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Tupac Amaru Shakur

Born: June 16, 1971

Physical Departure: September 13, 1996

Tupac Amaru was named after an Inca Chief, it's meaning is shining serpent. Tupac Amaru Shakur grew up around many influential leaders of the Black Panther Party. His mother, born Alice Faye Williams, who later changed her name to Afeni Shakur, was a section leader in the Black Panther Party. The Black Panther Party spurn from a movement to re-open the New York Public Schools, feed school kids breakfast and gain equal civil rights for African Americans.

Tupac was born on June 16, 1971, one month prior to his birth, a pregnant Afeni had just defended herself in court and been acquitted of 156 counts charged against her and other members of the Black Panther Party-called the Panther 21. Living in the Bronx, she found steady work as a paralegal and raised her son to respect the value of obtaining knowledge.

From childhood, everyone called him the "Black Prince." For misbehaving, he had to read an entire edition of The New York Times. When he was two, his sister, Sekyiwa, was born. Her father, Mutulu, was a Black Panther who, a few months before her birth, had been sentenced to sixty years for a fatal armored car robbery and had to leave the family.

Mutulu went away, the family experienced hard times. No matter where they moved-the Bronx, Harlem, with family-Tupac was distressed. "I remember crying all the time. My major thing growing up was I couldn't fit in. Because I was grew up everywhere. I didn't have any buddies that I grew up with."

As time passed, the issue of his father tormented him. He felt "unmanly," he said. Then his cousins started saying he had an effeminate face. "I don't know. I just didn't feel hard."

The loneliness began to wear on him. He retreated into writing love songs and poetry. "I remember I had a book like a diary. And in that book I said I was going to be famous." He wanted to be an actor. Acting was an escape from the reality of life. He was good at it, eager to leave his tough times behind. "The reason why I could get into acting was because it takes nothing to get out of who I am and go into somebody else."

His mother enrolled him in the 127th Street Ensemble, a theater group in the Harlem section of Manhattan, where he landed his first role at age twelve, that of Travis in *A Raisin in the Sun*. "I lay on a couch and played sleep for the first scene. Then I woke up and I was the only person onstage. I can remember thinking, "This is the best shit in the world!" That got me real high. I was learning a secret: This is what my cousins can't do."

In Baltimore, at age fifteen, he fell into rap; he started writing lyrics, walking with a swagger, and milking his background in New York for all it was worth. People in small towns feared the Big Apple's reputation; he called himself MC New York and made people think he was a tough guy.

He enrolled in the illustrious Baltimore School for the Arts, where he studied acting and ballet with white kids and finally felt "in touch" with himself. "Them white kids had things we never seen," he said. "That was the first time I saw there was white people who you could get along with. Before that, I just believed what everyone else said: They were devils. But I loved it. I loved going to school. It taught me a lot. I was starting to feel like I really wanted to be an artist."

In the late eighties, Shakur teamed up with Humpty-Hump (a.k.a. Eddie Humphrey, a.k.a. Gregory "Shock-G" Jacobs) and other Oakland-based rappers to create Digital Underground, a band intent on massive bass beats and frenetic, Parliament-Funkadelic-style rhythms. In 1990, the group released its debut and best album, *Sex Packets*, a pulsating testament to the boogie power of hip-hop, featuring two classic tracks, "Humpty Dance" and "Doowutchyalike." After an EP of re-mixes in 1991, D.U. released *Sons of the P* and, the following year, *The Body-Hat Syndrome*, all on Tommy Boy Records.

In 1992, Shakur entered a most fruitful five-year period. He broke free of D.U. and made his solo debut, *2Pacalypse Now*, a rap album that put him in the notorious, high-speed lane to stardom. That same year he starred in *Juice*, an acclaimed low-budget film about gangs that introduced him to the Big Screen. In 1993, he recorded and released *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.*, an album that found Shakur crossing over to the pop charts. The same year, Shakur played a single father and Janet Jackson's love interest in the John Singleton film *Poetic Justice*.

In November of 1994, he was shot five times during a robbery. Shakur miraculously recovered from his injuries to produce his most impressive artistic accomplishments, including 1995's *Me Against the World*, which sold two million copies, and the double-CD *All Eyez on Me*, which sold nearly three million. As his career arc began a steep rise toward fame and fortune, Shakur was shot and fought for his life before succumbing to his injuries. Though his death was a jolt to his fans and the music

community, Shakur himself often said that he expected he'd die by the sword before he reached thirty.

Shortly after his murder, *The Don Killuminati*, under the pseudonym "Makaveli" was released. In January of 1997, Gramercy pictures released *Gridlock'd*, a film in which Shakur played the role of a drug addict to mostly good reviews. His final film, *Gang Related*, was released in 1997. Afeni Shakur founded Amaru Entertainment/Records in 1997 as a way to legitimately release the huge catalog of unreleased work Tupac completed before his physical passing. Amaru Records has released several albums and a book of Tupac's original poetry titled "The Rose That Grew From Concrete." The Tupac Amaru Shakur Foundation, also founded by Afeni Shakur, started with the goal of nurturing the arts in our young people. The vision grew and in 2001, The Foundation embarked on the ambitious goal of building the Tupac Amaru Shakur Center for the Arts, an arts art center that will house a museum of artifacts from Tupac's life & career, an art gallery, education wing, screening room, and a theater for plays and productions. Around the same period, Amaru Films and MTV started production on a feature documentary on Tupac's life, narrated in his own words and targeted for release in 2003. Several more albums and soundtracks are in production as well.

Tupac was recently named by Forbes Magazine as one of the top grossing celebrities who are no longer physically alive. "Until The End of Time" was the top grossing Hip-Hop Album of 2001 and helped secured Tupac as the top selling Hip-Hop artist (dead or alive) ever with over \$38 million records sold to date. Although no longer physically here, Tupac's spirit continues to soar among the stars.