

Lupac Amar Shah

The Rose that grew From Concrete

Mitchell, and Toby, Emily Bestler, Kara Welsh, Liatek, Anthony Goff, Paolo Pepe, Jeanne Lee, Liz Brooks, Lisa, John De Laney, Stephen Fallert, thank you, thank you, for being the connector, the juggler, the struggler. You are having to pull all the pieces together. Thank you for all writing, reading, rereading, and for your effective communication skills. We all need you! Do we tell you enough? Jamal, Arvand Elihu, and James Cavinal. Poetry Circawanda Hunter, Ray Luv (Raymond Tyson) Damond, ta, T. J., Lotoya Gilel, Uilani Enid, Arrow, and Monica night. Dimpho and Tebojo. Young Imaginations, AIM, Kids, Kaleidoscope, International Women's Convention, and enaz in Berkeley. All the high schools that let us read our y before the rest of the world gave us their permission. ia Abouaf. Reese Hogg, David and Herb Steinberg. Mac Tracy Robinson and Gobi. Talia and Devanee.

—AFENI SHAKUR

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children, Shaquan, Talia, Devanee, Nikko, and all my other ren, you are the reason I do this, my cup runneth over. Shakur, you gave your only son to not just me, but to the l. So many times when I have not had the strength to even ut of bed, it is Pac's spirit that gives me breath. It is you gave his spirit breath, for this and for allowing me to con: his work, I cannot put into words my gratitude. Thank Tupac, I will continue to do your work with the portion of oul that you didn't take with you.

—LEILA STEINBERG

## Preface

*Celebrate life  
through the music  
through the spoken word  
through the splatter of  
color on paper  
or wood  
or iron  
or canvas*

*But celebrate your life  
Celebrate your ability  
to feel joy and  
sadness*

*Celebrate your ability to feel!  
Only then will we be free to  
Feel!*

I thank God and all my ancestors for the Artistic Tupac, for the Poetic Tupac. There was never a day when Tupac did not appreciate language. The sound and the rhythm of words did not intimidate him. He sought to interpret his world using all the visual and linguistic tools available to him. The battle

between the discipline of intellect and the ravings of the soul is a fascinating one.

These poems were written from 1989 to 1991, reflecting the heart and soul of my son. They represent the process of a young artist's journey to understand and accept a world of unthinkable contradictions. I always believed Tupac's work can and does speak for itself. I have nothing to add or detract—my responsibility is to do all I can to make sure he has been heard in venues and milieus that are appropriate to what he himself gave to his life and his work.

Tupac put these poems in the safekeeping of Leila Steinberg, who was Tupac's first professional manager and adult friend. We are indebted to Leila for her integrity in looking after the safety of Tupac's work. Her loyalty has allowed us the ability to offer this work in this medium.

Tupac had quite a few friends whose actions regarding his artistic integrity reflect a subconscious belief that he is still in the room. We thank all those of his peers, friends, and business associates who continue to act as though Tupac were still in the room. Thank you my beautiful and wonderful son—you're a perfect mirror of my soul!

*When you're not here  
I measure the space  
You used to occupy.  
Large areas become  
vast and endless  
deserts of you  
not there.*

—AFENI SHAKUR

## Foreword: Tupac, C U in Heaven

I'm glad this collection of the poetry of Tupac Shakur is being published. Those of us who recognize not only genius but light knew early on that young Shakur was special. He lit up the screen in *Juice* and *Above the Rim*. His raps were tight and strong. We all said to ourselves, "Something good is coming."

I guess it will always be the case that when someone brings a new idea or, more accurately, a truthful idea there will be complaints. There will always be those people, especially those people who are wrong, who try to shut the truth and daring down. I remember when *The Sugar Hill Gang* started the "New Rap Revolution" and they were fun. Grandmothers in stupid movies could imitate their rap, and old men could return from *Cocoon* and break-dance. It was just so, well, cute to play off rap. Then along came Tupac. You don't see any senior take-offs on his art. You don't see Hume Cronyn and his friends hip-hopping down the street to *Holler If Ya Hear Me*. No garden parties with Grandma bopping up to *Something 2 Die 4*. So they found a name, Gangsta Rap, to somehow distinguish it from, what? Polite, nice, highly compromised rap? They tried to isolate that beautiful boy who was trying to bring on the truth so that they could flood us with lies and excuses.

People will still stand up and say really stupid things like "I don't think profane language should be used" or "They are

always cursing and stuff, and I think they can make their point without bad language." But I always think bad language is "school vouchers," "lower taxes on capital gains," "don't ask don't tell," and language like that, which, silently or not so silently, kills people who are different from what we want to think we are. But who, in truth, are not so different after all. Children have to be educated; the correct citizens to pay taxes are those who have money; people have a right to their own hearts, but mostly what I keep seeing is the emptiness of lives that have nothing better to do than judge and condemn. Tupac once said, "Only God can judge me." I say good for him. He had taken that step to understand that no matter what any of them say you have an obligation to the universe to follow your own muse.

I like Tupac Shakur in the same way I liked Prince when he was Prince. When he wrote music that was a bit edgy, a bit out there, a bit daring. Whatever turned that beautiful boy, the "rude boy," into a whiny symbol should rot in five different hells. Tupac stayed fresh and strong and committed to himself and his people. Yet, as this collection shows, he was a sensitive soul. The poems for the lovers in this life, for his mother, for his child in heaven show a boy who touches our souls. This, too, is Tupac. Just as people want to make Malcolm X an integrationist, thereby changing the nature of his daring and his truth, people want us to overlook the sensitivity and love Tupac Shakur shows because, after all, if he loves, if he cries, if he cares, if he, in other words, is not a monster, then what have we done? What a great crime has been committed in the name of, what, the status quo? How awful and ugly of us.

One day, in the not too distant future, there will be a gathering in Atlanta much like the one in Memphis. You remember

Memphis and Graceland. The Postmaster General of the United States invited Elvis's family members to unveil the artists' concepts of Elvis. There was an 800 number for the young, pretty, slim Elvis and another 800 number for the fat, drugged-out Elvis. We the public were invited to phone in our choice, and that would be the stamp. When the Malcolm X stamp was chosen, there was no gathering at Betty Shabazz's home. No calling the girls, Malcolm and Betty's daughters, together with the Postmaster General. No artists' conception, inviting the public to choose between a smiling Malcolm and that frowny ugly thing they produced. No choice between a Malcolm-and-Betty stamp and a Malcolm-by-himself stamp. In fact, as usual, white people decided what Black people should want and did as they wished with the image of our hero. The Tupac Stamp must go public. We, the public, demand the right to make choices. I want an image of a thoughtful Tupac with the words: *C U in Heaven*. He deserves to be taken seriously and we must therefore mourn.

—NIKKI GIOVANNI

## Introduction

Tupac felt that through art we could incite a new revolution that incorporated the heart, mind, body, spirit, and soul. He wanted his art to instill honesty, integrity, and respect.

It was the spring of 1989 in Marin City, when a young man with fan-like eyelashes, overflowing charisma, and the most infectious laugh began to make his way into my life. I was sitting on the grass outside Bayside Elementary School reading Winnie Mandela's *Part of My Soul Went with Him*. A young man with big beautiful sparkling eyes came up behind me quoting lines aloud from the book. It fascinated me that he knew the lines by heart. When he introduced himself as Tupac, I realized that he was the Tupac that friends had spoken to me about. I was a writer and producer working in the music industry and he was an aspiring rapper looking for a manager. I did not have time to speak at length with him then because I had a class to teach, a multicultural educational program, "Young Imaginations." However, I was so impressed with him that I invited him to sit in on my class.

After class, Tupac began to share his ideas on how the arts could be included in school curriculums to help youth address some of the issues that they were experiencing in their lives. By combining art with education, Tupac felt we could begin to heal society's pain and confusion.

I later invited him to participate in a weekly writing circle I

had at my house. His first time there, he immediately took over and decided that we would write about what he wanted, not what I wanted. One of the first poems Tupac wrote with us—"The Rose That Grew from Concrete"—tells you a great deal about him in just a few lines. Tupac was the rose that grew in spite of all obstacles. His life shows that a young man/boy could rise, shine, grow, and bloom beyond overbearing conditions to become one of America's most beloved men. He also had the grace to make it all look easy. Tupac's accomplishments, in twenty-five years, far surpass what most people do in three of his lifetimes. These poetry circles continued for a long time. We were all broke and struggling, but Tupac was the only one who had ever really tasted poverty; only he could take potatoes when there was no meat and make the best tacos you ever tasted; and only he could make a gourmet meal out of Top-Ramen noodles. He was a genius who became the group's greatest inspiration. Within four weeks of our meeting, Tupac appointed me his manager.

It has been several years since Tupac has passed, and a day does not go by that I do not think of him. I have kept a collection of the many poems that he wrote during the time of our poetry circle. The following poems show a side of Tupac Amaru Shakur that popular culture has yet to realize existed—pensive, introspective, loving, and concerned about world affairs. There is no better way to get inside the mind and heart of an artist than to examine his artistic expressions. I hope these poems allow those who are fascinated by Tupac to see his sensitivity, insight, revolutionary mind, fears, passion, and sense of humor. Tupac's stature and recognition as a rapper is clear and unequivocal. However, his place as a literary artist/poet has yet to be recognized.

I hope these poems, which Tupac wrote from his heart, will encourage people to take the first steps necessary to see his literary importance, as well as have us acknowledge the life struggles of young black men. Written when Tupac was nineteen, this poetry is free from the restraints of the music industry and all monetary pressures. It is free of the anger that came from getting shot, betrayed, and thrown in jail for a crime I believe he never committed. It is Tupac before his fame.

For the past seven years, Tupac's writings have been one of my most powerful teaching tools. I have participated in programs in schools, youth facilities, and a number of prisons all over the country. My most exciting work began in 1997 when Arvand Elihu invited me to participate in *History 98: The Poetry and History of Tupac Shakur*. This was a class Arvand was developing at UC Berkeley. Students from all races and backgrounds participated, discussing such issues as single parenting and poverty. Students and universities throughout the country have requested the teaching materials that Arvand compiled to initiate their own Tupac curriculum. Tupac was finally being recognized by academia.

In the summer of 1998, I assisted Afeni Shakur, Tupac's mother, in developing the first annual summer youth conference, "Life Goes On." We spent more than a weekend in Sparta, Georgia, using Tupac's lyrics to conduct workshops that resulted in bringing new life into the hearts and minds of those in attendance. Participants traveled from all over the nation to take advantage of the healing tool Tupac left us, his words. The following August, I was invited as a delegate to the International Women's Convention in Johannesburg, South Africa, to conduct a workshop with Enid Picket on the power of art in education. Once again the curriculum was based around

Tupac's writings. I have since been invited to the Netherlands and Costa Rica to conduct similar programming.

Now, Tupac's work, and especially these poems, are available to the public. I hope that they can attract the attention of those who have not given Tupac a fair chance—the same people who are quick to judge Tupac based on the media's sometimes negative portrayal. Tupac's poems can teach us about universal needs that textbooks rarely address. Poems such as "And 2morrow" and "Still I Wait for Dawn" speak of the need to survive and wait for a better day. They also teach us that humanity as a whole suffers if anyone starves. Unfortunately, it took his death to teach us that when one man dies we all bleed.

—LEILA STEINBERG

The Rose that  
grew From  
Concrete

## The Rose That grew From Concrete

Autobiographical

Did u Hear about THE rose That grew from a crack  
in the concrete

Proving Nature's Laws wrong it learned 2 walk  
WITHOUT Having Feet

Funny it seems But By Keeping its Dreams  
it learned 2 Breathe fresh air

Long Live THE rose That grew from concrete  
When no one else even cared!

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Autobiographical

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Funny it seems but by keeping its dreams  
it learned 2 breathe fresh air

Long live the rose that grew from concrete  
when no one else even cared!



## ~~THE~~ UNTITLED

Please wake me when I'm free  
I cannot bear captivity  
where my culture I'm told holds no significance  
I'll wither and die in ignorance  
But my inner eye can see a race  
who reigned as kings in another place  
The green of trees were rich and full  
and every man spoke of beautiful -  
men and women together as equals  
War was gone because all was peaceful  
But now like a nightmare I wake to see  
that I live like a prisoner of poverty  
Please wake me when I'm free  
**I** cannot bear captivity  
If I would rather be stricken blind  
~~If I~~ than to live without expression of mind

## Untitled

Please wake me when I'm free  
I cannot bear captivity  
where my culture I'm told holds no significance  
I'll wither and die in ignorance  
But my inner eye can see a race  
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That I live like a prisoner of poverty  
Please wake me when I'm free  
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If I would rather be stricken blind  
than to live without expression of mind

THE FEAR IN THE HEART OF A MAN  
DEDICATED 2 MY HEART

AGAINST AN ATTACKER I WILL BOLDLY TAKE MY STAND  
BECAUSE MY HEART WILL SHOW FEAR 4 NO MAN  
BUT 4 A BROKEN HEART I RUN WITH FRIGHT  
SCARED 2 BE BLIND IN A VULNERABLE NIGHT  
I BELIEVE THIS FEAR IS IN EVERY MAN  
SOME WILL ACKNOWLEDGE IT OTHERS WILL FAIL 2 UNDERSTAND  
THERE IS NO FEAR IN A SHALLOW HEART  
BECAUSE SHALLOW HEARTS DON'T FALL APART  
BUT FEELING HEARTS THAT TRULY CARE  
ARE FRAGILE 2 THE FLOW OF AIR  
AND IF I AM 2 BE TRUE THEN I MUST GIVE  
MY FRAGILE HEART  
I MAY RECEIVE GREAT JOY OR U MAY RETURN IT  
RIPPED APART

The Fear in the Heart of a Man

Dedicated 2 My Heart

against an attacker I will boldly take my stand  
because my heart will show fear 4 no man  
but 4 a broken heart I run with fright  
scared 2 be blind in a vulnerable night  
I believe this fear is in every man  
some will acknowledge it others will fail 2 understand  
there is no fear in a shallow heart  
because shallow hearts don't fall apart  
but feeling hearts that truly care  
are fragile 2 the flow of air  
and if I am 2 be true then I must give  
my fragile heart  
I may receive great joy or u may return it  
ripped apart



GOD


WHEN I WAS ALONE AND HAD NOTHING  
I ASKED 4 A FRIEND 2 HELP ME BEAR THE  
PAIN NO ONE CAME EXCEPT... GOD

WHEN I NEEDED A BREATH 2 RISE  
FROM MY SLEEP NO ONE COULD  
HELP ME EXCEPT.... GOD

WHEN ALL I SAW WAS SADNESS  
AND I NEEDED ANSWERS NO ONE  
HEARD ME EXCEPT.... GOD

SO WHEN I AM ASKED WHO I  
GIVE MY UNCONDITIONAL LOVE 2  
LOOK ~~FOR~~ FOR NO OTHER NAME  
EXCEPT.....

GOD!



## God

when I was alone and had nothing  
I asked 4 a friend 2 help me bear the  
pain no one came except . . . GOD

when I needed a breath 2 rise  
from my sleep no one could  
help me except . . . . GOD

when all I saw was sadness  
and I needed answers no one  
heard me except . . . . GOD

so when I am asked who I  
give my unconditional love 2  
look for no other name  
except . . . . . GOD!

## THINGS THAT MAKE HEARTS BREAK

pretty smiles

deceiving laughs

and people who dream with their eyes open

Lonely children

unanswered cries

and souls who have given up hoping

The other thing that breaks hearts

are fairy tales that never come true

and selfish people who lie to me

selfish people just like u

## Things That Make Hearts Break

pretty smiles

deceiving laughs

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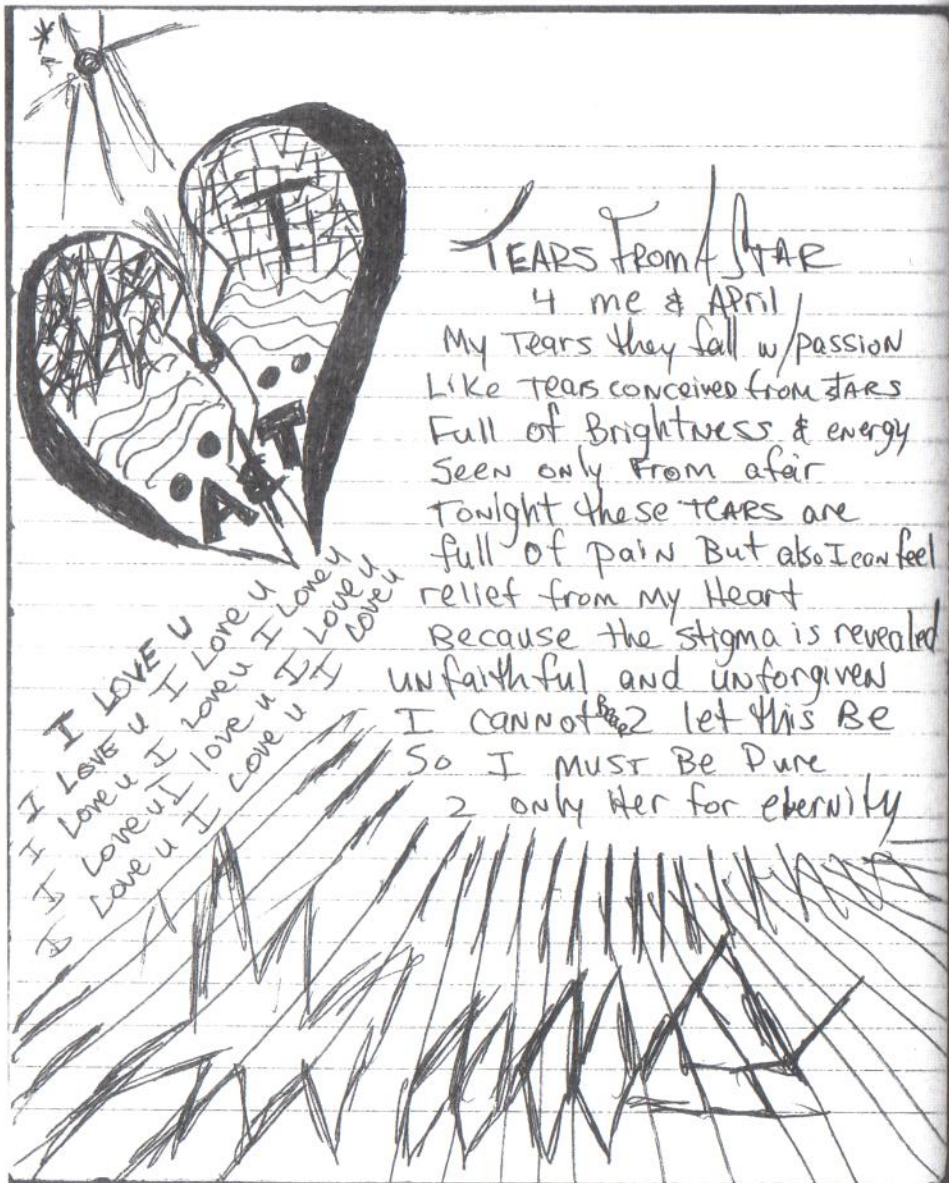
## A Love unspoken

WHAT OF A LOVE UNSPOKEN? IS IT WEAKER WITHOUT A NAME?  
Does this Love deserve 2 exist without a title  
Because I Dare not share its name  
Does that make me cruel and cold  
2 Deny the world of my salvation  
Because I chose 2 let it grow  
People TEND 2 choke  
That which they Do not understand  
Why shouldn't I be weary  
and withhold this love from MAN  
What of a love unspoken  
No one ever knows  
But this is a love that lasts  
and in secrecy it grows

B

## A Love Unspoken

What of a love unspoken? Is it weaker without a name?  
Does this love deserve 2 exist without a title  
because I dare not share its name  
Does that make me cruel and cold  
2 deny the world of my salvation  
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People tend 2 choke  
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Why shouldn't I be weary  
and withhold this love from MAN  
What of a love unspoken  
no one ever knows  
But this is a love that lasts  
and in secrecy it grows



TEARS FROM A STAR

4 me & APRIL

My Tears they fall w/passion  
 Like tears conceived from stars  
 Full of brightness & energy  
 Seen only from afar  
 Tonight these tears are  
 full of pain But also I can feel  
 relief from my Heart  
 Because the stigma is revealed  
 unfaithful and unforgiven  
 I cannot <sup>be</sup> let this be  
 So I must Be Pure  
 2 only Her for eternity

Tears from a Star

4 Me & April

My tears they fall with passion  
 Like tears conceived from stars  
 Full of brightness & energy  
 Seen only from afar  
 Tonight these tears are  
 full of pain but also I can feel  
 relief from my heart  
 Because the stigma is revealed  
 unfaithful and unforgiven  
 I cannot bear 2 let this be  
 So I must be pure  
 2 only her for eternity

# JADA

4 JADA

u R THE omega of my Heart  
The foundation 4 my conception of Love  
when I THINK of what a Black woman should be  
it's u that I FIRST think of

u Will Never fully understand  
How Deeply my Heart Feels 4 u  
I worry that we'll grow apart  
~~and~~ and I'll end up losing u

u Bring me 2 climax without sex  
and u do it all with regal grace  
u R my Heart in Human Form  
a Friend I could never replace

## Jada

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The foundation 4 my conception of Love  
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u R my Heart in Human Form  
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The Tears in Cupid's Eyes  
4 JADA

The Day u chose 2 leave me  
it rained constantly outside  
In Truth I Swore The rain 2 be  
The Tears in cupid's eyes

The Tears in Cupid's Eyes

4 Jada

The day u chose 2 leave me  
it rained constantly outside  
In truth I swore the rain 2 be  
The tears in Cupid's eyes



## Just A Breath of Freedom 4 Nelson Mandela

Held captive 4 your politics  
They wanted 2 Break your soul  
they ordered the extermination  
of all minds they couldn't control  
4 u the fate was Far worse  
than Just a Brutal homicide  
They caged u like an animal  
and watched u slowly die inside  
As u Breathe your first air of freedom  
on the day u become a free man  
Raise your Regal Brow in Pride  
4 now you R in God's Hands  
The life of many were given  
so that this day would one day come  
That the devils in Power at Pretoria  
would pay for the evil crimes they've done

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## Government Assistance

or  
My Soul

It would be like a panther  
asking a panther hunter  
4 some meat, All  
High School Dropouts R NOT DUMB  
All unemployed aren't lazy  
and there R many days I hunger  
But I would go hungry and homeless  
Before the American Government gets my Soul

## Government Assistance or My Soul

It would be like a panther  
asking a panther hunter  
4 some meat, all  
High school dropouts R not DUMB  
All unemployed aren't lazy  
and there R many days I hunger  
But I would go hungry and homeless  
Before the American Government gets my soul

## Liberty Needs Glasses

excuse me But lady liberty needs glasses  
AND So Does Mrs Justice By her side  
Both the Broads R BLIND AS BATS  
Stumbling Thru the system  
Justice Bumbed INTO MUTULU AND  
Trippin' ON Geronimo Pratt  
But stepped right over Oliver  
AND his crooked partner Ronnie  
Justice stubbed her Big Toe on Mandela  
AND liberty was misquoted by the INDIANS  
slavery was a learning PHASE  
Forgotten with out a verdict  
while Justice is on a rampage  
4 endangered surviving Black males  
I mean Really if anyone really valued ~~the~~ life  
and cared about the masses  
they'd take em Both 2 Pen optical  
and get 2 pair of Glasses

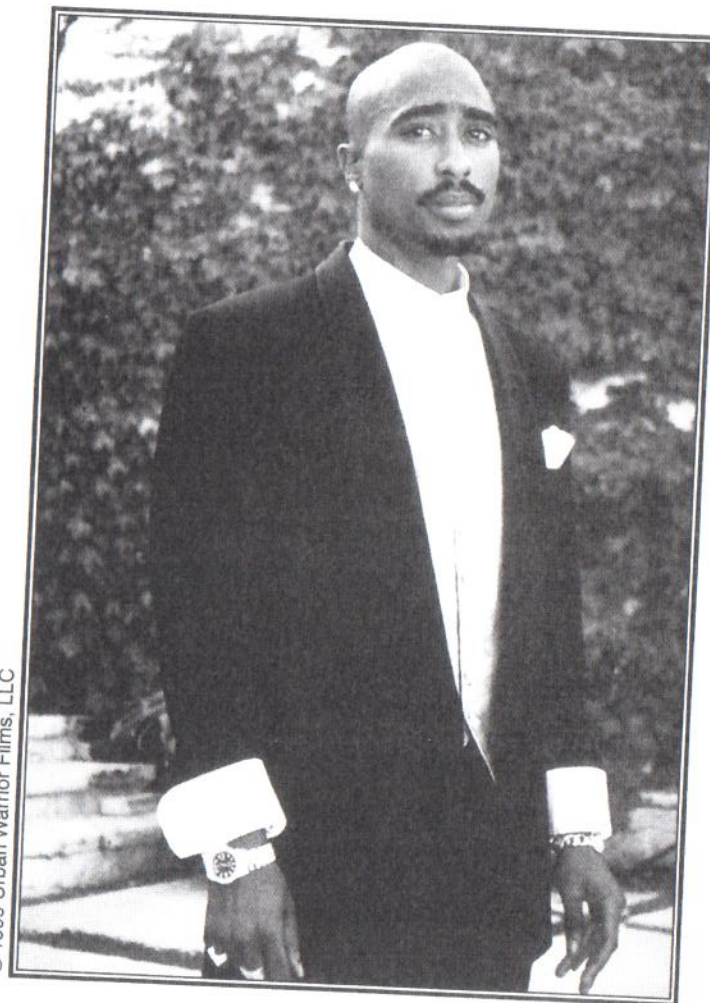
## Liberty Needs Glasses

excuse me but Lady Liberty needs glasses  
And so does Mrs. Justice by her side  
Both the broads R blind as bats  
Stumbling thru the system  
Justice bumped into Mutulu and  
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But stepped right over Oliver  
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They'd take 'em both 2 Pen Optical  
and get 2 pairs of glasses

## IN THE EVENT OF MY DEMISE

Dedicated 2 THOSE CURIOUS

In the event of my Demise  
when my heart can beat no more  
I Hope I Die For A Principle  
OR A BELIEF THAT I had lived 4  
I will die Before my Time  
Because I feel the shadow's Depth  
So much I wanted 2 accomplish  
Before I reached my Death  
I have come 2 grips with the possibility  
and wiped the last tear from my eyes  
I Loved All who were Positive  
In the event of my Demise!



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TUPAC AMARU SHAKUR  
1971-1996