

Notoriously Overrated: What Was so Big about Biggie Smalls? by Minister Paul Scott.

There's a new movie coming out, next month, called "Notorious". It's the story of a black kid who grew up on the mean city streets, became a Black Panther and dedicated his life to stopping police brutality and trying to organize street gangs into a revolutionary political movement. The story ends with him being murdered in his bed by the police as he slept next to his pregnant fiancée.

My bad, that was the Fred Hampton story. Wrong screenplay..."Notorious" is about the life of a drug dealer turned rapper who released a CD, got into a beef with another rapper and was shot on the streets of LA while leaving an after party. The end.

If you ask any Hip Hop fan who are the greatest rappers of all time, dead or alive, he will, most likely, put Christopher "Notorious BIG" Wallace in the top five. Any omission of "Biggie Smalls" is considered Hip Hop blasphemy. Even highly educated college professors have made a career out of quoting Wallace's lyrics like "The 10 Crack Commandments" as if they were part of some sacred text. Even today, if you go to any Hip Hop clothing store in any city in America you can still buy the T-Shirt of The Notorious BIG with the crown on his head for 20 bucks.

However, as it is with most American icons, we never take a minute to ask, at the end of the day, what was this person's overall contribution to society that made him worthy of the accolades that we bestow upon him, posthumously.

The tragic story of the Notorious BIG is the cornerstone of the Hip Hop catechism and has been the subject of so many books, documentaries and magazine articles that I am not sure how much more light the film "Notorious" can shed on his life. I guess that the movie company, Fox Searchlight, is banking on the possibility that thousands of loyal Hip Hop fans will be willing to put down \$8 a head just to pay homage to their dearly departed idol, even in the midst of a major Recession.

But the question remains, what makes a person like Christopher Wallace still relevant a decade after his death when many of our leaders who sacrificed their lives for black people are

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forgotten soon after their casket drops?

Most Hip Hop heads can run down in their sleep how Wallace sold drugs in Brooklyn, signed with Bad Boy, married Faith Evans and discovered Lil Kim. Who doesn't know about his infamous beef with Tupac Shakur (2Pac) during the mid 90's that had black folks debating who had the best rappers, the East or West Coast, during the same period when right wing conservatives were debating how to take away the few rights that black folks had.

Many of the faithful still get teary eyed when they recall the night that "Big" was murdered, a tragedy that made a black record label owner rich and a whole lot of multi-national white businessmen, richer.

Very few Hip Hop aficionados will debate the fact that many consider Wallace's first release, "Ready to Die," a Hip Hop classic. But one would be hard pressed to find anything even remotely political or intellectually, insightful in any of the lyrics on his CD's where every thing he rapped about could have taken place within a one mile radius of his own block. Besides tales of black on black homicide and suicidal thoughts based on either self hatred or major depression, there is little else to justify any of his work being held in the same light as a "It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back" or "The Score."

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Talib Kweli once rapped about how we have the uncanny ability to find beauty in the hideous. In the case of Biggie's lyrics, we also try to find depth in the shallow.

Maybe the reason lies within our "mis" educational system. We are trained since elementary school to accept what the text books teach us as the absolute, unadulterated truth. If the book says that Christopher Columbus "discovered" America, then Christopher Columbus discovered America. So as we get older, if a Hip Hop magazine says that Christopher Wallace was the greatest of all time, than Biggie Smalls was the illest. No questions asked.

Perhaps we just have a fascination with death. Especially the deaths of other black folks. I know

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people who can't start their day without checking the newspaper to see who got shot the night before. We also have the tendency to elevate people in death to levels that they would have never achieved in life.

In ancient Egyptian culture, when a pharaoh died he was worshiped as a god. So when rappers die violently, they are transformed into gods of war, leading their followers on a quest to seek revenge against all those that had beef with them when they were alive.

Holly"hood has also capitalized off of our necrophilia as, for the last 15 years, the plot of black men getting tragically caught up in the streets has been the theme of too many movies to name. No one wants to admit that although they say art imitates life, in the hood , life imitates art as the death of Christopher Wallace only helped to desensitize a generation of young black men to the finality of death. And with the upcoming release of "Notorious," we see that we still have not learned our lesson.

Sadly, although the Notorious BIG became even more famous beyond the grave, for the young brothers who followed in his footsteps, the only fame they received was a 15 second news flash on Channel 9.

Back in the day Kurtis Blow said that there were 8 million stories in the naked city. Unfortunately, most of our stories end the same way . No happily- ever- after. No pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Just black blood being spilled on city streets.

I guess the BIG man was right when he said that "You're nobody till somebody kills you.

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