

Ode To Biggie Smalls

By M. Frank Weaver



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we heard *One More Chance* being mixed in by the DJ? How many of us tried to get our groove on with the person we were dancing with while your song was playing? So, Notorious B.I.G., you influenced us all with your style. As far as the sage in your music, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

It's sort of interesting, Biggie. When I left the enlightened chat room the morning I heard the news and bedded down next to my beautiful pregnant wife for the evening, I dreamt about holding my unborn son in my arms and looking at God's creation. Around the same time, I was dreaming about being a progenitor of life, someone became a prohibitor of yours.

When I found out in the afternoon, I paused. I walked outside, looked into the heavens and wondered how many more of us have to die like this: so violently and so prematurely. How many more of our sisters have to be raped and victims of physical abuse? How can our society bring this roller coaster ride towards destruction to a grinding halt? I prayed for an answer so that I may one day share it with my child and s/he will have no reason to pause as I did. Peace, Christopher Wallace. May you find a resting place in Life After Death. "There's the respect that makes calamity of so long life."

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"...For in that sleep of death what dreams may come, when we have shuffl'd off this mortal coil, must give us pause." How many more times are we going to have to pause for another prematurely snuffed out life? Snoop, do we pause for you next? Or Luke? Foxy Brown? Li'l Kim? Keith Murray? How do we begin to separate the messenger from the message? Or are they indeed one in the same?

Shakespeare's words from Hamlet's infamous soliloquy on life and death coupled with the aforementioned questions have been ringing in my ears since I learned of the death of Biggie Smalls, the Notorious B.I.G., last week. Around 4:00 a.m. that morning, I was in a Black Voices chat room and the news had not quite hit the wire. I was conversing with other sisters and brothers across the nation about black economics, politics, relationships and overall black empowerment. Biggie, not Tupac for that matter, was never mentioned. As a matter of fact, we didn't even vibe on rap or hip-hop. The closest mention of original rap was Gil Scott Heron's *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*.

All of that, however, brings me back to Biggie. Hard core lyrics. Lyrics extolling violence perpetrated on other men and other women. I'm not about to offer a debate on the evolution - or digression of hip-hop. Yet, I can't help but contemplate the messenger and the message in this age of rap requiem. Are the two distinct and separate? Or are they inextricably tied to one another? In other words, does the music we create and/or listen to influence our daily lives?

I would answer a resounding **yes** to the latter question. The advent of rap in the early eighties gave us the likes of the Sugarhill Gang, The Real Roxanne, Salt n' Pepa, Whodini and Run DMC. Rap at that time was based on prowess in getting a crowd hyped.

As I reminisce the prophets of rage in the mid-eighties -- Chuck D, Professor Griff, KRS-One, Brand Nubian, Queen Latifah, Sista' Souljah, Arrested Development and others -- I see all of them still standing today on the same platform of black consciousness. Upon closer inspection of the late eighties and the introduction of "gangsta" rap, we begin to see the degradation of our women by the likes of NWA, BWA and the 2Live Crew.

However, this demeaning of our sisters was juxtaposed with totin' nines, drinking forties and getting high. The battle of east coast versus west coast was given the limelight. The early nineties brought "booty shake bass" on the scene and shaking what yo' mama gave ya was in vogue. The proliferation of adult entertainment and Freaknic notwithstanding, how many of us were influenced by any of these forms of music? In our dress? In our dance? In our hairstyles? In our accessories? In our thinking and actions?

Biggie Smalls, somehow and somehow, you were able to bring all of these varying forms of music and expression together in your lyrics and in your music. Uniquely ingenious in a **positive** and **negative** kind of way. How many times did we rush the dance floor when

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