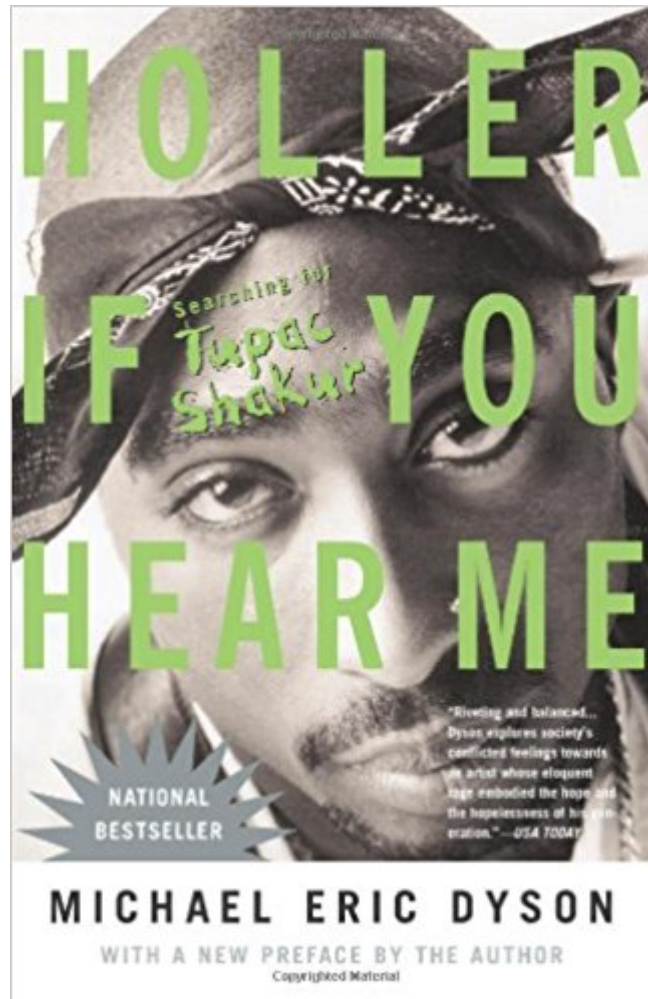


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Holler If You Hear Me: Searching For Tupac Shakur



Synopsis

Acclaimed for his writings on Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as his passionate defense of black youth culture, Michael Eric Dyson has emerged as the leading African American intellectual of his generation. Now Dyson turns his attention to one of the most enigmatic figures of the past decade: the slain hip-hop artist Tupac Shakur. Five years after his murder, Tupac remains a widely celebrated, deeply loved, and profoundly controversial icon among black youth. Viewed by many as a "black James Dean," he has attained cult status partly due to the posthumous release of several albums, three movies, and a collection of poetry. But Tupac endures primarily because of the devotion of his loyal followers, who have immortalized him through tributes, letters, songs, and celebrations, many in cyberspace. Dyson helps us to understand why a twenty-five-year-old rapper, activist, poet, actor, and alleged sex offender looms even larger in death than he did in life. With his trademark skills of critical thinking and storytelling, Dyson examines Tupac's hold on black youth, assessing the ways in which different elements of his persona—thug, confused prophet, fatherless child—are both vital and destructive. At once deeply personal and sharply analytical, Dyson's book offers a wholly original way of looking at Tupac Shakur that will thrill those who already love the artist and enlighten those who want to understand him. "In the tradition of jazz saxophonists John Coltrane and Charlie Parker, Dyson riffs with speed, eloquence, bawdy humor, and startling truths that have the effect of hitting you like a Mack truck."—San Francisco Examiner "Such is the genius of Dyson. He flows freely from the profound to the profane, from popular culture to classical literature."—Washington Post "A major American thinker and cultural critic."—Philadelphia Inquirer "Among the young black intellectuals to emerge since the demise of the civil rights movement—undoubtedly the most insightful and thought-provoking is Michael Eric Dyson."—Manning Marable, Director of African American Studies, Columbia University

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Customer Reviews

Michael Eric Dyson reveals in his latest book, "Holler If You Hear Me," that his own son, Michael II, once proclaimed, "Pop, if Tupac had had the chance to talk with you, he'd still be alive today." Having read Dyson's brilliant analysis of the most extraordinary poet to grace the modern music scene, I believe that Pac, indeed, would have found a healing salve for his wounds in the words and wisdom of America's unrivaled hip-hop intellectual. Dyson's tender probe of hip-hop's most shining knight takes us on a whirlwind search for Tupac Shakur. Eight chapters and an epilogue later, we learn that Pac was the one searching, searching for a Black man he could call father, searching for justice in America, searching for manhood and selfhood, and above all else, searching for love. An undeniable genius whose charismatic presence lit up the screen and stage, and whose searing social proclamations helped make rap a vehicle for change, Tupac's mercurial ascent has not yet plateaued, which makes Dyson's tome all the more important. Like other cultural icons he is compared with, Tupac's popularity transcends race and generation. Dyson's unparalleled defense of black youth, shines forth like a beacon in "Holler If You Hear Me," and caused me to understand that Pac is that brilliant young black man that each one of us has struggled to save from his own self-destruction. Dyson-the-journalist interviewed scores of people whose lives' Tupac touched and adroitly gets them to speak candidly about the paragon of virtue and violence that was Tupac Shakur. Those who knew the young man behind the handsome, dreamy visage, tell how this self-made intellectual chose death's door as his destiny. In his pulsatingly painful chapters exploring Tupac's relationship with his mother Afeni Shakur, Dyson allows us to understand for the first time how the patriarchal shortcomings of the Black Power movement failed the children of our revolutionaries. The carefully crafted chapter entitled "But Do the Lord Care?" had me in tears after learning how the brutality Tupac experienced in prison all but extinguished his flame. Hip hop has become one of the most important cultural genres ever created, and Michael Eric Dyson's compassionate look at it's most enduring icon is a must read for anyone who wants to understand the power of black youth.

This is by far the most brilliant, insightful, cutting-edge treatment of Tupac and hip-hop culture

available. Dyson doesn't offer a biography per se, and no one who is familiar with his equally impressive work on Malcolm X or Martin Luther King, Jr., would expect such a work. Dyson is helping to pioneer a distinctive new genre of scholarship: a seamless fusion of critical evaluation of an icon's life and a searching examination of that person's life and times. As such, this work takes its place as a sophisticated, meditative and scintillating tour through the dark passages of Tupac's complex music and his surprisingly nimble mind. The way Dyson sets the book up is compelling: He looks at Tupac's childhood, his mature artistry, and the beliefs that motivated his most thrilling achievements. I appreciate his joining Tupac's difficult childhood -- including his mother's drug abuse -- to both the political aspirations of a troubled revolutionary career (his mother was a Black Panther) and to the plague of poverty that cursed them. Dyson then convincingly links these stark realities to Tupac's plentiful and brooding music, and to the themes that would obsess him: death, betrayal, hopelessness, the search for forgiveness, spirituality, transcendence, racial authenticity and thug life. Dyson manages, in the process, to not only write about Tupac, but about the heartless vicissitudes that haunt millions of black youth. His discussion of the "n" word controversy is brilliant, as are his examinations of the contradictions that pile up around "keeping it real," the mantra of so much hip-hop culture. He tackles gender problems (in a gem of a word coinage, what he terms "femiphobia," which is simply illuminating for the way it manages to pry a space between old-style misogyny and outright sexism), while also dealing with Tupac's bold religious views. Dyson's chapter on Tupac's sense of embodiment is one of the most lyrical in the book, although it virtually sings throughout. Dyson is one of the few world-class scholars -- and in this regard, he is nearly in a class by himself -- who is capable of both rigorous analysis and poetic declaration. What is particularly winning about Dyson's book is the list of "firsts" he manages to accumulate: the first time we hear a prison interview he gave; the first time we hear about a video of the rapper when he was only 17; and the first time we hear from a variety of cultural and social commentators (there are over 60 original interviews in the book, if I counted correctly, including the likes of Quincy Jones, Stanley Crouch, Mos Def, Toni Morrison, Afeni Shakur, Common, Talib Kweli, Samuel Jackson, and Jada Pinkett) on the life of this most extraordinary young man. One of the most amazing things I learned -- and there are many features that fall in this category -- is the utter intelligence that characterized Shakur's life. Dyson devotes an entire chapter to outlining the rapper's reading, and that alone is worth the price of the book. I cannot recommend this book highly enough. It is an intellectual tour de force by perhaps the most brilliant intellectual of his generation. For Dyson to have written the kind of utterly original book he did on Martin Luther King, Jr., only to come back in a year's time to deliver an equally powerful reflection on such a controversial, gifted and important artist as Tupac, is in

itself a remarkable feat. We are all in his debt.

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