair and unjust. The case which, in

most of the time, lead African-American people to take justice into their hands since they do not trust both the American justice system and the American government.

And I still see no change, can't bother get a little peace?

There's war in the street and war in the Middle East

Instead of war on poverty, they got a war on drugs (1-3 in the 12th stanza)

Tupac's lyrics are so meaningful in expressing the government's attitude towards the African-American community. So, the American government is more interested in a war happening in a different country rather than caring about what is going in its inner cities including gang wars, drug wars, shooting, a lot of people are brutally killed or treated with violence, and deprived from their simple rights.

Tupac's song attacks the government, the judicial system and highlights the reality of being black in America. It is a nightmare that will never change to that idealized "American Dream," for African-Americans, unless they resist and eliminate those unbearable situations. So, Tupac considers himself as a warrior and his lyrics are a call for fighting as he said "Cause we all soldiers, unfortunately. Everybody's at war with different things. With ourselves. Some are at war with the establishment. Some of us are at war with our own communities."(Qtd. in Westhoff 277) Tupac rapped about fighting back, and really this is what he was doing. His battles against both the police and the government were endless and his lyrics indicate that.

Tupac's song "Words of Wisdom" (1991) is another clear insight of his political views. It describes African-American society as living in dreadful circumstances, highlights how they are treated with inequality, deprived from their rights and evokes Tupac's critical thought towards the situation.

Edward states that “it is a straight indictment of America for killing off young black males in the hoods, and a call to action for these young black males to fight back.”(66)

Tupac’s song is clear incitement for African-American to stand against those circumstances, and a reminder to the American government to execute that order issued by the American president Abraham Lincoln in 1862, during the civil war era, as the following lyrics indicate:

Emancipation, proclamation, Please!

Nigga just said that to save the nation verses (12-13 in the second stanza)

Tupac is requesting the American government to apply the “Emancipation Proclamation” decree to free those African-American enslaved people and to build a new nation where all people can have the same rights and live free from any racial discrimination besides to gaining peace in the ghetto streets. This is what the following lyrics indicate:

Lady liberty still the bitch lied to me

Tupac wants to indicate that freedom and liberty for his community is still yet a lie that would never be realized unless they set up, stand up to build a new nation, this is what he meant in the following verses:

So get up, it is time to start nation building

I’m fed up, we gotta start teaching children

That they can be all that they want to be (verses 4- 6in the third stanza)

Tupac’s lyrics indicate both his call for change and his optimistic view that a new nation can be built one day and children will be able to do what they are hoping and wishing to do in order to achieve the goals of the civil right movements that is

considered a symbol of activism for the African-Americans. Tupac indicates that when he mentioned Malcom X in the following verses

No Malcom X in my history text

Why is that? (Verses 7-8 in the fourth stanza)

Malcom X is an outstanding African-American human rights activist and a popular figure during the civil right movement, who tried to educate and liberate his people and identified the inequities and injustice within the American society. Tupac insists that those important figures should be part of the African-American curriculums and their activism should be taught at school in order to raise learners' awareness and motivate them to carry on their ancestors' activism.

2. Of Social Activism

Tupac is considered the most influential rapper of all the time. He was the first rapper to start promoting a political and social message about resisting and confronting social injustices. His songs are still valid at any time and they make him alive in the hearts of his audience even years after his death because they are a light shining on real life situations of the inner cities that still have not changed.

Tupac's lyrics transcend being a light shining on his political activism; they are also a reflection to his social activism, his consciousness and his thoughts about African-American social circumstances. They reflect both the views and experiences of someone who really experienced the same social circumstances.

Being raised in poverty, by a single mother and living in an environment that is mostly known for the prevalence of violence, drugs, crime, are the issues that boost Tupac's consciousness and urge both his desire and call for changes. Changes that Tupac wants to realize are then set to be the title of his song. The following verses are a cut from it:

We gotta make a change

It's time for us a people to start makin' some changes

Let's change the way we eat

Let's change the way we live

A let's change the way we treat each other

You see, the old way wasn't working it on us to do

What we gotta do, to survive (verses 1-7 in the eleventh stanza)

The lyrics stand for Tupac's direct call for a radical change that should be made by his community in order to be able to live in that nation. African-Americans need to make some radical changes that should cover every aspect of their lives in order to make a step forward to enhance their social status and prove their existence in that community. It is an endeavor that cannot be achieved by the efforts of one person only, but by the fight and resistance of a whole community.

Tupac's hopes for changes seemed to touch even women's life in the inner cities as they still live in deprivation, illiteracy, jobless and in most of the cases being exploited in different ways or obliged to do some unethical things they aspire to improve their lives.

Tupac's first album *2Pacalyps Now* contains one of his most successful songs "Brenda's Got a Baby" (1991), which is a fictionalized song that narrates a tragic story of a young African-American pregnant girl. The song discusses the issue of teenagers' pregnancy and its effects on those young mothers and their families. Since Tupac lived the same story with his mother, he uses the story of Brenda to present the situation of single mothers in general, and African-American ones in particular, who find themselves having no financial support besides to some social difficulties.

Tupac's activism was carried out even after his death through his legacy. Tupac's Amaru Shakur Foundation is an organization that was formed by his mother Afeni Shakur to bring quality arts training to young people and offer a wide range of art activities. The foundation that tends to create some artist that may be Tupac's successors and would carry on what Tupac started years ago.

Conclusion

Tupac Shakur was born on June 16, 1971 and he died on September 13, 1996. He was 25 years old and it can be said that it is particularly tragic when death occurs for a hip-hop superstar at an early age.

Throughout this work, we have explored the artistry of Tupac and the way he addresses political and social issues of the African-American community.

In the first chapter which is entitled “Singing about the Gangster’s Life”, we have analyzed several aspects of the life of gangsters in the African-American neighborhoods. It has been revealed that Tupac used the strategy of transgression by celebrating the life of gangsters in his lyrics. This was done by promoting the use of guns and drugs in addition to singing about girls and money.

The songs in the first chapter that we have examined were full of profanity and informal words. It is the African-American register used in the inner cities and in a way we must not view the use of African-American vernacular English as something shocking. Tupac simply reflected real life in excluded quarters where the members of his community struggled to make a living and provide food on the table.

In short, it can be recognized that the first artistic strategy of Tupac of singing about gangster which seems very transgressive is a relevant way to report about the daily hardships of his people. Because we think that the main objective of hip-hop is to report about reality of America of the 21st Century.

The second chapter in this present work tackled the songs of Tupac about social and racial issues. Hip-hop music has always been concerned with addressing the problems of the African-American community. So Tupac has been rapping about the lack of opportunities, poverty, exclusion and the disillusionment resulting from it. He showed his anger against segregation and racism and also expressed his dissatisfaction

because of police brutality against African-Americans who were automatically profiled as criminals and predators in the inner cities where they live.

Finally, the third and last chapter came logically to contend the idea that Tupac Shakur is more than a hip-hop singer. In fact, he is a rebel and an activist who had shown his discontent with the American government because of the chaotic conditions of the African-American members. Despite the fact Tupac never endorsed a presidential candidate or supported any political figure, he was engaged in the African-American neighborhoods by raising awareness among youth about gun violence and the use of drugs. It can therefore be said that Tupac used his art to sensitize teenagers and entire generations about the challenges facing them in the future.

Today we can see that Tupac left an enduring legacy within the hip-hop community in spite of his relatively short recording career. His popularity was undiminished after his death, and a long succession of posthumous releases ensured that his albums continued to appear into the 21st century.

And to contextualize the popularity and legacy of Tupac, we can mention a novel written by the young African-American author Angie Thomas which is entitled *The Hate U Give* (2017). As a matter of fact, Tupac inspired Thomas as she has used his famous concept THUG LIFE in her recent literary work. The young African-American author used the principles and philosophies of Tupac to address the racial problems in contemporary America and build empathy with the Black Lives Matter movement. So we cannot deny the fact that Angie Thomas' novel was largely inspired by Tupac's artistry and activism.

On April 7, 2017, Tupac was posthumously inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, one of music's highest honors - a worthy inclusion for a rapper hailed by many to have been the greatest of all time.

Tupac Shakur became the first solo African-American rap artist in history to receive this recognition and in a way we think his fans in America and all over the world should take a moment to celebrate his life, art, and activism.

Appendix: Biography of Tupac Shakur (1971-1996)

Tupac Shakur was an African-American hip-hop singer who came to embody the 1990s gangsta-rap artistry, and who in death became an icon symbolizing noble struggle. He has sold 75 million albums to date, making him one of the top-selling artists of all time.

Tupac began his music career as a rebel with a cause to articulate the injustices endured by many African-Americans. His skill in doing so made him a spokesperson not just for his own generation but for subsequent ones who continue to face the same struggle for equality.

Tupac was born on June 16, 1971, in Harlem, New York. His mother, Afeni, was raising two children on her own and struggled to educate them. The family moved homes often, sometimes staying in shelters. They moved to Baltimore, where Tupac enrolled at the prestigious Baltimore School for the Arts.

Tupac was named Lesane Parish Crooks at birth. After joining the Black Panther party, his mother changed his first name to Tupac Amaru, a Peruvian revolutionary who was killed by the Spanish.

Tupac met actress Jada Pinkett-Smith in high school at the Baltimore School for the Arts in Maryland. Pinkett-Smith was featured in the movie on Tupac *All Eyez on Me* (2017). She later told reporters that she was a drug dealer when she met Tupac.

Tupac's Baltimore neighborhood suffered because of crime, so the family moved to Marin City, California. It turned out to be a mean little ghetto. It was in Marin City that Afeni, the mother of Tupac, succumbed to crack addiction — a drug her son, Tupac, would sell on the same streets where his mother bought her supply.

Tupac's love for hip-hop would steer him away from a life of crime. At 17, in the spring of 1989, he met an older white woman, Leila Steinberg, in a park. They struck

up a conversation about Winnie Mandela. By the time they met, Tupac was obsessively writing poetry and convinced Steinberg, who had no music-industry experience, to become his manager.

Steinberg was eventually able to get Tupac in front of music manager Atron Gregory, who secured a gig for him in 1990 as a roadie and dancer for the hip-hop group Digital Underground. He soon stepped up to the mic, making his recording debut in 1991 on *Same Song*, which soundtracked the Dan Aykroyd comedy *Nothing but Trouble*. Tupac also appeared on Digital Underground's album *Sons of the P* in October that year.

After the band's manager, Gregory, took over from Steinberg, he landed Tupac a deal with Interscope Records. A month after *Sons of the P* hit the stores came *2Pacalypse Now*, Tupac's debut album as a solo artist.

In August 1992, Tupac was attacked by jealous youths in Marin City. He drew his pistol but dropped it in the melee. Someone picked it up, the gun fired, and a 6-year-old bystander, Qa'id Walker-Teal, fell down dead. While Tupac was not charged for Walker-Teal's death, he was reportedly inconsolable.

In October 1993, Tupac shot and wounded two white off-duty cops in Atlanta—one in the abdomen and one in the buttocks - after an altercation. However, the charges were dropped after it emerged in court that the policemen had been drinking, had initiated the incident and that one of the officers had threatened Tupac with a stolen gun.

The case illustrated the misrepresentation of African-American males, and the attitude of some police toward them, which Tupac had been talking about in his music. Tupac went to jail for 15 days in 1994 for assaulting the director Allen Hughes, who had fired him from the set of the movie *Menace II Society* for being disruptive.

Tupac has released a total of 11 platinum albums: four during his career, with seven more released posthumously. To date, Tupac has sold more than 75 million records worldwide. As of September 2017, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) listed Tupac as the 44th top-selling artist of all time by album sales and streaming figures.

Tupac died in Las Vegas on September 13, 1996, of gunshot wounds inflicted six days prior. His murder remains unsolved. Tupac's body was cremated. Members of his old band, Outlawz, made the controversial claim that they had smoked some of his ashes in honor of him. His mother announced she would scatter her son's ashes in Soweto, South Africa.

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