



Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur

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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

Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur Details

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From Reader Review Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur for online ebook

Kristin says

This book is very interesting..makes me feel dumb though b/c he read more books by 25 than I will in my life lol.

The book analyzes Tupac examining his complex character that is expressed in his music. The story features many interviews including: Jada Pinket Smith, Talib Kweli, Mos Def, and his mother Afeni Shakur. Interesting quick read, deffinatly recommended to his fans or people who like hip-hop.

Diceson Hines says

Interesting read. It seems as if the author decided to pull out as many uncommon words to prove his educated background. The words of those interviewed are great and this book is worth the read.

Chris Blocker says

Where do I begin? Let's start with me. It was 1993. I was fourteen years old, a white kid from a middle-class home in Kansas. For years, I'd been a fan of music, largely R&B—Bobby Brown, Shai, Portrait, Boyz II Men—those were my jams. In fact, it was the promise of a performance by Shai on the ill-conceived MTV Jams Live that got me turned onto Tupac Shakur. Ironically, prior to that day, I couldn't stand 2Pac. I laughed at his name. I hated the only song I knew of his, "I Get Around." He seemed much too overconfident for my taste. But that evening, as I hunched over my remote control ready to push record any time Shai went on screen, I heard for the first time "Keep Ya Head Up." The performance lacked the heart found in the recorded version of the song; nonetheless, I saw the socially-conscious side of 2Pac and I was intrigued.

I bought *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.* and was a fan. I found a copy of *2Pacalypse Now* and studied my new favorite artist with great interest. By the time 2Pac released his third studio album, I was a devout follower. *Me Against the World* was a CD that changed my life. You could actually hear the pain in Shakur's voice. While his previous two efforts were very political in nature, *Me Against the World* was heart-felt. Regardless of what he was rapping about, there was such a depression that blanketed that album. I loved the grittiness and reality of it. I was an unabashed follower of Shakur, and this led to significant problems. As you may have surmised from my background, listening to 2Pac, wearing 2Pac shirts, rapping my favorite 2Pac songs, made middle school and high school hell. I put up with the torment for some time, but eventually I broke. If something hadn't saved me from my hell, I probably would've done something drastic. Then I found religion.

In no time Tupac was replaced with the likes of the Gospel Gangstaz and LG Wise. And it was probably for the best, because later that year Tupac Shakur was murdered. I'm not sure how I would've handled seeing my messiah killed, but I think it would've been incredibly damaging. Instead I let the news roll off my newfound self-righteousness and moved on. Years passed and I rarely looked back. I got into underground hip-hop and eventually, seeing hip-hop grow stagnant, I left the whole rap game behind.

Interestingly, a few years ago Tupac's memory started calling me again. For the many rappers I've forgotten and dismissed as teenage ignorance and/or rebellion, Shakur's music still spoke to me. It felt as though I still

had something to learn from Tupac. I ignored it for a while, but recently I began to listen—to the music and the message. I opened my mind to who Tupac was and what he had to say. That led me to *Holler If You Hear Me* by Michael Eric Dyson.

So this “review” has gotten kind of wordy and so far I've only made one mention of the book. Maybe all of my backstory was irrelevant, but it was significant to me, and I think it might be relevant to Shakur's appeal. Reading Dyson's work on the rapper, I am struck by how complex Shakur was. I think it's easy to look at any celebrity, see the image they most put out there, and dismiss any possibility that there is more to them. When most people think of how Shakur must have been in life, I'm sure they imagine someone as thuggish and boisterous as Tupac was in his music videos. From interviews Dyson conducted, however, it is clear that Shakur considered himself first and foremost an actor, and that his rap career as 2Pac was merely one character in his acting career. When he started out, Shakur was a sweet, “artsy cat” into crystals, but, according to John Singleton, “for the sake of the whole rap game . . . he crafted the image [of the gangsta] for himself. He started to live that image out, and that's what led to a lot of his troubles.”

The Shakur the media has portrayed over the years is the character known as 2Pac. The real Shakur was a voracious reader, with a great love for Shakespeare, Vonnegut, Melville, Steinbeck... (a search for “Tupac Shakur's reading list” in your search engine of choice will bring up many lists). Shakur loved many different kinds of music; he listened to Mozart, U2, Sarah McLachlan, Eric Clapton, in addition to early hip-hop greats. Shakur was deeply into mysticism and *Les Misérables* and social justice and Jim Carrey and... hold on... Jim Carrey? Well, to each his own. The point is Shakur was much more unique than most of us would probably think any “gangsta rapper” could be.

I expected a biography on Shakur's life, but Dyson walks this line between a Shakur bio and an academic exploration of all things rap. Many of the chapters feel more like essays on various topics with tidbits about Shakur sprinkled throughout. There are chapters on race in rap, misogyny in rap, tattoos, religion, revolution, et cetera. This structure left much to be desired, but the facts about Shakur are still there, and Dyson's unearthing and relaying of these facts is what makes this book worth the time.

There were two things really impressed upon me from reading this book. The first was that Shakur worked very hard. Over and over, those interviewed said that when Shakur went to work on something, he was diligent in the task. If you look at his body of work, it's easy to see this industriousness. His professional acting and rapping career began in 1991. From that time until his death just five years later, Shakur released six studio albums, starred in six motion pictures, and recorded enough material for many posthumous albums. I mean, think about it, doesn't it seem like Shakur was around a lot longer than five years? He wasn't even a household name until his second or third year.

Secondly, I saw a clearer picture of the tortured Shakur. He was a person who swung from extremes. He had these grandiose ideas of saving the world and seeing the best in people; but it was his own low self-esteem that motivated his suicidal lifestyle. As lifelong friend Jada Pinkett Smith said, “He had a way of putting you on a pedestal, and if there was one thing you did wrong, he would swear you were the devil. Everything about him was extreme.” It's this exaggerated outlook which is so evident in Shakur's songs and interviews, the never-ending contradictions of a dual-natured personality. Shakur loved his mom because when she was there, she was really there for him; but when she wasn't, it was because of her own selfishness. Shakur respected and had a deep affection for women, until a woman proved her worth through infidelity or loose morality. He wanted to heal the world, but returned violence with violence, venomously spouting Thug Life rationale.

Shakur had and continues to have such a universal appeal. By no means was he the most gifted em-cee of all time, but somehow—in spite of his Thug Life tattoo, his antics in front of the camera, his tragic life story—he was perhaps the most universal. As one person interviewed said of Shakur, “He just really tried to be too many things to too many people, and you really can lose yourself like that.”

I can go on, because I find the subject fascinating, but I won't. I have to leave something for the potential reader. If you're interested in Shakur, rap, or very dynamic personalities, this book may be good to check out. The format leaves much to be desired, and it's easy to set the book aside when Dyson gets hung up in all things *not-Tupac*; when the subject is the person, however, it's quite fascinating. There was no way for me to know Shakur during his short life, but I find that I want to get to know him as best I can in the present. Outside of Shakur's own work, *Holler If You Hear Me* is a great place to start.

Brian Perez says

Holler If You Hear Me was made by Michael Eric Dyson. It is a non-fiction book about Tupac Shakur's life and the struggles he had with his mom and the spirituality he gained growing up also the education he learned about from his mother. June 16, 1971, Tupac was born in Harlem. His mother was a black panther and so was his uncle, aunt, and his father who abandoned him and his mother when he was young. His mother was busy with the black panther party so for sometime Tupac was alone, but after things settled down with the panther party Tupac finally got the time to spend with his mother and at this time Tupac was taught many things from his mother like poetry, respect, reading, kindness, respect yourself and others, and to THINK. To think about like why are these things happening in society, and why the world is like this stuff like that. During Tupac's childhood he moved 27 times. He moved to Baltimore with his mother and he got accepted to Baltimore High school for the Arts. Tupac got into acting in the high school he also got into poetry and reading more his taste of art expanded during this time. Also during this time he was having issues with his mother because she became addicted to crack. By the time Tupac is 17 he moved out to California with his mother to Marin City but as she got worse he moved out and met Leila Steinberg who would later be his manager she took him in and gave him books to read and clean clothes, etc she did all this because they both had a lot in common they both read a lot and were well educated. Tupac would show her what raps all about and the knowledge behind it and the art of it and she got interested. Later they will meet Atron Gregory a producer and he noticed what a artist he was and his lyrical ability and soon he will introduce him to digital underground (a rap group) and Tupac would become a roadie and soon will become a Star.

My opinion on this book was it was exciting and interesting to read. I also learned new things about him that i did not know before like him having Alopecia (hair loss), and him being a great cook. I'll admit it was boring in the beginning but it sucked me in during the middle of the book all the way up to the end. My experience during reading this book was I couldn't leave my seat because it was that good of a book and I was into it. My experience after reading the book was you can't judge a book by it's cover because Tupac tried to make it out of poverty and better himself even though the media portrayed as a thug and menace Tupac was much more than that he symbolizes the blights on hip-hops influence on black youth.

I think the people who should read this book is the people who judge a book by it's cover and who are lost because Tupac is a kind of person you can relate to in anyway and get a good vibe and feel his music and you can understand his music.

Kevin Eleven says

Holler If You Hear Me, finds author, Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, critically evaluating the life and mythology of Tupac Shakur. From the time of his birth as a second generation Black Panther, to his unfortunate demise on a Las Vegas strip that left him riddled with bullets, Dyson attempts to uncover the motives and trials of Tupac as he existed.

What makes the books interesting as well as captivating, is Dyson's stellar research that stems from interviews of celebrities, artists, journalists, historians, teachers, actors, and many more that were affected by Tupac directly or indirectly. Dyson does this by incorporating sound bites and various pieces of sources that

actively dissect Tupac's life, his motives, and the sociological complexity of a man who was considered conflicted and torn between two sides physically and emotionally.

The most interesting aspect of Dyson's research speaks to Tupac's legacy and his death symbolizing "The Black Body". The black body of Tupac and his non-existence that came about on September 13th, 1996, represents the reality of many African-American young males living within the inner city. Through health crises, black-on-black violence, poverty, and police brutality, Dyson exhibits that Tupac's life, as well as his music, was profoundly absorbed and appreciated by the black community due to the fact that he himself lived through tumultuous hardships. As a result, Tupac, himself, became a vocal outlet for those that lacked a microphone to release their own tensions and frustrations.

The book, however, does not lack in its few share of surprises. When interviewing, Leila Steinberg, Tupac's first manager as a musician and friend, Steinberg divulges Tupac's passion for literature and affinity for books. She says that it was rare to see him without a book, even on tours, and that he remained well-read up until his untimely death. Some of Tupac's passions included theology, philosophy, poetry, and critical theory. At the start of his career, a goal for him was to get the American youth reading by spreading the idea through his raps. In addition to this, during his time spent living in Baltimore, Tupac formed a Stop-The-Aids campaign, a Help-The-Homeless agenda, and was dedicated to fixing up the inner city turmoil that Baltimore was experiencing in its ghettos. Although, this isn't groundbreaking information, it is certainly safe to admit that the average mind would lack the sufficient knowledge of Tupac before his days as an MC, and his intentions.

Without question, *Holler If You Hear Me*, is a very good read. Not only is it informative in how it takes a myriad of instances, moments, and reflections by others to chronicle the life of a troubled artist, but it also encompasses the many fragments and pieces that make up the complex persona of Tupac Shakur to reveal him as a golden entity of his era. Tupac, was already a polarizing and captivating figure, but through the life lessons provided from daily interactions, his music and interviews, the man known as Tupac Shakur was more than just a musician, a hip-hop artist, or a thug, he was timeless.

Kizzy Hunter says

I was enlightened after reading this book about Tupac's postrevolutionary childhood. If you get an opportunity to read this book please do so. Tupac was ingenious and it's great how this book paints a vivid picture of his life and the relationship he had with his mother. This book was well-written and I was intrigued by Tupac's story.

Calis Johnson says

Tupac Shakur was a complex person in his lifetime. One minute he's quoting great poetry and literature the a minute later he's involved in a shootout with police officers (he would have never gotten out of jail in today's times for that). In this book Micheal Eric Dyson (a complex and contradictory figure himself) explains and often tries to defend some the things that made this rap icon so controversial.

While Eric Dyson brings up parts of Tupac's life that I didn't even know about, such as attempt to create his own branch of the Black Panther Party, most of the facts about Tupac stated are things already known by a lot of fans. The bulk of the book is set to defend the more negative aspects of the rap genre. What I found most disturbing was Dysons defense of the N word (a defense he repeats in *Tears We Cannot Stop*). It took all my self control not to throw the book across the room while reading that chapter as it stubbornly and defiantly deems the word appropriate in Black Culture as an endearing compliment when in reality is a word that should be used by NOBODY. But this is Michael Eric Dyson we're talking about and his fast talking

sociological pros are littered throughout the pages as he explains the allegorical impact that Tupac has left in death.

Reading this (or any book about Tupac) makes me sad because it shows how a bright and intelligent man let the image he create for himself be his downfall. Despite my many disagreements with Dyson on many issues this was great book and the best if the three books I've read by him.

Seán says

This could have been a strong biography or readable academic text; unfortunately, Dyson didn't have it in him to make it both. There are plenty of good bits, like the interview with Shakur's old manager and mentor who still has shelves lined with Pac's books or Dyson's refusal to gloss over Tupac's conflicted views about women.

Still, the book never provides enough background detail one wants out of a biography, or enough depth one expects from a book-length exegesis of a single artist. Also, and this is obviously a minor complaint, the 4 or 5 page discussion of Mike Tyson seemed like a gratuitous cribbing of another work.

Lorraine says

This book is no ordinary biography. This is a fully considered, holistic social narrative of the King of Rap, Tupac Shakur, presented as only Michael Dyson could. Professor Dyson, who received his PhD in religion from Princeton University, authors what is in effect an apologetic discourse on Tupac. 2Pac's life is illuminated from personal, social, and political perspectives. Holler If You Hear Me is not a typical chronology, but a tapestry of rich meaning and political significance exploring the dialectic between social norms and rap culture, with Tupac as the governing lord.

Chapter one explores the importance of the single mother in poor black communities. The reader enters into Tupac's relationship with his mother, Afeni Shakur, as both face the poverty of life in the "outer city" as Pac calls it. He explains it's not the inner city, but the "outer" or "left out" city which he grew up in. Afeni balances her life in the Black Panther community, her political passions, and raising children amid staggering challenge and poverty.

In chapter two, the author allows the reader into the world of the Black Panther movement. While the government kept tabs on the Panther members, it was their children who often suffered under the social disenfranchisement. Tupac was no exception.

Chapter three ... I read this chapter three times before moving on. This chapter deals with the formulation of 2Pac's intellectual ideals. It chronicles his process from a highly aware twelve year old child to a politically determined high school student and beyond. It shows how far reaching his passions and influences were- from Japanese Kabuki dramas to Khalil Gibran. The author draws extensively from an interview of Pac at 17. We witness his tremendous gift of social analysis and criticism at this young age. Next we are privy to the literary foundations which built this keen understanding as the last portion of the chapter showcases an enormous list of his reading choices.

The author moves from Tupac's childhood and adolescence to the "portrait of an artist." Tupac's place in hip

hop culture is explored, and why it is he ranks above other artists as the true King of Rap. Tupac had the heart of a poet, and in fact it was his keen love of poetry which led him to rap. His astute observations regarding Shakespeare's universality, folk music's narratives, and culturally relevant allegory find intention in his art. What's more, his honesty was noble and rare. The concept of authenticity is explored, or as Pac would call it, "keeping it real." It is no surprise to find Nietzsche's complete works in Tupac's library. Many concepts explored in Nietzsche's works find their way into iambic pentameter through Pac.

Chapter six conquers Tupac's complex relationship with the fairer sex. Yes, he was charming, but also chivalrous (political incorrectness notwithstanding.) Chapter seven- again a chapter I read multiple times before moving on- deals with his theology... and more importantly his theodicy. I might have highlighted the entire chapter, but refrained, making a mental note to reread and reread in it's entirety. Chapter eight deals with Tupac's physicality and what that means in the rap culture, and in the evolving black community and society at large.

The final "How Long Will They Mourn Me" contrasts the immortality of honoring Tupac's musical memory versus communal disbelief in his death. Both are ways to keep Pac alive in a world that still desperately needs his voice, honesty, and candor.

I cannot say enough good about this book. I wish every person would at very least read chapters three and seven. They speak volumes about the man and the world he longed to change.

Dennis says

After reading "Holler If You Hear Me," by Michael Eric Dyson I feel I have learned quite a significant amount of new knowledge toward its subject Tupac Shakur. Dyson's approach to educating the readers will have even the most devoted fans eager for more. I feel the way book is set up is the most complimentary of Dyson's style. Each chapter is unique by being quoted after a line Shakur used in songs. Dyson dives into Shakur's childhood and makes us believe we were there, by using old cartoons and television show that 70s and 80s babies would relate to. He his great devices for imagery. My personal favorite part of the book was the discussion of the "N" word controversy and how that word was flipped around so much by Shakur. I have never looked to write biographies but, if I would I would use this as a great reference guide. Dyson is a great writer and he continues to write about powerful leaders and topics. I would recommend any of his books to anyone looking to learn new knowledge.

Robin Kempf says

This is not a bad book. I just feel like I experienced an instance of bait and switch. I thought this was a bio of Tupac Shakur, but in fact, it is really a sociological study of what Tupac means or represents. There are bits and pieces of his life, but there is a whole lot of analysis of topics such as the treatment of women in gangster rap or the hyper-masculinity of young black men. All very interesting on some level, but also not what I really signed up for.

Michael says

I am probably the only one that has never been a huge fan of the iconic Tupac Shakur. My reasons differ regarding taste or preference, but it has to do with never really having the interest to search his history. However this book expanded my mind on what I did not know about him previously, from his upbringing, lyrical poetry and the tribulations that he had to go through. I will admit that I never really heard a track of any of his albums, besides the song that was a tribute to his mother. Now after reading this book, I am very curious to see what type of life he lived, obviously he inspired musicians, celebrities, etc all around him, thus he must be legendary. The main thing that impressed me the most about this novel was how consistent it was to the timeline of the book prologue. It followed in a chronological order, it was not all over the place as some biographies are.

It was a great book that exposed a lot of myths about his life. Additionally it inspired me to search more about him, he made a great reputation about himself.

The Book Nazi says

Many young people like me will always be affected by Tupac's message and music, many generations would continue to admire him and keep his memory alive. There was pain and anguish in his voice that many rappers don't have, He wasn't afraid to be vulnerable cuz he sang such hits as "Dear Mama" and laid down heavy social commentary on tracks such as "Changes", "Brenda's Got a baby" and countless many tracks..

Dyson attempts to present Tupac's life as it was, 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.

Tupac was usually in films that reflected real street life, he was able to draw from his experience with the streets. The notion of truth, of authenticity, of the real, is a recurring theme in the narratives that swirl around Tupac and that he spun for himself. Even though every rapper exaggerates every now and then, keeping it real is the mantra that Tupac lived to its devastating, perhaps even lethal, limits.

This book is a must read for any Tupac Shakur fan and any one who has an interest in the genre of hip-hop and the man who changed the very fabric of Hip hop by attacking the anti-intellectualism of Hip-hop, even though he was an offender of many crimes too..

Jeff says

I really enjoyed the book as it was not only a biography but also a dissection of his life and songs. While offering people's memories of him and what he meant to them and the world at large, it also gives us insight into culture and issues that are at the heart of not only the black community but the world also. It gives us a background on him, the civil rights movement and the people he was inspired by and the messages he sought to bring to the world

Jae (Jazmine) says

Wonderful book. Dyson shows the world who Tupac really was not only through music but also as an intellectual and political figure. He exposed Tupac's passions and revived the positive meaning Pac put

behind terms like T.H.U.G.L.I.F.E. (The Hate U Give Little Infants F*cks Everyone)and N.I.G.G.A. (Never Ignorant Getting Goals Accomplished)! Definite must read!
