

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Still thuggin'

"I'll probably be murdered for the **** that I said, I bring the real, be a legend, breathing or dead."
 — "Against All Odds," Tupac Shakur's "Don Kiluminati" CD

Tupac Shakur died as he lived - "thuggin." But to relegate Tupac Amaru Shakur to a thugged-out sidenote in history, is not to understand the man, and what people loved or hated about him.

White America feared him, as did many in Black America. But Tupac transcended race, as many in the rap community would attest. White youth, who drive the billion-dollar rap industry, chant his macho mantras and wear clothes bearing his image. Tupac served as spokesman for the "keep it real" crowd. Hardcore rappers and society's "rough" element loved him for telling their story.

In addition, Tupac bridged the socio-economic gap, he traversed the generational divide; at the same time, he agitated, taunted, befuddled and polarized the American public.

In Tupac you could see victory. Shakur is Arabic for "Thankful to God."

He triumphed over a rough childhood, spent shuttling from New York to Baltimore and then to Marin City, Calif. His mother, Afeni, a charter member of New York's Black Panther Party and former drug abuser, struggled to raise Tupac and his younger sister Sekwiya Shakur.

Tupac thrived in the school, starring in plays such as Zora Neale Hurston's "A Raisin the Sun," studying poetry, acting and getting good grades.

Soon his penchant for writing scored him a gig with the well-respected, Oakland-based rap group Digital Underground. While waiting for a solo deal, Tupac landed a role in the movie *Juice*, cementing himself in the movie genre. He would later star in *Poetic Justice*, *Gridlock'd* and *Above the Rim*.

His rap star continued to rise up to and after his death. His last two releases in particular, "All Eyes on Me" and the posthumously released "Don Kiluminati - The 7-day Theory," rocketed him to rap's highest echelon.

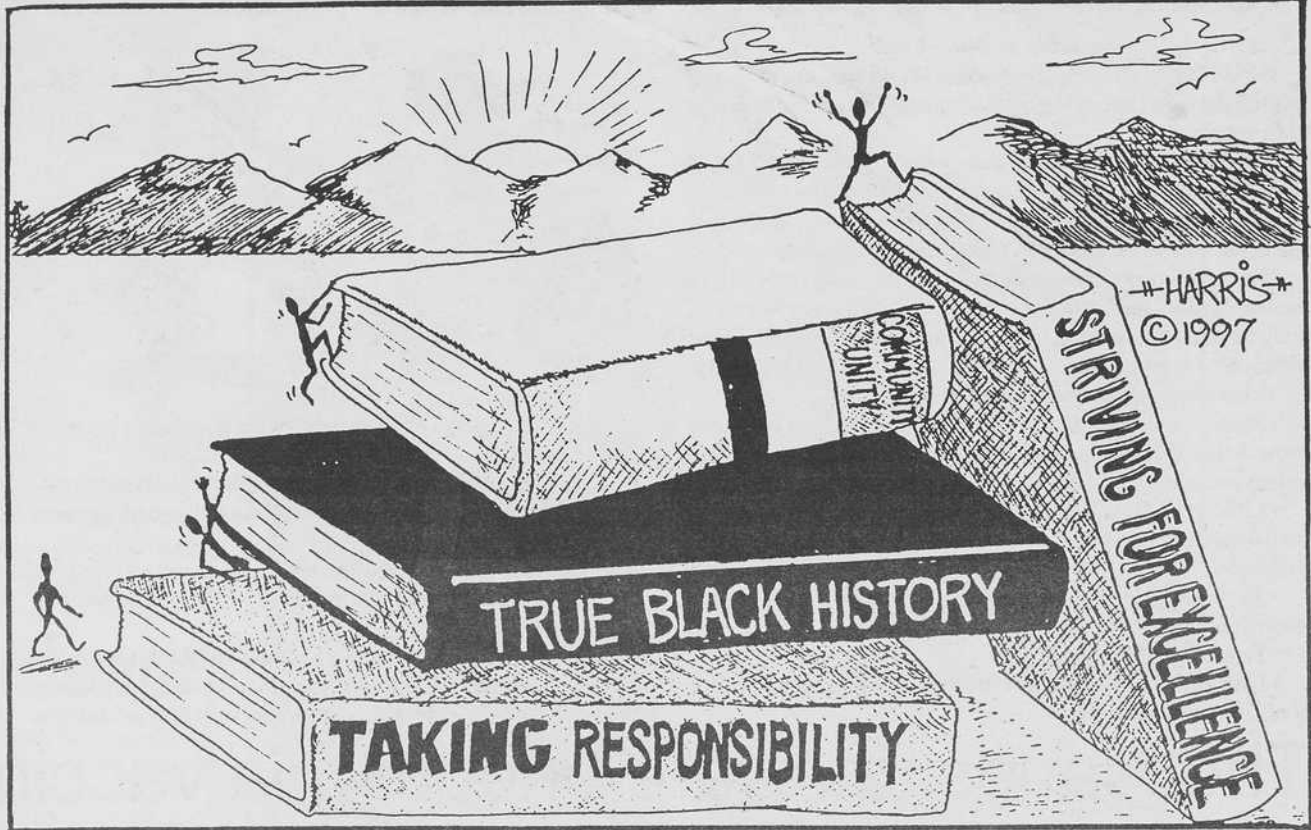
In Tupac, you could also see defeat.

He was named in a wrongful-death lawsuit of a six-year old boy caught in the crossfire at a carnival in Northern California. A woman filed suit against him claiming that his actions sparked a riot at a concert in Pine Bluff, Ark. She was hit by a stray bullet and left a paraplegic.

His other legal travails include: attacking a rapper in Michigan with a baseball bat after he was publicly criticized; shooting two off-duty police officers in Atlanta who had shot at him; assaulting producers of the movie *Menace to Society* because they fired him; and being charged with sexual abuse in Manhattan.

Tupac was a living paradox, capable of sincere emotion ("Dear Mama") or deplorable violence ("Death Around The Corner").

The world lost a true talent.



Congo: Some winning developments

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Three months ago, the Congolese people made a revolution in their central African country that was front page news.

Mobutu Sese Seko, the Western-backed dictator who had ruled Zaire for 32 years and died recently, fled the country with his Presidential Guard, his scores of hangers-on, and millions of dollars stolen from the Congolese people.

Laurent-Desire Kabila and his rag-tag liberation army, were welcomed into the capital of Kinshasa. They announced the birth of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and began the difficult process of reconstruction.

Shortly thereafter, the scarce attention allotted to Africa in our newspapers has shifted to other "trouble spots" on the continent.

We read and hear very little about the momentous changes going on in Africa's third largest country. What's happening now in the Democratic Republic of Congo?


What's happening is complex and not easily reduced to a three-minute segment on the evening news.

The drama of the stunning military victory over the corrupt Mobutu regime has transformed into the tragic-comedy of reconstructing a country that had been pushed back into the stone age by 32 years of rampant exploitation and criminal neglect.

President Kabila and his relatively inexperienced cabinet must deal with the fact that their country has virtually no infrastructure. There are no passable roads. Because of this,

*This Way
For Black
Empowerment*

By Lenora Fulani



cities suffer food shortages, although there is plenty of food in the Congo.

There is no national telephone system. If you want to make a call in the Congo, you had better have a cellular phone, hooked up to a satellite.

Hospitals have no medicine, no syringes, no bandages, no bed linens and no reliable source of clean water.

Schools have no books, chalk, restrooms, nor, in some cases, roofs.

Nobody knows how many Rwandan refugees are still wandering in the DRC. Estimates range to 200,000, and their presence creates tensions with impoverished local populations whose scarce resources are overwhelmed by the refugee influx.

Before he left, Mobutu and his clique cleaned out the central bank, leaving the new government completely broke. Because of the collapse of the formal economy, there is only the narrowest of tax bases, largely in the mining sector.

What is more, the external debt of Congo is approximately \$14 billion dollars, most of that owed to "official creditors" like the World Bank, the IMF and foreign governments, who are likely to condition future aid on a credible plan to repay that debt. But the money loaned to Zaire went straight into

Mobutu's pocket, not into the economy's development, so payment will be virtually impossible.

These are some of the obstacles faced by President Kabila and his government, and it is not at all clear that they will be surmounted in the near term. Nevertheless, there are many reasons to be hopeful.

The DRC, unlike some underdeveloped countries, is fabulously rich in natural resources, and not just gold and diamonds.

It has enough potential hydroelectric power to light up all of southern Africa. Its rich agricultural resources could feed the entire region. It has approximately 45 million people (there has been no census for many years, so no

one really knows how many Congolese there are) who are now buckling down to the business of reconstruction. Many of these Congolese, including a good deal of the new cabinet, are professionals who have been living abroad for decades, and who have now returned home to contribute their skills and know-how to their country.

One can transit through the airport quickly and efficiently, without being held up by an army of threatening "custom agents" demanding bribes. The era of hyper-inflation (4,725 percent per year from 1990 to 1996) is over, and the currency is actually appreciating against the dollar. There are less things to buy in the markets, but prices are down 20 percent to 25 percent, thanks to the government's tight control of the currency.

Most importantly, the Kabila government has the cooperation and support of neighboring African governments who are eager to see the DRC stabilized.

A new pattern of regional cooperation, unthinkable under Mobutu's regime, is emerging.

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