

More than a Mural . . . Tupac Shakur in the 21st Century

When a young brotha dies, being immortalized on a mural is the highest tribute the hood can offer. Unfortunately, growing up in the Bronx, I saw far too many of these spray-paint memorials erected, with captions like “The Good Die Young”, “Gone but Not Forgotten” or one of the countless other epithets my generation has grown all too familiar with.

Now I ask: “What does a mural do?” “How much meaning does a mural carry?” Growing up, one of my motivations was to become influential enough that I would get more than a mural if I were to pass. I wanted to touch enough people where cats would have to get innovative in paying homage to my life. Reason being, if you get a mural, the only heads who see it are the people who live in that area. One of the more popular definitions for a nigga is “someone who sees the world as the five block radius around his home.” I may have grown up a nigga, but I knew I didn’t want to die one! I’m not trying to take anything away from all the brothas who are up on walls throughout the hood, but certain individuals just deserve a little more. One such person is Tupac Shakur.

Four years after his death, Tupac is still touching the lives of his generation. Every major hip-hop publication had a Tupac story in their September issue (he died September 13, 1996), Tupac web-pages number in the hundreds, his songs (old and new) still get airplay, books about Tupac are being published, and at least one play, *The Seventh Son*, has been penned. Even Tupac critics still find it necessary to poke holes in Tupac’s character and denounce Tupac fans. But I say: “Keep doing it . . . Keep his legacy alive!

Most Tupac fans were under the age of thirty at the time of his death -- or at least the passionate ones. Reason being, those were the people who could most readily identify with Pac’s struggles. Unfortunately, that group does not (yet) have the means or capital to properly pay tribute to the most important figure of their generation. A similar situation occurred when Malcolm X died. Most older Afrikan-Americans were King supporters, while the younger generation embraced Malcolm’s message. At his funeral in Harlem, this younger group was not ready to champion his life . . . they needed help. Ossie Davis stepped in and eulogized Malcolm, crowning him as “our Black prince.” His speech was the catalyst for a movement which saw Malcolm X celebrated in print, art, cinema, and music . . . eventually ending up on a postal stamp. The man who Whites hated is on a postal stamp!

Nikki Giovanni is Tupac’s Ossie Davis. One of our most gifted poets and writers, she has continuously defended Tupac and even wrote the foreword to his critically-acclaimed book of poetry *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*. Now it is our turn, the foundation has been set we need to erect the building. I don’t know how long this will take, but I know every time I listen to Tupac’s music, I still get excited. As long as that feeling exists, I’m down for the cause. If I have anything

to do with it, they won't be comparing Pac fans to Elvis fans, they'll be calling Elvis the White Tupac! That's the type of dedication I'm talking about.

When Biggie died, within hours, a mural went up in my neighborhood in the Bronx. When I went home last year, I realized that the mural had been replaced by something new . . . that won't happen to Pac . . . he deserves more than that!

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