

## Introduction

Tupac Amaru Shakur is sentenced to up to four and one-half years in jail for sexual abuse charges. It is February 14<sup>th</sup> 1995 and he immediately begins serving his jail time in New York's Rikers Island penitentiary. Two months later, his third album, *Me Against the World*,<sup>i</sup> is released and shoots to number one on *Billboard's* pop chart and earned him a Grammy award nomination for Best Rap Album.<sup>ii</sup> The eight months Shakur spends in jail mark the close of the Tupac Shakur that shines through on this album. During the decade of the 1990s, Shakur personifies the life of the young Black male in America. His words are inspiration to a generation that has been forgotten by America. To study Tupac is to study the young Black male.

Tupac Shakur recorded three albums, *2Pacalypse Now*,<sup>iii</sup> *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.*,<sup>iv</sup> and *Me Against the World* before being sentenced to jail time. The message conveyed is similar: resistance, Black self-reliance, and Black power. His words resonated through inner-city dwellings across America; a ray of hope signifying someone is still fighting for them. "Keeping It Right," Tupac Shakur trumpeted the woes and inequities, trials and tribulations facing Black males across America, even though his fame could have insulated him from it all. His willingness to remember his people and write about the life he lived made him one of the most important emcees in rap music history. Paradoxically, the Tupac Shakur that emerges from jail digresses from this description.

In October of that year, Suge Knight, CEO of Death Row Records, posts bond for Shakur (for the sexual abuse charge) and in return Shakur agrees to record three albums for Death Row Records.<sup>v</sup> The first of these albums is entitled *All Eyez on Me* and becomes the first double CD to be released by a hip-hop<sup>vi</sup> artist.

## References

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- <sup>i</sup> Tupac Shakur, *Me Against the World* (Interscope Records, 1995).
- <sup>ii</sup> Alfred James Robinson, "Tupac Shakur." *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African-American Experience*. Ed. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Basic Civitas Books) 1698-99. To date Tupac Shakur has had four albums reach number one on Billboard's Top 200 list: *Me Against the World*, *All Eyez on Me*, *Makaveli: the don killumanati theory*, and most recently *Until the End of Time*.
- <sup>iii</sup> Tupac Shakur, *2Pacalypse Now* (Interscope Records, 1992).
- <sup>iv</sup> Tupac Shakur, *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.* (Interscope Records, 1992).
- <sup>v</sup> Cathy Scott, *The Killing of Tupac Shakur*. (Las Vegas: Huntington Press, 1997), 83.
- <sup>vi</sup> In the context of this paper, hip-hop refers to the overarching term which encompasses the lyrics (rap), break-dancing, dee-jaying, and the fashion which collectively define the genre and culture.

Misc. Reference for a particular song:

- <sup>vi</sup> De La Soul, "The Bizness" *Stakes is High* (Tommy Boy Records, 1996).