

This Paper

TUPAC SHAKUR, HIP HOP MUSIC AND POPULAR CULTURE

by

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ABSTRACT

The study of hip-hop music is well documented. However, current research has often addressed the cultural stereotypes associated with hip-hop music. Yet, current research rarely acknowledges the fact that hip-hop includes a great deal of cultural relevance regarding the black American culture. This study examines if hip-hop provides culturally relevant admissions through the assessment of hip-hop artist Tupac Shakur's music. While incorporating the lyrics from two of his songs, "Who Do You Believe In," and "My Block," Kenneth Burke's theory of Dramatism is also employed for this study. The discussion and conclusion sections of this study, clearly demonstrate why hip-hop music provides meaningful and pertinent black American cultural expressions.

INTRODUCTION

Music is a cultural memoir that discusses all cultural realities. For the Black American culture, music has always been a platform for many relevant discussions; i.e., religion, racism, politics, violence, education, and self-awareness. Stewart (1998) considers hip-hop as the newest cultural and artistic development in black America. While most genres of Black music have been meaningful to the Black American musical culture, such as jazz, blues, rock-n-roll, and gospel, hip-hop is regarded as one of the more relevant genres of the black musical spectrum. Hip-hop's primary language is African American Vernacular English (AAVE) because it has a political location in society distinctly ascribed to black people, and is derived from black American oral culture and musical traditions (Perry, 2004). Although hip-hop may seem to be more notable than other black musical genres, Perry (2004) strongly believes that hip-hop has had a great dependence on earlier black music, which has constituted a kind of conversation with the black musical tradition. This dependence has developed a great forthrightness in hip-hop music. Walker (2001) sees the forthrightness expressed in hip-hop as an integral component of the lifestyles for blacks. Ogbar (1999) agrees with this belief and contends that hip-hop artists present valid social commentaries regarding the black race and community.

Hip-hop, unlike other black musical genres embodies several important components-rap, break-dance, and graffiti artwork. Graffiti art and break dancing are nonverbal expressions of hip-hop; rap music is hip-hop's musical manifestation (Stewart,

1998). Rap is the verbal-musical element of hip-hop with which society mostly associates (Stewart, 1999). In addition, break-dancing, which involves dance routines, similar to acrobatic type dance moves also became associated with hip-hop because break dance was routinely performed to hip-hop music. Lastly, graffiti artwork, which is a type of cursive, also became associated with hip-hop. An example of this association are the hip-hop murals that are created as a dedication to the exceptional and deceased hip-hop artists; these murals use graffiti art to spell the names of each artist.

Rap began to popularize during the 1970s as a creation by black youth who experienced the turbulence from racism, poverty, and violence during the infamous 1960s. Kitwana (2004) classifies hip-hop music as a dominant cultural movement that documents the problems of the post-segregation generation of blacks. Kitwana (2004) also asserts that young blacks born during the period of 1965-1984, are the first generation of blacks to grow up without experiencing legalized racism. The music of the artists who were born during this period appeared to present the music in a way that Dyson (1989) describes as a social critique. This period of artists focused on the social issues of black urban life; which later formulated hardcore, activist, and gangster rap genres of hip-hop rap Dyson (1989). Spencer (2002) believes that although hip-hop artists born during this time period experienced lesser forms of racism, the pressure they experienced as minorities encouraged them to express their adversities musically (Spencer, 2002). This theory has led many to believe that rap music has a complex relationship to American society (Perry, 2004).

According to Hooks (2001), as laws were enacted during the 1960s, such as a the desegregation laws, and the laws that enforced social equality, new and more psychologically damaging strategies of oppression were created as well. One of the most damaging strategies created was the lack of education that black males began to receive, which in turn encouraged their over involvement in criminal lifestyles. A 2004 study conducted by Arizona State University discovered that black males experience a high level of underachievement in the educational arena, and they are excessively involved in the criminal system. The study also showed that black males experience high rates of unemployment, poverty, and deaths from homicide (Arizona State University, 2004). Garibaldi (1992) also discovered in his study of the New Orleans public school system, that although black male youth only represent 43 percent of the educational community, they accounted for 58 percent of non-promotions, 65 percent of suspensions, 80 percent of the expulsions, and 45 percent of the dropouts in the New Orleans school system. Glasgow (1980) believes so much of the ghetto youths' anger and despair arises from contact with mainstream institutions, which almost imperceptibly and very impersonally, reject them; eventually breaking down their individuality and integrity. Jenkins (2006) feels that in general, a lifestyle of disenfranchisement for blacks, such as poor educational systems and lives of poverty was intentionally created for black men. Swindell (1978) saw the onset of these problems during his research in 1978, and as a result began to view Black Americans as internal colonial subjects of whites, who live next door to their conquerors, attend their schools, fight their wars, and work in their factories.

Smitherman (1994) states that hip-hop rap is a contemporary response to conditions of joblessness, poverty, and disempowerment of black people. Many hip-hop artists share similar beliefs, and their discussions serve to explain the frustrations of blacks. Glasgow (1980) argues that survival as an underclass person, such as the Black Americans who are regarded in most hip-hop music, is an excruciatingly painful social existence that requires Herculean individual effort, guile, wit, and much perseverance. Swindell (1986) offers the opinion that although African Americans have progressed to some degree, blacks have not been fully accepted as equals in America's economic, political, and social system.

Although hip-hop is sometimes viewed as a tool for protest, for the purposes of Communication Studies, hip-hop has been explored as a multi-million dollar entity, which greatly influences marketing, pop culture, and politics (Ogbar, 1999). Some believe that hip-hop maintains its staying power as a powerful entity through the promotion of social irresponsibility (Ogbar, 1999). In more recent years, hip-hop has gained a reputation for culturing its audiences with unpropitious lyrics and beliefs. Although hip-hop has been applauded for being a conscientious vehicle of expression, the hip-hop culture has also been scathed for its overuse of misogynistic, violent, and racist themes. As a result, this opinion has been the platform for many public discourses, involving presidential candidates, congressmen, and academics (Ogbar, 1999).

I have incorporated the lyrics of the late hip-hop artist Tupac Shakur into this study. Tupac Shakur is viewed as one of the most successful hip-hop artists of all time (Ogbar, 2001). Tupac was raised in some of America's most disadvantaged cities. This

fact was likely the driving force behind his conscientious lyrics and cultural theories. Tupac was born in New York, City (Shakur, 2002). During his early teenage years, Tupac's family relocated to Baltimore, Maryland (Shakur, 2002). Later, Tupac moved to Marin City, California, where he embarked upon his musical career (Shakur, 2002). The musical recognition that he continues to receive even after his early passing in 1996 has proved him to be a very memorable artist. Ogbar (1999) and many others felt that Tupac's music entailed great political fervor. Early in his career, Tupac earned his stripes as a revolutionary artist. Tupac coined two important terms, "Thug Life" and "Nigga". Thug Life stood for (the hatred you gave little infants fucked everybody). Tupac arrived at the meaning of thug life after determining that specific cultural barriers were created in an effort to destroy the black race. Tupac explained his logic for this belief during an interview that was later released as a documentary in 2002. He felt that the intentional influx of drugs in black communities, poor educational systems, excessive poverty and job shortages in black communities began to negatively alter the lives of blacks and other races (Shakur, 2002).

Tupac coined "nigga" as a moniker that served to reject the racially degrading term "nigger." Traditionally, "nigger" is used as a racially degrading connotation for blacks. So in turn, Tupac adopted the term "nigga," which mocked the racial slur nigger. As a result, he renamed the term "nigga" with the following expression; (never ignorant getting goals accomplished) (Shakur, 2002). Tupac routinely incorporated both sayings in a number of his musical works during his entire career. This terminology was even incorporated into some of his song and album titles. "Nigga" was used in his second

album title, “Strictly For My Niggaz.” Beginning in 1991, Tupac released four studio albums, “2Pacalypse Now,” “Strictly For My Niggaz,” “Me Against The World,” and “All Eyes on Me.” During the November that followed his death in 1996, his fourth album, “The Don Killuminati: The Seven Day Theory” was released under his pseudonym, Makaveli (Smith, 2001).

In an effort to best prove the validity of Tupac’s music, I performed a qualitative analysis of his lyrics based on Kenneth Burke’s theory of Dramatism. A qualitative analysis is more fitting for the evaluation of an artistic expression, such as music. After all, qualitative research methods allow researchers to study behavior and emotions by looking beyond data, statistics, and numbers (Maxwell, 1996).

The theory of Dramatism intersects with the study of qualitative research methods. Dramatism also studies behavior, emotions and more importantly, human motive. The founder of Dramatism, Kenneth Burke considered motive to be the underlying reason for all human behavior, and messages that humans communicate (Burke, 1962). Kenneth Burke’s principles of Dramatism are incorporated into the study to decipher the implied meanings of Tupac’s music.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Music plays a major role in establishing cultural identity (Krimms, 2000). Blackings (2005) concedes that music is treated arbitrarily to real life situations. Considering that black music has played a major role in fortifying the black culture, most of the research reviewed in this study generally focuses on black America’s cultural connection to music. The musical corpus of African American music is reflected by

variety and genre, and hip-hop music has grown to be a popular representation of this corpus (Floyd, 2005). Richardson (2001) affirms that hip-hop's discourse is a black creative response to absence and desire, and is a site of epistemological development. Smallwood (2001) feels that black music has always dealt with black America's underlying issues. Jenkins (2006) also draws a connection between hip-hop music and the black culture, and therefore considers hip-hop to be the present day cultural environment that encourages black men to read, write, speak and think.

Floyd (2005) has intensely studied African American music, which has led to his admission that African American music, especially hip-hop. Hip-hop encompasses a wide range of valuable struggles and fulfillments, which reflect the gropings, failings, inhibitions, successes, pleasures, regressions and advantages of the black experience. According to Baskerville (1994) "Black music, like other forms of African American expression, is a reflection of African American life during any given time period" (p.484). Snead (1981) shares a similar belief as Baskerville (1994), and therefore sees music as a powerful tool that he deems capable of fulfilling and denying social needs. Erskine (2003) insists that music is a tool that is capable of enabling the poor and marginalized to acknowledge and celebrate their identities. Smallwood (2001) concludes that American society fails to recognize the colossal accomplishments and contributions of blacks. Therefore, the concept of cultural ethos for Black Americans is important. Ramsey (2004) follows suit with the belief that the entire history of black music in the United States can be characterized as the inscription of the African American presence into America's representation of its cultural profile. Karenga (1994) regards these

inscriptions as “ethos,” which she defines as the sum characteristics and achievements of a people that define and distinguish it from others. Hip-hop music strives to present the ethos of the black race. Ani (2001) also believes in cultural ethos, and refers to them in the following way:

Our spirit symbolizes our uniqueness as a people, or we would say that the African American ethos is spiritual. The ethos of a people is related to special characteristics that identify them as a group; setting them apart from other groups. Our ethos refers to our emotional responses and reactions. It does not refer to conscious or self-conscious responses and reactions. It has to do with the way in which certain things make us feel good and others displease us. It is the bedrock of the black aesthetic. It has to do with things in life that excite us, and those about which we share laughter. It helps to explain why we tend to ignore some things, and why others make us cry...Ethos, like culture, is understood to refer to shared group reaction and group response. (p. 3)

Black Culture and Music

Although hip-hop has culturally symbolic messages, and encounters mainstream sensibilities, Neal (1999) believes it can be viewed as a mode of social resistance. Possibly Neal’s belief is partially contrived from hip-hop’s obvious political overtone. Smitherman (2006) considers hip-hop’s political overtone to be the catalyst that makes hip-hop an unmatched vehicle for influence and change. Scott (1990) feels that oral traditions, such as music, offer a kind of seclusion, control, and even anonymity that make themselves vehicles for cultural resistance. Rose (1994) declares that rap’s cultural politics lie in its lyrical expression; its articulation of communal knowledge, and in the context for its public reception. Ramsey (2004) also believes in the power of hip-hop, and regards the music as a dynamic social text, as well as a meaningful cultural practice that continuously delivers a political voice for black people. Spencer (2002) therefore

describes hip-hop music as the jazz of an overlooked talented **tenth** (?), which engages in self-determinative moral/black political leadership.

Ogbar's (1999) acquaintance with the hip-hop art form has led to his discovery that many hip-hop songs grapple with issues of contention in society, and tend to implore listeners to assume higher levels of moral and spiritual consciousness, and social responsibility Ogbar (1999). Jenkins (2006) tailors that belief. Jenkins (2006) deems hip-hop as the new tool that enables black males to learn, speak, and process their experiences in welcoming environments, such as their cultural audiences. Rose (1994) believes that most black males who experience with police brutality, racism, and harassment form the political core of male rappers' social criticism. Hamilton (2005) contends that "one of the reasons that hip-hop is such a vital mode of African American cultural expression is its immediacy and its insistence on lived experience" (p.35). Because hip-hop rappers base so much of their music on the lived experience, Smitherman (1999) defines hip-hop rappers as verbally gifted storytellers and historians who discuss the complexities of African American life (Smitherman, 1999).

Semiotics

Semiotics studies how words, images, sounds, objects, and other forms of communication convey cultural meanings through their representation of signs and codes (Eco, 1976). According to Chandler (2002), semioticians believe that a text can exist in verbal and non-verbal forms. And Orlov (1981) believes that language and music, which are regularly studied in Semiotics should be seen as mutually complementary domains. In the study of Semiotics, music serves as a linguistic sign. A linguistic sign is a link

between a thing and a person's psychological and physical understanding of specific things (Suassure, 1983). Music, like other arts, myths, and cultures is based on the primary modeling system of language (Orlov, 1981). Therefore, music as language is used to naturally tell stories about lived experiences and to express feelings, concerns, and emotions..

Dramatism

The theory of Dramatism identifies language and thought as modes of interaction (Blakesley, 2002). Kenneth Burke, the founder of Dramatism regards life as a dramatic act that is driven by motives (Burke, 1962). Burke (1962) also feels that profound thoughts are expressed through fictional documents, such as poetry and music. Burke (1969) maintains the belief that men seek vocabularies that are faithful reflections of reality. Pelias (1992) sees a connection between behavior and vocabulary, and therefore asserts that human behavior requires a vocabulary. Pelias (1992) has therefore adopted and often references many of Burke's concepts regarding the theory of Dramatism. Pelias (1992) believes that the analogy of Dramatism provides a useful way of explaining human behavior.

Kenneth Burke's principles of Dramatism are expressed through an informational pentad (Blakesley, 2002). The pentad seeks to provide an explanation for the motives of men and women (Burke, 1962). The Dramatism pentad explains its five principles as: the agent, purpose, scene, act and agency. The agent explains the characteristics, attitudes, and agendas of the person who is delivering a message (Pelias, 1992). Purpose seeks to explain the motivation of the speaker or agent (Pelias, 1992). The scene explains where

and when the speaker is delivering the message (Pelias, 1992). The act explains the speaker's actions, thoughts, and messages (Pelias, 1992). The agency explains how the speaker is communicating his or her message (Pelias, 1992).

Summary

Thus far this study has provided an introduction to hip-hop, and reviewed the literature that serves as theoretical framework for this project. The following sections will address the research questions through the methods, data analysis, discussion, and conclusion sections. Therefore, the study's research questions are as follow:

RQ1: Does Tupac's music serve as an important cultural expression?

RQ2: How does Tupac's music portray the black America's combat with its social and cultural problems?

RESEARCH METHODS

While preparing for this study I explored Tupac's extensive musical catalogue and selected the songs, "Who Do You Believe In" and "My Block" and decided to incorporate these songs into the study. Both recordings deal with issues that negatively challenge the black race, such as crime, violence, and drug use. "Who Do You Believe In" appeared on Tupac's posthumously released album "Better Dayz" in 2002, and "My Block" appeared on the soundtrack for the hip-hop documentary film, *The Show*. "Better Dayz" was a double disc with 26 recordings. Just as most of Tupac's work, "Better Dayz" included many songs that were outcries about various cultural plights that black

Americans have experienced. “Who Do You Believe In” was extremely compelling. It discussed how the continuous problems that impoverished black Americans have faced, such as high fatality rates, poverty, and drug use, and how these problems have caused many blacks to feel a lack of faith in the American government, justice system, and themselves. “The Show Soundtrack” published on August 15, 1995, was a compilation album that included the works of many popular and influential hip-hop artists. *The Show* was a documentary film that expanded the overall understanding of hip-hop. Most artists whose songs were included in this album identified with the realities existing in black American communities, such as poverty, violence, etc. Tupac’s “My Block” appeared on “The Show Soundtrack” portrayed the realities and discussed potential dangers of growing up in an inner city neighborhood.

Data Analysis

This study utilizes a qualitative methodology. Although qualitative research methods consider evidence that is proven by data and facts, it looks more closely at situated meanings that arrive through music and other forms of communication (Maxwell, 1999). The application of qualitative research methods will allow a more heightened understanding of the cultural hardships that are expressed in Tupac’s music.

The results of this study presented in the following sections are the themes that emerged in Tupac’s music, such as racism, spirituality, violence, drugs, family and children are presented with the excerpts of sound lyrics. And, the meanings of the specific themes explicated in Tupac’s hip-hop music are interpreted from the perspectives of Dramatism.

By analyzing these two song recordings, the specific themes are identified as follows.

A Sense of Community

Tupac's music paints a picture of the typical black communities that have sustained economic and social damages, and have made negative transformations. Drugs, crime, and poverty have flourished in these communities, and the communities have never regained their original structures as a result. He views drugs as the main catalyst that has turned black neighborhoods into dysfunctional and dangerous environments. Referring to drugs as a force that has exterminated black life, his music explains the before and after of the black community, by discussing the deterioration that has occurred over time.

My neighborhood ain't the same
 Cause all these little babies goin crazy and they sufferin' in the game
 And I swear it's like a trap
 But I ain't given up on the hood, it's all good when I go back
 Hoes show me love, niggaz give me props
 Forever hop cause it don't stop... on my block (My Block)

The "trap" that he refers to and his statement about the babies who are going crazy, pertains to the communal dysfunction that residents of impoverished black communities are experiencing.

Used to be a close knit community but now we're all cold strangers
 Time changes us to stone them crack pipes
 All up and down the block exterminating black life (My Block)

This statement explains the negative transition of the community is as a result of drug use. Tupac felt that the crack cocaine epidemic was a slow killer of black Americans.

Violence and Crime

Themes of violence and crime heavily dominate Tupac's music. Tupac elaborates about the ongoing murders of fellow black men. The songs contend that black on black violence is excessive and ongoing behavior, which has worsened over time. As a result, his music explains how violence negatively impacts the lives of his people in a number of ways. These lyrics express how ongoing violence, such as recurring murders added to the dissolution of the black community. Tupac explained how acts of violence affect different members of the black community, such as mothers, children, friends, and especially black males. The lyrics reveal how the black community has become a major haven for violence. Ultimately, the excessive violence in black communities has sent the message that the black community has disregarded its own culture, by not caring about the future and safety of fellow blacks. Tupac's music indicates that black males are the main targets of the violent crimes. Since black males are the main targets of violent crimes, especially murder, the black male population have been diminishing. The population has started to diminish, not only from murders, but also the incarceration rates of the males who commit murders and other violent acts. Another possibility about the connection between violence and black males, is the fact that some males feel obligated to commit violence for revenge, and/ or harbor weapons to protect themselves. Tupac's lyrics discuss violence as follows:

For all the brothers that are buried in the cemetery
 Shit is scary, how black on black crime legendary

 Every block is kinda mean

 Now shit's constantly hot, on my block, it never fails to be gunshots

Can't explain a mother's pain, when her son drops
Black male slippin' in hail (My Block)

....

Can't close my eyes cause all I see is terror
I hate the man in the mirror
Cause his reflection makes the pain turn realer
Times of Armageddeon, murder in mass amounts

An Armageddon is a major battle that results in multiple deaths. Therefore,

Tupac's statement implies that the ongoing murders in his community are similar to an Armageddon.

Cause so far I done witnessed to many dead niggaz in caskets
With they chest plates stretched like elastic
And what's worse I'm on front line, holdin' down camp, still mashin'
Heard my cousin, one of the old heads from the block
Just came home October of '95 back in Yardsville stuck
with a three to five, if he don't act up, now he realize
If you don't stay wise, then in this game you f**ked
Talk to my baby girl, give me the word on what she heard
One of the grimmies is snitchin', Diamond a stool pigeon I talked to him
He said he didn't, my man said he did, in fact he's sure
Cause he just came home off of bail (Who Do You Believe In)

Tupac also questions why young children are frequently killed by violence, he states,

I can't help but wonder why, so many young kids had to die
Caught strays from AKs in the drive by (My Block)

...

I see mothers in black cryin', brothers in packs dyin'

...

My tear drops getting' bigger but can't figure what I'm crying for
Is it the miniature caskets, little babies (Who Do You Believe In)

Tupac uses his own child experience to describe the courses of the criminal behavior. It is poverty and homeless that makes children commit crime and insensitive to others. He indicates,

cause I'm starvin', can't get a job
 So I resort to violent robberies, my life is hard
 Can't sleep cause all the dirt make my heart hurt
 Put in work and shed tears for my dead peers (My Block)

I asked my homie on the block why he strapped, he laughed
 Pointed his pistol as the cop car passed and blast
 It's just another murder, nobody mourns no more (Who Do You Believe In)

These lyrics express how ongoing violence, such as recurring murders were adding to the dissolution of the black community. Tupac's lyrics indicates his witness of, and concern about, the violence scene in the black community and how violence affects the community and members, such as mothers, children, and more regularly, black males. The lyrics reveal how the black community became a haven for violence. Overall, the lyrics suggest that violence is a major aspect of impoverished black community life.

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Because of the miserable reality they face, many black Americans abuse drug and alcohol to escape from reality. All aspects of drugs and alcohol negatively impact the black communities that Tupac mentions in his music. Because these neighborhoods are poverty stricken, and most community members lack formal education, which would have enabled them to work promising jobs; many people sell drugs for a living. Tupac's music explains how drugs are yet another negative contributor to the problems within the black race. Drugs affect all age groups of the people in the communities that Tupac mentions. The individuals who sell drugs are often sentenced to prison. People who use drugs and alcohol destroy themselves. The children of parents, who abuse drugs and alcohol, are usually neglected. Drugs also impair people's abilities to think rationally, and

encourage violence within communities. Tupac is worried about his community is “strapped” and destroyed by drugs and alcohol abuse.

Fearin' jail but crack sales got me living well
 And the system's suicidal with this Thug's Life
 Stayin' strapped forever strapped in this drug life

 Time changes us to stone them crack pipes
 All up and down the block exterminating black life

 Fantasies of a nigga livin' phat, but held back
 Pipe dreams can make the night seem hopeless
 Wide eyed and losin' focus... on my block

 Alcohol will make a lazy nigga slip and fall, miss his call

 A single mother with a problem child, daddy free
 Hangin' out pickin' up game, sippin' cheap liquor (My Block)

Victims of a stray, from drug dealers gone crazy
 Maybe it's just the drugs, visions of how the block was
 Crack came and it was strange how it rocked us
 Perhaps the underlying fact stay high explain genocide
 It's when we ride on our own kind
 ...
 In this society where only getting' the cash counts
 I started out as a beginner
 Entered the criminal lifestyle became a sinner
 I make my money and vacate, evade prison
 Went from the chosen one to outcast, unforgiven'
 And all the Hennessy and weed can't hide, the pain I feel inside (Who Do You Believe In)

Dismantled Families

Tupac's music pays attention to the fact that many black families are dismantled. His music identifies single mothers, and neglected children as common examples in black communities. The responsibility of raising a child in a single parent household is more challenging than that in a two-parent household. Usually, single parent households with a

smaller income offer less supervision for children. Tupac's music focuses on the discussion about the struggles of the single black mother in regards to bring up black youths. Tupac's describes single mothers' lives in the following context:

Single Mother

My mama's welfare check has brought the next man chrome wheels
 Shit's real, I know ya' feel, my tragedy
 A single mother with a problem child, daddy free
 (My Block)

Neglected Children

Neglected children are usually candidates for a plethora of problems.

Without the proper adult supervision, neglected children are easy recruits for many dangerous activities, ie; gangs, drugs, etc. Tupac speaks about the miserable and dangerous life of black children and what pushes those children to be involved in criminal acts:

My neighborhood ain't the same
 Cause all these little babies goin crazy and they sufferin' in the game

 Livin life is but a dream
 Hard times is all we see

 And I can't help but wonder why, so many young kids had to die
 Caught strays from AK's and the drive by
 Swollen pride and homicide, don't coincide
 Brothers cry for broken lives, mama come inside
 Cause our block is filled with danger

 And block parties in the projects lastin' way past daylight
 A young nigga learned to break night
 Used to play fight with my homies but they stuck in the pen

 Growing up in this world where everything is scandalous
 I reminisce on tha fast times, past crimes

Tryin' to cop a slice of pizza with my last dime
 Can't explain, just what attracts me to this dirty game
 And what's strange is everybody knows my name, swear they all know me
 And lots of cash make a nigga change (My Block)

In this society where only getting' the cash counts
 I started out as a beginner
 Entered the criminal lifestyle became a sinner
 I make my money and vacate, evade prison
 Went from the chosen one to outcast, unforgiven'

You know, it's like I'm livin' just to die
 I fall on my knees and beg for mercy, not knowin' if I'm worthy
 Livin' life thinking no man can hurt me
 So I'm asking -- before I lay me down to sleep
 Before you judge me, look at all the sh*t you did to me, my misery (Who
 Do You Believe In)

Crime as a Result of Racism, Poverty, and Injustice

Considering that Tupac is expressive about the problems of black America, his music makes some underlying and oblivious statements about the relationship between black America's problems and racism and social injustice. His lyrics indicate that violent activities that frequently occur in the black community are a negative reaction to those racial and social injustices that they receive from the larger society. Tupac expresses these considerations in the following manner:

Teardrops and closed caskets, the three strikes law is drastic
 And certain death for us ghetto bastards

 I wonder if the Lord still cares, for us niggaz on welfare
 And who cares if we survive
 The only time they notice a nigga is when he's clutchin on a four – five
 ...
 From the start I felt the racism cause I'm dark
 Couldn't quit the bullshit make me represent (My Block)

Tupac uses some of his childhood experiences to draw a connection between life long poverty, and the criminal activities. He indicates,

I'm starvin', can't get a job
 So I resort to violent robberies, my life is hard
 Can't sleep cause all the dirt make my heart hurt
 Put in work and shed tears for my dead peers (My Block)

I asked my homie on the block why he strapped, he laughed
 Pointed his pistol as the cop car passed and blast
 It's just another murder, nobody mourns no more (Who Do You Believe In)

I reminisce on tha fast times, past crimes
 Tryin' to cop a slice of pizza with my last dime
 Can't explain, just what attracts me to this dirty game
 Gold chains, some extra change, and the street fame
 And what's strange is everybody knows my name, swear they all know me
 And lots of cash make a nigga change (My Block)

In this society where only getting' the cash counts
 I started out as a beginner
 Entered the criminal lifestyle became a sinner
 I make my money and vacate, evade prison
 Went from the chosen one to outcast, unforgiven'
 And all the Hennessy and weed can't hide, the pain I feel inside (Who Do You Believe In)

Depression

Tupac's music explains how the negative norm in his community, especially the multiple deaths of his peers causes depression. The black-on- black crime, which he references, mainly targets black males who are very similar to him. As a matter of fact, it generates a lot of fear about his personal existence. The overall stress of living in a violent environment, and knowing that the individuals who are most similar to him are regular targets for violence and death, has been quite disturbing for Tupac and other community members. Tupac shows the scneries:

They got a nigga
 Sheddin' tears, reminiscing on my past fears
 Cause shit was hectic for me last year
 It appears that I've been marked for death, my heartless breath
 The underlying cause of my arrest, my life is stressed
 And no rest forever weary, my eyes stay teary
 For all the brothers that are buried in the cemetery
 Shit is scary, how black on black crime legendary
 But at times unnecessary, I'm gettin' worried
 Teardrops and closed caskets, the three strikes law is drastic
 And certain death for us ghetto bastards (My Block)

My tear drops getting' bigger but can't figure what I'm crying for
 Is it the miniature caskets, little babies (Who Do You Believe In)

And, he cries again, for "hopeless," "mislead," "astray," negligence of God to his
 pray, racism and so forth, in following lyrics of "My Block."

Can't sleep cause all the dirt make my heart hurt
 Put in work and shed tears for my dead peers
 Mislead from childhood where I went astray
 Till this day I still pray for a better way
 Can't help but feel hopeless and heartbroken
 From the start I felt the racism cause I'm dark
 Couldn't quit the bullshit make me represent (My Block)

What is it we all fear, reflections in the mirror
 We can't escape fate, the end is gettin nearer (Who Do You Believe In)

Although Tupac is a star living in a life "Hit the bar and played the star,
 everywhere I went," in the song he is in pain for "so many young kids had to die,"
 "homicide" in community, brothers' broken lives, and mama's crying, and he feels alone.

In my heart, I felt alone out here on my own
 I close my eyes and picture home... on my block
 And I can't help but wonder why, so many young kids had to die
 Caught strays from AK's and the drive by
 Swollen pride and homicide, don't coincide
 Brothers cry for broken lives, mama come inside
 Cause our block is filled with danger

...

I hit the green just to maintain, feelin' pain
 For all the niggaz that I lost to the game... from my block (My Block)

Self-Esteem and God

Tupac's music discusses self-esteem and spirituality in God. He claims that many people from his community have low self-esteem and lack of faith in God, based on their life experiences suffering poverty, racism, misleading, and negligence. He feels heart hurting and hopeless by witnessing the prevalent violence, drugs, poverty, crime, and broken families in his community, and wants a good connection to God.

Can't close my eyes cause all I see is terror
 I hate the man in the mirror
 Cause his reflection makes the pain turn realer
 ...
 Black males slipping in hell, when will we prevail
 It's like we don't believe in God cause we're living in sin.
 Entered the criminal lifestyle became a sinner
 Went from the chosen one to outcast, unforgiving
 God help me cause I'm starving, can't get a job
 But don't cry through your despair, I wonder if the lord
 Still cares for us niggas on welfare
 ...
 Can't sleep cause all the dirt makes my heart hurt
 Mislead from childhood where I went astray
 Till this day I still pray for a better way
 Can't help to feel hopeless and heart broken
 From the start I felt the racism cause I'm dark

He urges his fellows to establish positive self-esteem "believe in yourself," while keeping the faith in the higher power of God. However, in the song "Who Do You Believe In," Tupace reiterates that the reality is "to believe in yourself." It is that only human beings can truly satisfy human being's goals. Tupac's beliefs are expressed in his song:

Who do you believe in?
 I put my faith in God, blessed and still breathing
 And even though it's hard, that's who I believe in
 Before I'm leaving, I'm asking the grieving - who do you believe in?

...
 You know, it's like I'm livin' just to die
 I fall on my knees and beg for mercy, not knowin' if I'm worthy

...
 I rose up from the slums, made it out the flames
 In my search for fame will I change? I'm asking
 Faith in Allah, believe in me and this plastic

Who do you believe in?
 Is it Buddah, Jehovah, or Jah? Or Allah?
 Is it Jesus? Is it God? Or is just yourself?
 Definitely not to be imposed, being a demon
 Because this is the joy of believing!
 Men, to believe in yourselves
 But for sure, the higher power
 Resides only to ride in the heart of the true
 From the soul, of the man; for truth never has an alibi

...
 Just to understand, that every man, is his OWN man
 And only man can satisfy the man
 Only the soul of the man, the feelings of the man
 The for realness of the man
 You can't shake the man when you feel the man you know the man
 And you gotta call yourself because you are that man (Who Do You Believe In)

Tupac also uses “nigga” and “niggaz” to address himself and his fellows. It is the evidence that Tupac encourages black Americans to never be ignorant and to always get goals accomplished (Shakur, 1991).

Advocating for Change

Tupac uses his music as an educational tool, as well as a vehicle to promote changes. His songs remind people how over time their communities have transformed into unsafe environments, after years of drug use and violent acts. The lyrics suggest that most black communities were initially harmonious places to live but it was those negative

elements that have permeated black communities and produced many negative changes. However, Tupac does not give up, although the real life experience made him feel low self-esteem and depressed,. He wants to expose the darkness of black community to the larger society in order to alert his fellows to make changes. His lyrics that advocate changes are as follows:

But I ain't given up on the hood, it's all good when I go back
 Hoes show me love, niggaz give me props
 Forever hop cause it don't stop... on my block (My Block)

Men, to believe in yourselves
 But for sure, the higher power
 Resides only to ride in the heart of the true
 From the soul, of the man; for truth never has an alibi
 ...
 Just to understand, that every man, is his OWN man
 And only man can satisfy the man
 Only the soul of the man, the feelings of the man
 The for realness of the man (Who Do You Believe In)

Overall, these lyrics discuss the disturbances that are found in impoverished black communities. The themes emerged in Tupac's songs are a sense of community, violence and crime, Drug and alcohol abuse, dismantled families (single mother and neglected children), Crime as a result of racism, poverty, and social injustice, depression, self-esteem and God, advocating for change.

Discussion: the Application of Dramatism

According to Kenneth Burke (1962), the key concepts of Dramatism is that life as a dramatic act driven by motives, and that human beings as actors use language to express their thoughts and interact with others. There are five elements analyzed by Dramatism: the agent, purpose, scene, act and agency. Music is one kinds of language,

and musicians and singers are actors or agents. Tupac uses music to portray Black Americans' life in contemporary society. Tupac's song and lyrics represent his thoughts to interact with the public and the authority. His music career is a dramatic act driven by his motive for change. On the other hand, Tupac's song describes black Americans' life that is another dramatic act discussed by Tupac through his albums. Tupac has observed and experienced black American's life and uses music to present the acts of black Americans and explain the motives of their actions. The research questions are answered through the following discussions.

RQ1: Does Tupac's music serve as an important cultural expression?

The concept "act" regards what happened, what is the action, what is going on, and what thoughts are behind the action. Tupac's music as an act, including the underlying message delivered by the music and the thoughts of Tupac, is examined in this paper. As an important action through his song, Tupac exposes the problems and discusses serious issues in black American community and its relationship with the larger society. Overall, Tupac's music relays an underlying message that reminds black America of how violence, drug use, racism, genocide, and other communal issues have negatively impacted family life, children and the self-esteem of black community members. The "scene" is about where the act is happening and what is the background situation. The "scene" represented in Tupac's music is his performance in public, the distribution system through an array of different mediums. Any airplay, video rotation or concerts that Tupac's music was performed serve as the Dramatic "scene" for delivering his message. The black community, and the problem existing in the community also

serve as the background situation for the creation of Tupac's messages. Tupac's youth, popularity and familiarity with various black communities fortified his relationship with the black community, which therefore encouraged his peers and others who were wowed by his messages to listen to and promote his artistry.

According to the theory of Dramatism, the "agent" is regarded as the messenger, i.e., who is involved in the action, and what are their roles. The ideologies and stances of the messenger are also studied in an effort to understand the full value of one's message. Although Tupac is recognized as the primary agent in this study, any individuals who backed to his beliefs, such as his audiences, and the media outlets that supported his music are also deemed agents. As defined by Kenneth Burke (1945), the "agency" explains how a speaker communicates his or her message and by what means the speaker communicate. Essentially, Tupac communicates his messages about the problems and advocates for change through his music performances, album distributions, interviews, and public relations efforts. The "purpose" of his message directly connects to the "act," which explains why Tupac creates and performs his songs and what Tupac wants and anticipates the future of black American fellows, children, and the community. The purpose of Tupac's music is to educate, motivate, and help redirect the lives of black community members in a more positive direction. One of the most important purposes of Tupac's music is to expose the negative realities of black America to advocate black Americans to believe in themselves for change by getting out of the violence, alcohol and drug abuse while praying the higher power of God. As in the songs he sings:

But I ain't given up on the hood, it's all good when I go back
 Hoes show me love, niggaz give me props
 Forever hop cause it don't stop... on my block (My Block)

Men, to believe in yourselves
 But for sure, the higher power
 Resides only to ride in the heart of the true
 From the soul, of the man; for truth never has an alibi (Who Do You Believe In)

One the other hand, as a popular hip hop singer, he wanted to help the larger society better understand the lives of black Americans and, especially, their children, in order to fight against racism and power abuse that is the external cause to the decline of black American community. Tupac claims in the song “My Block” about the “trap,” racism,” and “genocide” tendency,

My neighborhood ain't the same
 Cause all these little babies goin crazy and they sufferin' in the game
 And I swear it's like a **trap**

...

Mislead from childhood where I went astray
 Till this day I still pray for a better way
 Can't help but feel hopeless and heartbroken
 From the start I felt the **racism** cause I'm dark
 Couldn't quit the bullshit make me represent

...

Victims of a stray, from drug dealers gone crazy
 Maybe it's just the drugs, visions of how the block was
 Crack came and it was strange how it rocked us
 Perhaps the underlying fact stay high explain **genocide**
 It's when we ride on our own kind

RQ2. How does Tupac’s music portray the black America’s combat with its social and cultural problems?

Black American’s life is a dramatic act driven by the living situation in the larger society. The “agents” are black Americans. The “agency” is about how black Americans communicate with each other and with the larger society. The “scene” is based on black

community. Family and community is the foundation of human communication. However, according to Tupac, the broken of family ties (single mother families, neglected children) and decline of community values destructed the positive communicative venues and means, and instead, violence becomes a new way of communication. Tupac sings in “My Block”,

Used to be a close knit community but now we're all cold strangers
 Time changes us to stone them crack pipes
 All up and down the block exterminating black life
 ...
 I hit the green just to maintain, feelin' pain
 For all the niggaz that I lost to the game... from my block
 ...
 Now shit's constantly hot, on my block, it never fails to be gunshots
 Can't explain a mother's pain, when her son drops
 Black male slippin' in hail

The relationship with the larger society is dominated by racism and impoverishment, and the reaction of black Americans to the societal abuse is violence (motives). Tupac indicates in his songs,

I wonder if the Lord still cares, for us niggaz on welfare
 And who cares if we survive
 The only time they notice a nigga is when he's **clutchin on a four – five**
 ...
 From the start I felt the **racism** cause I'm dark
 Couldn't quit the bullshit make me represent (My Block)

 cause **I'm starvin', can't get a job**
 So I resort to violent robberies, my life is hard
 Can't sleep cause all the dirt make my heart hurt
 Put in work and shed tears for my dead peers (My Block)

I asked my homie on the block why he strapped, he laughed
 Pointed his **pistol** as the cop car passed and blast
 It's just another murder, nobody mourns no more

The “acts” of black community presented in Tupac’s songs are of violence and crime, drug/alcohol abuse, low self-esteem, decline of communication values, and

depression, as shown in the data analysis section. Finally, the “purpose” and motivation of those acts is for attention and changes. However, Tupac asserts that it is wrong and destruction to black America. Instead, it is more important than ever to believe in yourself and never give up your people and community. He advocates,

Men, to **believe in yourselves**
 But for sure, the higher power
 Resides only to ride in the heart of the true
 From the soul, of the man; for truth never has an alibi
 ...
 Just to understand, that every man, is his OWN man
 And **only man can satisfy the man**
 Only the soul of the man, the feelings of the man
 The for realness of the man (Who Do You Believe In)

But I **ain't given up on the hood**, it's all good when I go back
 Hoes show me love, niggaz give me props
 Forever hop cause it don't stop... on my block (My Block)

Similar to existing studies on hip-hop music, Tupac’s songs reflect the lives and social issues of black communities (Baskerville, 1994), and refer to Tupac’s conscious responses and reactions to the reality of black America, which he shares with black Americans (Ani, 2001). Tupac uses his life experience to review the history and tell personal stories in order to expose those problems in the black community to the public (Smitherman, 1999). He claims that black communities are not always inauspicious. However, over time, these communities have transformed into unsafe environments, after years of drug use and violence occurred. Nonetheless, most important meanings revealed in Tupac’s songs are advocating for change by believing in black Americans themselves, no matter how hard the lives they have been going through. Tupac’s motive expressed through these songs demonstrates the power of hip-hop as a dynamic social text and

meaningful cultural practice to deliver a political voice of black people (Obgar, 1999; Ramsey, 2004). And, he plays a leadership role in the community for change.

Conclusion

This study intends to examine whether Tupac's music had cultural relevance, and how black American combated social and cultural problems in the community. The main research questions are as follow, RQ1: Does Tupac's music serve as an important cultural expression? RQ2: How does Tupac's music portray black America's combat with its social and cultural problems? The results from this study indicate that Tupac's music successfully addressed and combated pertinent issues regarding the black race, such as violence, poor self-esteem, drug use, and the acknowledgement of spirituality. As Kenneth Burke's theory of Dramatism suggests, motives influence human behavior (Burke, 1962). The lack of normalcy in the black American communities, due to the various issues discussed, motivated the black Americans Tupac referred to, to embrace several negative aspects of life.

Theoretical Implications

Semiotics studies how words, images, sounds, objects, and other forms of communication convey cultural meanings through their representation of signs and codes (Eco, 1976). Hall (1997) explains the function of language system in human communication. He defines the relationship between the material world and the symbolic practices and processes.

It is not the material world which conveys meaning: it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts. It is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the

linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others. (p. 25)

Tupac used musical language to construct meanings about the existence of the problems in black American communities and to advocate his passion for change. The present study effectively applied semiotics to find emerging themes and patterns in Tupac's songs and interpreted meanings in both denotative and connotative levels. And, then, Dramatism principles are employed to examine Tupac's motive and the cultural meanings conveyed through his music to the public.

The theory of Dramatism contends that motives influence humans to communicate messages based on his or her characteristics, attitudes, and agendas (Pelias, 1992). The study reveals that Tupac's lyrical discussions were motivated by his negative cultural experiences. The negative experiences that he identified influenced his combative discussions. According to the principles of Dramatism, Tupac's music was an agency for communicating his stance about the social and cultural setbacks, such as drugs, violence, and crime that, he believed, is leading to the destruction of the black American culture.

Although the main purpose of Tupac's music was to first entertain hip-hop listeners; the additional and more important purpose of his music was to promote cultural awareness and change. As a well-received recording artist, Tupac had the ability to impart messages to masses of people with his music. The motivation for Tupac's messages, were based on his personal experiences and critical observations about his black culture. According to the principles of Dramatism, the scene explains where and

when the speaker is delivering the message at (Pelias, 1992). In a physical sense, his live performances were the setting that Tupac delivered his message at. Yet, the actual recordings make his messages timeless. Therefore, his music can always be referenced from an educational standpoint. Pelias (2002) assumes that the act provides the connotative messages intended by the communicator. I believe Tupac's music had many overt meanings, such as poverty, violence, crime, etc. However, this study presents the essential hope of the changes for and by black Americans as the underlying message in Tupac's music.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study. Out of Tupac's extensive musical catalogue, only two recordings were assessed in this study. Although Tupac had a short musical career, he had many in-depth recordings, most of which addressed the existence of profound issues. These two songs included in the study, "Who Do You Believe In," and "My Block" were great examples of Tupac's work. However, if additional recordings were analyzed in the study, more thorough analytical discussions and better understanding could have been accomplished regarding the social and cultural issues of the black race.

Future Research

Future research should continue to assess the rhetorical and cultural values provided in Tupac's music. After all, his music gives a quite clear profile of cultural issues concerning black Americans. Considering the meaningful results derived through the analysis of the lyrics from two of Tupac's songs, I believe an extensive study

analyzing more of his work would provide better informative and educational values. Tupac's music not only contends specific problems, it also looks at the onset of the issues; therefore, I believe that his music could be analyzed from a temporal standpoint. In my estimation, Tupac's music could be assessed as a black cultural study. After all, the crack cocaine epidemic, poverty, racism, and other issues that he conferred about in his music can be mentioned as part of the black histories in America. To date, his messages have been referenced by many scholars, and incorporated into traditional research. Therefore, I believe his music can be assessed from many different angles.

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Appendix A

“My Block”

The Show:1995 Def Jam Music Group Inc.

They got a nigga
Sheddin' tears, reminiscing on my past fears
Cause shit was hectic for me last year
It appears that I've been marked for death, my heartless breath
The underlying cause of my arrest, my life is stressed
And no rest forever weary, my eyes stay teary

For all the brothers that are buried in the cemetery
 Shit is scary, how black on black crime legendary
 But at times unnecessary, I'm gettin' worried
 Teardrops and closed caskets, the three strikes law is drastic
 And certain death for us ghetto bastards
 What can we do when we're arrested, but open fire
 Life in the pen ain't for me, cause I'd rather die
 But don't cry through your despair
 I wonder if the Lord still cares, for us niggaz on welfare
 And who cares if we survive
 The only time they notice a nigga is when he's clutchin on a four - five
 My neighborhood ain't the same
 Cause all these little babies goin crazy and they sufferin' in the game
 And I swear it's like a trap
 But I ain't given up on the hood, it's all good when I go back
 Hoes show me love, niggaz give me props
 Forever hop cause it don't stop... on my block
 Livin life is but a dream
 Hard times is all we see (on my block)
 (chorus)
 Every block is kinda mean
 But on our block we still play (repeat 2x)

Now shit's constantly hot, on my block, it never fails to be gunshots
 Can't explain a mother's pain, when her son drops
 Black male slippin' in hail when will we prevail
 Fearin' jail but crack sales got me living well
 And the system's suicidal with this Thug's Life
 Stayin' strapped forever strapped in this drug life
 God help me, cause I'm starvin', can't get a job
 So I resort to violent robberies, my life is hard
 Can't sleep cause all the dirt make my heart hurt
 Put in work and shed tears for my dead peers
 Mislead from childhood where I went astray
 Till this day I still pray for a better way
 Can't help but feel hopeless and heartbroken
 From the start I felt the racism cause I'm dark
 Couldn't quit the bullshit make me represent
 Hit the bar and played the star, everywhere I went
 In my heart, I felt alone out here on my own
 I close my eyes and picture home... on my block
 And I can't help but wonder why, so many young kids had to die
 Caught strays from AK's and the drive by
 Swollen pride and homicide, don't coincide

Brothers cry for broken lives, mama come inside
 Cause our block is filled with danger
 Used to be a close knit community but now we're all cold strangers
 Time changes us to stone them crack pipes
 All up and down the block exterminating black life
 But I can't blame the dealers
 My mama's welfare check has brought the next man chrome wheels
 Shit's real, I know ya' feel, my tragedy
 A single mother with a problem child, daddy free
 Hangin' out pickin' up game, sippin' cheap liquor
 Gamin the hoochies hopin' I can get to sleep with her
 It's a man's world, staying strapped
 Fantasies of a nigga livin' phat, but held back
 Pipe dreams can make the night seem hopeless
 Wide eyed and losin' focus... on my block
 And block parties in the projects lastin' way past daylight
 A young nigga learned to break night
 Used to play fight with my homies but they stuck in the pen
 I send them ends, but it's tough on a friend, in my mind
 I see the same motherfuckers ballin'
 Alcohol will make a lazy nigga slip and fall, miss his call
 I know the young niggaz understand this
 Growing up in this world where everything is scandalous
 I reminisce on tha fast times, past crimes
 Tryin' to cop a slice of pizza with my last dime
 Can't explain, just what attracts me to this dirty game
 Gold chains, some extra change, and the street fame
 And what's strange is everybody knows my name, swear they all know me
 And lots of cash make a nigga change
 I hit the green just to maintain, feelin' pain
 For all the niggaz that I lost to the game... from my block

Appendix B

“Who Do You Believe In”

Better Dayz: 2002 Interscope Records

I see mothers in black cryin', brothers in packs dyin'
 Plus everybody's high, too doped up to ask why
 Watching our own downfall, witness the end
 It's like we don't believe in God cause we living in sin
 I asked my homie on the block why he strapped, he laughed
 Pointed his pistol as the cop car passed and blast
 It's just another murder, nobody mourns no more
 My tear drops getting' bigger but can't figure what I'm crying for
 Is it the miniature caskets, little babies
 Victims of a stray, from drug dealers gone crazy
 Maybe it's just the drugs, visions of how the block was
 Crack came and it was strange how it rocked us
 Perhaps the underlying fact stay high explain genocide
 It's when we ride on our own kind
 What is it we all fear, reflections in the mirror
 We can't escape fate, the end is gettin nearer
 Who do you believe in?
 I put my faith in God, blessed and still breathing
 And even though it's hard, that's who I believe in
 Before I'm leaving, I'm asking the grieving - who do you believe in?
 Can't close my eyes cause all I see is terror
 I hate the man in the mirror
 Cause his reflection makes the pain turn realer
 Times of Armageddeon, murder in mass amounts
 In this society where only getting' the cash counts
 I started out as a beginner
 Entered the criminal lifestyle became a sinner
 I make my money and vacate, evade prison
 Went from the chosen one to outcast, unforgiven'
 And all the Hennessy and weed can't hide, the pain I feel inside
 You know, it's like I'm livin' just to die
 I fall on my knees and beg for mercy, not knowin' if I'm worthy
 Livin' life thinking no man can hurt me
 So I'm asking -- before I lay me down to sleep
 Before you judge me, look at all the sh*t you did to me, my misery
 I rose up from the slums, made it out the flames
 In my search for fame will I change? I'm asking
 Faith in Allah, believe in me and this plastic
 Cause so far I done witnessed to many dead niggaz in caskets
 With they chest plates stretched like elastic
 And what's worse I'm on front line, holdin' down camp, still mashin'
 Heard my cousin, one of the old heads from the block
 Just came home October of '95 back in Yardsville stuck
 with a three to five, if he don't act up, now he realize

If you don't stay wise, then in this game you f**ked
Talk to my baby girl, give me the word on what she heard
One of the grimmies is snitchin', Diamond a stool pigeon I talked to him
He said he didn't, my man said he did, in fact he's sure
Cause he just came home off of bail
Who do you believe in?
Is it Buddah, Jehovah, or Jah? Or Allah?
Is it Jesus? Is it God? Or is just yourself?
Definitely not to be imposed, being a demon
Because this is the joy of believing!
Men, to believe in yourselves
But for sure, the higher power
Resides only to ride in the heart of the true
From the soul, of the man; for truth never has an alibi
In the poetry, or in it's realm
That's what pulls all words together
Just to understand, that every man, is his OWN man
And only man can satisfy the man
Only the soul of the man, the feelings of the man
The for realness of the man
You can't shake the man when you feel the man you know the man
And you gotta call yourself because you are that man