

STUDY GUIDE FOR UNIT 3: TARGETS 2 (TUPAC SHAKUR, BIGGIE SMALLS)

TUNI 250: HONORS ADVANCED TOPICS SIMULATION IN CULTURAL CRITICISM: RATCATCHER FALL 2018

Material from the reading by Collins

1. Know whether or not the **crucial element** of Biggie's persona--the **intensity and violence** of his subject matter--came from the intensity and violence of the **environment that molded his imagination**. Know whether or not **hardcore rappers** rhyming about blowing away their foes with 9-millimeter pistols are in a sense part of a **grand and troubling tradition**. Know whether or not the **punishment** for the five African American and Hispanic teens in the beating of the **Central Park jogger** stood up in court and was **carried out**. Know whether or not some have compared Biggie's gestures to **minstrelry**. Know whether or not, as parables, Biggie's tales **advertise practicality and skill at negotiating**. Know whether or not, in rhyme after rhyme, Biggie chronicles the **risks of the "everyday struggle"** on rough Brooklyn streets. Know whether or not, **critical** to the **feedback loop** of credibility is Biggie placing himself in a tradition of rappers whose **words can change to bullets** and back again. Know whether or not hip hop has built its epics in the **very vortex** of the struggle for **existence and success**. Know whether or not, according to **Anderson**, there are always people around looking for a fight in order to increase their **share of respect**, or "**juice**," as it is sometimes called. Know whether or not "**The Ten Crack Commandments**" is in a sense a Biggie **"Wealth of Nations."** Know whether or not Biggie's commentary is a call to **moral reform** rather than to **mastery of "the game."** Know whether or not Biggie's rule number one touches on one of rap music's **greatest contributions** to the analysis of American society: the elaboration of the mechanics of **envy and jealousy**. (p. 911-916)
2. Know whether or not **smoked crack** moves from the pipe to the **large surface of the lungs** and thence to the brain where, within ten minutes, it **induces a high** that has been compared to a **full-body orgasm**. Know whether or not, as for the sellers of crack, money is **ultimately the drug of choice**. Know whether or not, according to Anderson, in the inner-city community, drug dealing thus becomes **recognized as work**, though it is an occupation that overwhelming numbers of residents **surely despise**. Know whether or not, according to **Massey and Denton**, housing discrimination that **began in the 1950s** was **perfected in the 1960s**. Know whether or not the **dealers** are, in principle, **much closer** to the American mainstream than are **those they sell to**. Know whether or not **HOLC** helped institutionalize the crediting of a whole population **living in red-lined areas**. Know whether or not the author thinks **getting high on your own supply** is a specialized form of **embezzlement**. Know whether or not Massey and Denton think that HOLC practices were **models for the Federal Housing Administration** and the **Veterans Administration** that together completely **reshaped** the residential housing market of the United States. (p. 916-919)
3. Know whether or not, according to **Morgan**, black people are **all winners** when a space exists for brothers to honestly state and explore the **roots of their pain** and subsequently their **misogyny**. Know whether or not the reference in "Another" to **Sam Rothstein** (central character in "Casino") is a reference to a man who **loves both wisely and deeply**. Know whether or not Morgan suggests that the rapper's **hard exterior**, especially with regard to women, is in part a **defensive stance**. Know whether or not a corollary to commandment five is to **keep one's family and illegal business separated**. Know whether or not **failure to play the game correctly** leads to all the consequences the would-be rags-to-riches entrepreneur **wants to avoid**. Know whether or not Kim's reference to her love as "**concrete**," again, suggests the kind of **strength** that love needs to have in a **hostile racial and economic environment**. Know whether or not, according to Morgan, denying the **justifiable anger** of rappers is empowering and strategic for **black feminists**. Know whether or not, in one of his raps, Shakur records his theory that **Biggie and Puffy Combs** were behind his **being shot five times**. Know whether or not the eleventh commandment is that one **must stay in the crack game** even if a viable alternative **makes itself available**. Know whether or not a **comic figure**, the **mad rapper**, is really **dangerous**. Know whether or not Biggie was **unaware** that even complete mastery of the game did not guarantee that disaster **would be avoided**. Know whether or not, at

the end of "**Born Again**," Biggie's mother speaks about her son's worries about "**playa haters**" wounded by his success. Know whether or not the prelude to "Ready to Die" samples the Curtis Mayfield classic, "**People Get Ready**." Know whether or not "**Missing You**" is the closest thing to a **love ballad** on "Life After Death." Know whether or not, to rap artists, rap appeared to be an arena where one could go **as far as one's skills could take one**. Know whether or not the difficulty is that the street dialectic of **seeking and being endangered** by envy spills over into the rap world **as Biggie experienced it**. (p. 919-925)

4. Know whether or not, in the **stigmatized world**, stigma creates a **constant ache** in the organs of self-esteem at the same time that it makes it more difficult to **eliminate that ache**. Know whether or not, according to **Loury**, racial stigma consists of **dishonorable meanings** socially inscribed on arbitrary bodily marks, of **spoiled collective identities**. Know whether or not, **unlike the psalmist**, the gangsta desires to be **protected from his foes and slanderers** and to have the **necessity and essential justice** of his actions recognized. Know whether or not **open appeal to the divine** compromises the **autonomy** that makes the gangsta the **master of his fate** and the **living law** of his environment. Know whether or not **one manifestation** of rapper **sensitivity and inventiveness** is **entrepreneurialism**. Know whether or not the **reality of street life** causes the "**Aristotelian principle**" to be confronted with what might be called a "**Plutocratic principle**." Know whether or not **Rawls** distinguishes "benign envy" from "emulative envy" and "excusable envy." Know whether or not **Kant** would surely **approve** of the Biggie persona's **gargantuan appetites**. Know whether or not the concept of the "**crew**" so prominent in Biggie's music and in hip hop suggests that **individualism is not all**. Know whether or not part of the **greatness** of Biggie's body of work lies in its ability to express the **full reality** of the **gangsta ethic** and the "game" that grows out of it. Know whether or not **Christopher Wallace exited** the crack game and crafted the **Notorious B.I.G. image** as a means of **escaping danger** and want and carrying his **neighborhood crew along with him**. Know whether or not Biggie's **final trip to California** was his own effort to **end the arms and death race** that he knew had come to include Shakur's supporters and mourners. Know whether or not part of the **tragedy** of the deaths of Biggie and Tupac lies in the fact that they **transmuted so many barriers** not only by **bragging about their differences** but also by working with the **surviving universals of our time**. Know whether or not it is true that, as the hip hop community itself recognized in the wake of the murders of Shakur and Wallace, a **crucial limit** that needs to be observed is the one between the **performer and the personae** he creates. (p. 925-935)

Material from the reading by Morrison et al.

1. Know whether or not Tupac was named after a **famous African leader** of the **18th century**. Know whether or not, although Tupac was born and raised on the **West Coast**, he had strong **allegiance** to the **East Coast**. Know whether or not many speculate that the **media coverage** played a large part in **hyping** the East Coast-West Coast feud. Know whether or not one of the **positive legacies** that remain from the East Coast-West Coast feud is the **determination** to keep other artists from trudging down that **same negative path**. Know whether or not Tupac became **bigger** than the feud he **helped to create**. Know whether or not Tupac began his career with **Digital Underground** as a **roadie and dancer**. Know whether or not the lyrics to "**2Pacalypse Now**" became the center of a **national debate**. Know whether or not Tupac was the **first rap artist** to let his fantasies of revenge on **police officers** play out in lyrics. Know whether or not the **prison imagery** conjured by the name **Death Row** fits Tupac when one considers his **numerous run-ins** with the law. Know whether or not the role of dancer serving as **point of entry** to **recording** hip hop (as was the case with **Tupac**) has **never been repeated** in hip hop culture. Know whether or not **C. Delores Tucker** was enthusiastically **supportive** of Shakur's gangsta rap lyrics. Know whether or not the **obscenity conviction** of "Nasty as They Want to Be" was **merely the latest** against a long line of lyrics prior to **2 Live Crew**. Know whether or not Dr. Tucker and her husband **won their suit** against Shakur's estate. Know whether or not more hip hop albums received **parental advisory stickers** than any other **music genre**. Know whether or not, in **1994**, government officials began a **four-year crusade** to rid society of a genre of music they deemed "**pornographic smut**." (p. 393-400)
2. Know whether or not Tupac's last film, "**Above the Rim**," was released **posthumously**. Know whether or not one can see that **Tupac's stage identity** as an outlaw or thug played out in **the movie roles he landed**. Know whether or not one of the **informal rules** on the streets of Harlem (as depicted in the movie "**Juice**") is that those who are **deemed vulnerable** can and will be subjected to **violence** and may be killed in order for kids **to earn respect**. Know whether or not Tupac's role as **Bishop** in "Juice" is powerful because the character he plays is only an **extension of the outlaw/thug identity** portrayed in his lyrics. Know whether or not one of Tupac's best acting performances was in the **Hughes brothers' "Menace II**

Society. Know whether or not a major contribution that Tupac made to hip hop culture involved his role in **countering the notion** that illiteracy is **commonplace** within the hip hop community. Know whether or not Tupac avoided reading works in the **African American literary canon**. Know whether or not Tupac **intellectualism** had a **profound impact** on his rap lyrics. Know whether or not Tupac clearly understood the **power of ideas** and the ability of those ideas to have **great influence over others**. Know whether or not the **importance of literacy** in Tupac's life was inherited from his father. Know whether or not Tupac's last album introduces Tupac as his **alter ego, Makaveli**. Know whether or not Tupac **supported Dr. Dre's decision** not to testify in court on behalf of **Snoop Dogg** in his **murder trial**. Know whether or not Tupac took opportunities to **disrespect Biggie Smalls** in public, but Smalls **refused to respond in kind**. Know whether or not "Don Killuminati" took **more than six months to make**. Know whether or not "The Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory" **ever made it to platinum**. (p. 400-406)

3. Know whether or not "**White Man'z World**" addresses several political issues, such as **reparations, Black Nationalism, and class**. Know whether or not "**Hail Mary**" ever **quite caught on** in the hip hop community. Know whether or not, undoubtedly, Tupac's **street credibility** was **greatly enhanced** in the eyes of fellow West Coast thugs for the **barrage of comments** that he directed toward his **East Coast adversaries**. Know whether or not the **duress** Tupac was facing inside and outside of Death Row Records served as a **catalyst** for the thought-provoking **commentary** on "Don Killuminati." Know whether or not the **most popular** (and socially significant) song on "Don Killuminati" is "**Hail Mary**." Know whether or not the development of Shakur's alter ego, **Makaveli**, established the basis for theories that Tupac **faked his own death**. Know whether or not **rumors and conspiracy theories** have the ability to **alter our perceptions** of reality, thereby **becoming our reality**, ultimately becoming **the truths** by which we live. Know whether or not, beyond music, there is also a **Makaveli clothing line** and a **performing arts center** dedicated to keeping Tupac's legacy alive. Know whether or not the **rumors about Tupac still being alive** largely came to **an end** once his **murder was solved**. Know whether or not Tupac used the philosophy espoused in "**The Prince**" to **change the rap game** through "Don Killuminati." (p. 406-409)
4. Know whether or not, in songs such as "**Death Around the Corner**," Tupac's Outlaw persona faces **revenge and retaliation** against his enemies. Know whether or not, ultimately, the **goal** of an outlaw is just **survival at all costs**. Know whether or not an important tenet of the **Thug Life ideology** is the **unrelenting embrace of death**. Know whether or not Tupac's **preoccupation with death** was rooted in **nihilism**. Know whether or not, to be **thugged out**, or even to be in compliance with the notion of being a thug, was **quite popular** in hip hop culture. Know whether or not, when one takes into consideration the **sum of his existence**, Tupac Shakur emerges as hip hop's **greatest iconic symbol**. Know whether or not very few can **walk among thugs** yet be capable of building on the philosophy of **political thinkers**, and greater still, use these ideas to **change hip hop forever**. Know whether or not Tupac embraced **Thug Life**, though more **as a fad or phase**, rather than as an **ideology**. Know whether or not the notion of **contradiction**, or more specifically **double-consciousness**, is **reflected strongly** in Tupac's lyrics. Know whether or not, more often than not, Tupac wrote lyrics that were **mysogynistic and degrading** to black women. (p. 409-413)

Material from reading by Peterson

1. Know whether or not Biggie's mother was **much older** than his father. Know whether or not, when Biggie's mother was informed of his **truancy and blatant disrespect** of the educational process, she decided to let it go. Know whether or not, during Biggie's **teenage years**, Brooklyn was caught up in the **crack cocaine epidemic** that plagued much of urban America at that time. Know whether or not it was not until his **late teens** that "Biggie" earned his **nickname**. Know whether or not Biggie's mother, in coming to America, had a plan that **included Biggie's father**. Know whether or not Wallace's **first MC moniker** was "Biggie Smalls." Know whether or not Biggie attended the **same high school** as **Jay-Z and Busta Rhymes**. Know whether or not, while growing up, Biggie **avoided** the mainstream hip hop artists like **LL Cool J, Run-DMC, and Big Daddy Kane**. Know whether or not **Sean Combs** has stuck with the **same moniker** throughout his career. Know whether or not, as far back as the **Fat Boys**, oversized MCs have used their **weight as a gimmick** or for **artistic capital**. Know whether or not Biggie's affinity for **street life and hustling** derived from **economic lack** in his **own home**. Know whether or not the name "Biggie Smalls" comes from a film, "**Let's Do It Again**." Know whether or not **50 Grand** doubted that Biggie would make it **big in the rap game**. Know whether or not Wallace's **physical stature** and his sensible marriage to that stature with his **artistic designations** follow a powerful and entertaining legacy of **larger-than-life MCs** who made similar decisions. Know whether or not, essentially, Biggie lived a **double life** as a teenager. (p. 418-424)

2. Know whether or not "**One More Chance**" solidified B.I.G.'s appeal to his women listeners more than either of the **two previously released singles** from "Ready to Die." Know whether or not "Ready to Die" chronicles the **nihilistic inclinations** of a crook who is trapped at the **crossroads of lack and desire**. Know whether or not, to Biggie, death's call is comparable to the **alluring call of crack cocaine** for crackhead characters like **Pookie from "New Jack City."** Know whether or not, in "Everyday Struggles," Biggie's narrator exclaims that he **wants to live forever**. Know whether or not, while 1990s gangsta rap certainly **elevated the level of attention** to murder and gun violence in lyrics, **old-school hip hop** also had its **run-ins with death**. Know whether or not, for some artists, the lyrical theme of death serves as a way of **selling more records**. Know whether or not, in "Ready to Die," Biggie's narrator obviously exists in a world where **material wealth is ubiquitous**—hence his **undying desire**. Know whether or not, initially, the narrator in "Everyday Struggles" is **doing very well**. Know whether or not rappers who **capitalize** on real-life ghetto violence may find themselves, even as major-label recording artists, not that far removed from **the perils of street life**. Know whether or not, to say that rap lyrics **influence or cause violence** freely acknowledge the **statistics** that tell us that physical violence and murder occur at **alarming rates** in impoverished neighborhoods. Know whether or not critics of rap point out that a lot of the artists that **talk death and violence** really don't live the life they rap **about in their songs**. Know whether or not some have suggested that, in **surviving violence on the streets**, black criminals face limitations that **white criminals** like John Gotti do not. Know whether or not Biggie's father was **not in his life** too much beyond his **toddler years**. Know whether or not the **"golden age" of hip hop** was from about **1979 to 1987**. Know whether or not the singles from "Ready to Die" clearly exhibit Biggie's **most compelling hard-core narrative abilities**. (p. 424-430)

3. Know whether or not Biggie makes it clear that being **ready to die** for material things is, in many real-life cases, the equivalent of **already being dead**. Know whether or not, on the **"darker" tracks** of "Ready to Die," Biggie's preparedness for death is **glorified**, and made **sexy and appealing**. Know whether or not there were a **lot of women** in Biggie's short and extraordinary life. Know whether or not, according to **Coker**, Biggie's reaction to Tupac's death was **dismissive and contemptuous**. Know whether or not, after Tupac's death, Biggie despaired of ever being able to make the **haters love him**. Know whether or not, **after the party** following the Soul Train Awards, as Biggie and his entourage caravan exited the party, a car pulled alongside Biggie's rented Suburban and **seven forty-caliber nine-millimeter shots rang out**. Know whether or not, just before his death, Biggie commemorated a **newfound peace with God** by tattooing parts of Psalm 23 on his inside right forearm. Know whether or not Biggie was **married only once**. Know whether or not "Ready to Die" was one of Biggie's **least successful albums**. Know whether or not, among the powerful women who **mothered children for him**, **Lil' Kim** clearly had a **special space** in Biggie's heart. (p. 430-433)

4. Know whether or not, for **Biggie's funeral**, the fact that it was a **drive-by shooting** and that the shooting took place in Los Angeles, so far from home for his **homegrown Brooklyn audience**, enhanced the **tension in the atmosphere** even further. Know whether or not, in many ways, the posthumous album "Life After Death" picks up exactly where "Ready to Die" **left Biggie's growing audience**. Know whether or not "Life After Death" features **virtually ignores various subcommunities** within hip hop culture, in favor of a **general message**. Know whether or not Biggie's **second posthumous album, "Born Again,"** was released almost **three years after his murder**. Know whether or not "**Living in Pain**" stands out among hip hop culture's **posthumously produced materials**. Know whether or not the story and the controversy surrounding the unsolved murders of both Biggie and Tupac **no longer make headlines**. Know whether or not the **labyrinthine mess** surrounding **L.A.P.D.'s corruption** came to a head when the **Wallace estate's civil suit** was declared a **mistrial**. Know whether or not **Biggie's impact on youth** facing the same challenges he faced will **sustain itself** based on his short but incredible presence on the hip hop cultural landscape. Know whether or not as a **beloved son of Brooklyn**, Biggie was afforded a funeral procession through the **streets of his neighborhood**. Know whether or not "Kick in the Door" and "Ten Crack Commandments" are pure **DJ Premier-produced street bangers**. (p. 433-437)