

## KEEPING IT REAL: FACT AND FICTION IN GANGSTA RAP'S CRIMINAL PERSONAE

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*"My people had used music to soothe slavery's torment or to propitiate God, or to describe the sweetness of love and the distress of lovelessness, but I knew no race could sing and dance its way to freedom".*

- Maya Angelou, 1981

*"I do gangsta rap. They wanna blame the world problems on gangsta rap. It's gangsta rap's fault that people are poor, can't get enough to fuckin' eat or live their lives. They blame it all on us. I'm blaming them mothafuckas for gangsta rap. Because if they didn't create these kind of conditions, I wouldn't have shit to rap about, you know what I mean?"*

- Ice Cube, *Thank God (The Gangsta's Back)*

### Prologue

It is said that truth is stranger than fiction. Maybe that's why a good story can never be true. However, according to the Thomas theorem, if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that facts don't exist, but that we – like the acclaimed writer James Baldwin stated – “take our shape” by the ways we interpret the world (Baldwin, 1949, p. 583).

As Baldwin observed, it seems impossible for us humans to gain notice unless we are caught in some categorization that defines our identity. Yet it is precisely through our dependence on this “cage of reality” that we are “most endlessly betrayed” (ibid.), because an interpretation can never be true.

This story is about a people who escaped notice for centuries because of the way they were identified, and who at the same time constantly drew attention by the identities imposed on them. A people who in the past decades gave birth to a group whose semi-self-constructed criminal identity literally screamed to be heard, but whose very nature continually eludes everyone.

### Setting the stage

I was only 25, but in the view of the 15-year-old before me I must have been an adult; he eyed me with all the disdain a juvenile delinquent can muster. In my short career as a forensic psychologist I had already seen bad cases, but this baby took the cake. He didn't care about his sentence or his future, and he certainly didn't care about me. He explained that the choice for a criminal career added up to balancing the odds of getting caught versus the probability of getting paid, and the answer was easy. Then he fell silent and stared out the window. My mind went blank, and only the stupidest question remained: “Ok, so... do you have... hobbies?”

It almost jolted him out of his chair. “Yes”, he replied intently, “I like 2Pac”. Now, I had always been partial to disco, where everybody smiles. As far as I knew gangsta rappers, they looked angry, cursed, and wore as many fat golden chains as ugly tattoos.

And Tupac Shakur - that much I remembered - had just been shot in a drive-by. Took 4 bullets at the age of 25, just as young as me, and more than tenfold talented. Not the most appropriate role model for a kid about to go astray. So I asked him: “Why?”

The boy weighed his options. Should he reveal something personal, or preserve the mystery that would leave me guessing forever? As up to this day, I remain indebted to him for choosing the first. He leaned towards me, pointed his finger up to the sky, and solemnly swore: “Ma'am, he's telling the truth”.

Back home, I rushed to the record store. My choice surprised the lady behind the counter. “Are you sure you want to hear this?”, she asked, “It is kinda... loud”. “Hand me the headphone”, I demanded, “I've heard this guy is telling the truth”. She turned up the volume, *Troublesome '96* blasted my ears, tears welled up in my eyes, and a profound peace filled my heart, again leaving room for just one thought: “Yes”.

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<sup>1</sup> The Thomas theorem was formulated in 1928 by the American sociologist William Isaac Thomas.

## Genesis

In the beginning was the word.

Nobody knows where it actually started. But many have uttered an idea.

Some believed it was rooted in the Black oral tradition of tonal semantics<sup>2</sup>, narrativizing, signifying, and playing the dozens (Smitherman, 1997). The tradition originated from the Malian belief in *Nommo*, the heavenly power that represents right, reason, society, and order. *Nommo* consists of 24 forms of formal judgments that, so to speak, lay down the law (Douglas, 1967). At that time, the power of the word was exerted by the *griot*, the storyteller and cultural historian in traditional African society, who was given the verbal agility to “tell it like it is” (Dundes, 1973; Dance, 1978).

Others point to advent of the white man. He disrupted society, tore apart families, and stole their name, religion, and language for over more than 200 years, necessitating new ways to express pain with impunity. At the same time, he provided them with a new identity: “nigger”. *Nigger* belongs to the French *nègre* (‘black’), which from its earliest known literary reference of 1587 came to be directly associated with a man’s value as a labor commodity (Keil, 1966). *Nigger* also could mean “exceptionally hard work”, because nigger was seen as an index of productive labor that was somebody else’s property (Judy, 2004).

The 1865 ratification of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which prohibited slavery - unless as a punishment for crime - did not end this (DuVernay, 2016). The Civil War had left the South in tatters, while 4 million people that had hitherto formed an intricate part of its production system walked free. The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment loophole was immediately exploited by arresting African-Americans in mass for minor crimes, like loitering or vagrancy, to force them into rebuilding the economy for free (Alexander, 2010). Due to the race card, black people were given a new identity that made it easy to dispose of them in a non-racist way: they became “criminals” (Dargis, 2017; Levin, 2015).

Most people understand that being a “criminal” is not a desirable identity if you want to get ahead in an already unfair society. The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw its own civil war within the Black community, with on the one hand those who tried to escape misery by leading a virtuous middle-class life, and on the other hand those who simply weren’t that lucky or smart, and who disappeared from the world’s eye into the pitch hole of the ghetto, this time being left even by their “brothers” who “Uncle Tommed” their way into the white world. Both parties bitterly resented each other, as both felt their identities were real, not realizing either was based upon the external criterion set by the white man. He stayed out of the heat this next step in the emancipation process generated, until Malcolm X and Martin Luther King tried to incinerate the last refuge of so-called neutrality in what appeared to be only a domestic fight. But they got killed.

Then some just looked at the situation at hand. The Reaganomics of the ‘80’s had deprived most of the middle class of a job, leaving too many young men with too little to do. The CIA introduced crack cocaine to L.A. to secretly finance the revolution of the Contra’s against the Sandinist regime, and the West Coast ghetto’s proved an excellent market: police was nowhere to be found, the inhabitants were desperate, and if they killed each other, nobody cared (Levin, 2015). The switchover from revolvers to semiautomatics like uzi’s and AK-47’s, and the outsourcing of business to original gangsters like Crips and Bloods did the rest; Los Angeles County became a war zone (Bascuñan, 2007).

Everything came together at the wrong time.

Somebody had to speak up.

## Testify

In African-American speech, the term *rap* originally referred to romantic, sexualized interaction, undertaken by a man to win the favors of a woman. By the late ‘60’s, rap came to mean *any* kind of aggressive, highly fluent, powerful talk (Haugen, 2003). Rap music is not merely a black expressive cultural phenomenon. While being an art form, it accurately reports the nuances, pathology and resilience of the black ghetto, and employs African-American discursive practices to convey the Black struggle for survival (Dawsey, 1994). Rap songs stress the urge to testify to the living conditions of the people described in its lyrics, thus preserving a forceful historiography of the experiences of a social group that society at large for the most part neglected. As Chuck D. from the rap group Public Enemy once stated: “It is black folks’ CNN” (Chambers & Morgan, 1992).

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<sup>2</sup> In contrast to most Western music, traditional African drumming upon which rap is based does not have a key, the tonal center comprised of pitches a song comes back to. Instead, African drumming, as well as rap, centers mainly around games with rhythm, which is exactly what makes the genre a bore to some listeners. See: Levitin, D.J. (2007). *This Is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession*. Plume, New York.

Like a postmodern *griot*, a rapper is obligated to apply his lyrical and linguistic fluency to testify to the truth (Dundes, 1973). Rappers use their verbal wizardry to dispense social and cultural critique, and to retrieve historic black ideas, thereby permitting young Blacks to discern links between the past and their present circumstances and to use the past as a fertile source of social reflection, cultural creation, and political resistance to the “chain” that – despite abolition and affirmative action – “still remain” (Dyson, 2004). Through their bold and talented productions, rappers fulfill what Baldwin called “the artist’s duty to disturb the peace” (Baldwin, 1992). Since the American ghetto’s where rap has its roots are a hotbed of unrest, dispossession, and powerlessness, what is usually being disturbed by rap is the peace of middle-class White and Black America (Smitherman, 1997). For example, Naughty by Nature sings: “*They give a man a cell quick before they give a man work [...] Bars and cement instead of help for our people / Jails ain’ nothin’ but the slave-day sequel / Tryin’ to flee the trap of this nation / Seein’ penitentiary’s the plan to plant the new plantation*”. Its mission gives much of rap’s music a sharp moral edge.

It was Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five’s inimitable *The Message* from 1982, that first seized upon the social awareness of the general public this way. Sung in a slow chant seething with desperation and fury (Aletti, 1982), the tale about how a poisonous environment of drugs, filth, poverty, violence, and madness soon learns children’s originally innocent eyes “to sing a song of deep hate”, made it clear that in a secluded jungle like the ghetto - where “bum education and double-digit inflation” even take precedence over the loving eye of God - people live so “close to the edge” that they need to set all their wits to prevent from “going under”. *The Message* became a platinum-selling hit within a month of its release. But it didn’t change a thing. Maybe it had to be louder.

### **Screaming From the Desert**

Gangsta rap gathered force first on the West Coast by the end of the 1980’s, and is considered a product of the gang culture and street wars of South Central L.A., Compton, and Long Beach (Gemert, 2005). Its roots can be traced to early depictions of the hustler lifestyle and blaxploitation movies of the 1970’s like *Superfly*, which glorified blacks as criminals, pimps, pushers, prostitutes, and gangsters (Kubrin, 2005).

Whereas almost all rap music uses the inner-city environment to call the pitiful life of the ‘hood to attention, gangsta rap explicitly applauds the street warriors and gang rivalry that scourge inner-city ‘hood life, thus purportedly providing an insiders’ look into black urban street life via crime and violence (Kitwana, 1994; Keyes, 2002). Gangsta rappers deliberately use images of the selling and using of illegal drugs, firearms and their use on other people, various forms of crime, and what may be regarded as “promiscuous” sex (Haugen, 2003). Its criminal affiliation can also be seen in the names of crews like Compton’s Most Wanted and South Central Cartel, and brands of artist-owned record labels, like Suge Knight’s and Dr Dre’s *Death Row Records* (Forman, 2000).

In 1987 gangsta rap violently placed itself on society’s map with *6 ‘n The Morning* by Ice-T, a song that hailed everything *The Message* had so deeply lamented (Forman, 2000). *6 ‘n The Morning* tells the dead-end story about a life that has “no meaning and where money is king” of a “self-made monster of the city streets”, who starts his day by fleeing cops, then hangs around with his home boys, and after he has beaten down “some stupid bitch”, gets caught by the police to be sentenced to 7 years, only to resume his aggressive lifestyle as soon as he gets out. This character takes its devastating course so hastily that there is never “time to ask” why things happen the way they do, and even if a short-lived opportunity for reflection stops by, nobody bothers to inquire.

*6 ‘n The Morning* accurately describes the psychological implosion that takes place when external brutalization can no longer be endured. The song introduced a persona who perceives the world as a place that is devoid of existential contemplation to such an extent that the even the slightest impulse to moral appeal from the in- or outside seems utterly pointless. The only way the audience can identify with the main character, is to infer for itself that a life that is so empty and where bad things ‘just happen’ no matter what you do, self-evidently fuels behavior aimed solely at ‘filling’ it; in an environment where *nothing* really matters, momentary kicks like pointless violence, and hip tags like gold chains or a fly car, remain the only way by which identity – albeit briefly – can be affirmed.

It was, of course, an outrage.

## Holy Indignation

The fact that the moral vacuum laid down by *6 'n in the Mornin'* was enthusiastically seized upon by later gangsta rap artists to stuff it with even more pronounced antisocial motives, led mainstream media to condemn the genre as despicably violent, misogynistic, and unduly drug and gang oriented (Rule, 1994). Research has shown that compared to other genres, the videos of gangsta rap indeed contain twice the lyrical and visual violence (Tapper, Thorson, & Black, 1994). And its contents are shocking. No matter how smooth Snoop Dogg's flow in *Ain't No Fun* may be, a lyric like "I had respect for you / Until you opened up your gap" can hardly be regarded as well-disposed towards women, nor would any parent recommend his child to follow Tupac's swinging invitation "to live and die in L.A." where at least the "automatics ring free".

It shouldn't surprise that some white people saw the gangsta rapper as their centennial nightmare come true. The first album of N.W.A. (Niggers With Attitude), *Straight Outta Compton*, contained the immediately controversial *Fuck tha Police*, an enraged response to LAPD brutality against black suspects: "Without a gun and a badge / What do you got / A sucka in a uniform / Waitin' to get shot". The album was followed by a disapproving letter from the FBI, banishment of N.W.A. from several cities, and brief detainment of the group members in Detroit after chanting a few bars from the song on stage (McKinnon, 2006). A media freakout portrayed them as marauding sociopaths, but 3 years later *Fuck tha Police* could have been CNN's soundtrack for the channel's helicoptered coverage of the Rodney King riots.

N.W.A.'s wind, however, unsuspectingly got stolen by Ice-T and his band Body Count who - mere weeks before these events - released the ever so infamous song *Cop Killer*. Again, American mainstream was horrified: sixty members of Congress signed a letter to the record label, and about 1500 U.S. stores pulled the album from their shelves. Ice-T himself referred to it as a general protest record, sung in the first person as a character "who is fed up with police violence" (McKinnon, 2006), but the recorded version from 1992 mentions then-Los Angeles police chief Daryl Gates by name. Shortly after the release, a jury acquitted the officers who beat King, and riots broke out in South Central Los Angeles. History seemed to take a dangerous turn.

Of course, Ice-T and N.W.A. were not the first artists 'glorifying' a criminal life style. During the Great Depression, people celebrated Pretty Boy Floyd.<sup>3</sup> Nor were Ice-T and N.W.A. the first to coin a cop killer theme. Luther Campbell, former gang member and frontman of the rap group 2 Live Crew, whose lyrics on the album *As Nasty As They Wanna Be* were judged to be "obscene" by federal court in Florida in 1990, making it the first album in history to be deemed legally lewd, stated that the campaign against the record was "racist" because nobody tried to ban white groups who wrote and performed the same type of songs (Editorial, 1990).<sup>4</sup> Even Frank Sinatra once was denounced as a "prime instigator of juvenile delinquency", and later, it was Elvis, The Beatles, and Metallica. With metronomic regularity, American society has sounded the alarm over each new spin on popular music.

However, from its inception, gangsta rap was marketed as an authentically Black expression, and the extent to which it shapes white America's vision of the black experience is still at the core of many arguments for and against the violent lyrics (Katz, 1995). This would precisely be the reason why despite its political message and celebration of the Black oral tradition, gangsta rap's moral crusade against racist inequality has not met with universal acceptance from the Black public. In 1993, African-American minister Reverend Calvin Butts held a "rap in" in Harlem, New York, to which he had invited participants to bring offensive tapes and CDs to be run over with a steamroller. In 1994, C. Delores Tucker, head of the National Political Congress of Black Women, got the U.S. Congress to hold hearings against rap music (Smitherman, 1997). Some commentators (including the black movie director Spike Lee) have accused gangsta rap of being analogous to blackface performances in which artists - both black and white - were made up to look like African-Americans, and acted in a stereotypically uncultured manner for the entertainment of the audience. When you try to make an earnest buck, it doesn't help when a junk of thugs claim they are "tha real nigga" (Braxton, 1990; Holsey, 2013).

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Arthur "Pretty Boy" Floyd (1904-1934) was an American bank robber. His criminal exploits gained widespread press coverage in the 1930s. Floyd is a familiar figure in American popular culture, sometimes seen as notorious, but at other times viewed as a tragic figure and victim of the Great Depression. Pretty Boy Floyd features in the no. 1 best-selling rap hit of all time, *The Message* by Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five: "Now you're unemployed/All non-void/Walkin' around like you're Pretty Boy Floyd".

<sup>4</sup> In 1992, the United States Court of Appeals overturned the obscenity ruling on the grounds that the material the county alleged was profane had important roots in African-American vernacular, games, and literary traditions and therefore should be protected. Moreover, members of the second jury said they found the lyrics amusing and could hardly keep from laughing as the tape was played in court, which made it clear that "community standards" as to what might be considered "patently offensive" remained hard to pin down (Pareles, 1990).

## Keeping It Real

Gangsta rappers usually defend themselves by saying that they are simply describing the reality of inner-city life; they just “tell it like it is”, and if anybody should know what they’re talking about, it’s them (Haugen, 2003). The belief in the forming power that rightful words exert over society can be seen in the way rap musicians emphasize authenticity. Phrasing should not only follow the rules of rhyme, rhythm and pace; the words themselves need also be ‘true’. They should express a genuine and heartfelt meaning that enables acknowledgement from others sharing the same experience. In rap, this is called *keeping it real*.

A rapper proves his authenticity by convincing his audience he has phenomenal experience in what he is talking about (Haugen, 2003). Many gangsta MC’s have lived the grisly narratives described in their music. Ice-T aligned with the Crips during high school, sold cannabis and stole car stereos by the age of 17, and learned how to pimp while stationed at Hawaii (Marrow & Century, 2011). Snoop Dogg used to be a member of the Crips. Having served time seems to enhance the popularity of gangsta rappers. If it doesn’t do that, it certainly doesn’t hurt, as it gives “street cred” (Holsey, 2013). The demand for personal ‘realness’ in gangsta rap might explain why white performers like Eminem initially had a hard time gaining appreciation from the African-American oriented rap scene (Hess, 2005a; Hess, 2005b; Lee, 2008).

However, as is always the case when identity is at play, it’s not all rock solid reality what’s working here. Most authors concede that rap consists of a blend of truth and fiction (Smitherman, 1997). A gangsta’s legitimacy doesn’t always have to be *empirically* true, but it should at least appear *to be able* to be (Ochs & Capps, 1996). In 2014, drugdealer Ricky Ross – who was in the 1980’s almost personally responsible for flooding L.A. with crack cocaine - sued the highly successful rapper William Roberts II, who allegedly “stole his name” and in his video clips dressed up to the persona of a hustler (Levin, 2015). Ross lost and had to pay Roberts the \$ 10 million he initially sued him for. The judge stated that Roberts “made music out of fictional tales of dealing drugs and other exploits – some of which related to plaintiff [but] using the name and certain details of an infamous criminal’s life as basic elements, he created original artistic works” (Selby, 2014).

To embezzle the question about their true identity even further, whenever consequences of their more or less fictitious characters get too real, gangsta rappers have always immediately retracted into the safe house of being an artist. When accused of inspiring violence against the police through *Cop Killer*, Ice-T claimed: “I ain’t never killed no cop. If you believe that I’m a cop killer, you believe that David Bowie is an astronaut”. In the same vein, in a case involving 2 teens who plotted a sniper attack on a police van “because of a Tupac Shakur record that talks about killing the police”, resulting in the death of officer William Robertson, Shakur’s attorney stated that: “Tupac is an artist, and his work is social commentary” (Philips, 1994).

## Flippin’ the Script

Another problem in understanding gangsta rap lies in the means by which it conveys its message. Upholding its political stance, the genre undermines ‘correct’ English usage by celebrating culturally encoded phrases (Dyson, 2004). The language of rap is African-American, a product of free African slave labor, used to function both as a resistance language and a linguistic bond of cultural and racial solidarity for those born under the lash (Smitherman, 1997). By applying this “antilinguistic”, gangsta rappers sociolinguistically construct themselves as members of the dispossessed, phrasing their narratives in terms that require intimate knowledge of the vernacular, like “reading the wax” (e.g. “listening to a record”; Smitherman, 1997), or in the frequent use of multiple negation which according to the rules of European American English reflects poor grammatical skills (“Don’t nobody pay no attention to no nigger that ain’t crazy”). Thus, despite its extremely loud presence in every way, gangsta rap defies comprehension by many of those to whom the message is directed, or conveys the impression that gangsta rappers are uneducated and therefore have nothing intelligent to say. In that respect, it doesn’t help that another significant aspect of Black narrative is the use of *braggadocio*, by which the storyteller projects himself as a powerful, omnipotent, or supersexy hero. In this way, he personifies the self-empowerment dreams of his Black audience and symbolizes triumph and accomplishment. However, to the innocent listener and eye, this picture - especially when it is accompanied by the traditional Benz filled with busy *ho’s* - must seem downright ridiculous.

Another characteristic of gangsta rap’s language that is frequently misunderstood is the semantic inversion, or *flipping the script*, as best seen in the poignant use of the word “nigger”. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *nigga* (plural *niggaz*) as a southern pronunciation of *nigger*, whose variant forms are *niggah*, *nigguh*, and *niggur*. Because of the African-American postvocalic *-r* deletion rule (like in Snoop Dogg’s *Gin and Juice*: “I’m tied [tired] of muthafuckas disrespectin us”), “nigger” is spelled and pronounced differently: *nigga*, and for the plural, *niggaz*. With the emergence of gangstarap around the end of the 1980s, *nigga* took on a variety of positive

meanings. Your best friend or lover is your *nigga*. African-American applies semantic inversion to take *nigga* as an honorary nickname to encode a variety of meanings that are taken to be uniquely Black, without the traditional genetic/racial/bloodline association (Smitherman, 1997). The definitely white Eminem got a *shout out* from Snoop Dogg in 2017 for *The Storm*, his much celebrated freestyle *diss* of Donald Trump. “We always knew you were a real nigga”, proclaimed Dogg. Nonetheless, Black people do not always appreciate the creative use of this historically charged word. As the Black journalist Hilsey wrote in 2013: “It is hardly a term of endearment”. It seems that by its specific use of certain terms and tools, gangsta rap not only estranges itself from the mainstream it wishes to waken, but also from its own, making it a lonesome trade.

### Jam or Scam?

Gangsta rap exploded as one of the most powerful cultural phenomena of the post-civil rights era, and one of the best-selling at that (Neal, 2004). Crime pays, but rhyme does too, especially when combined. The controversy around *Cop Killer* brought grist to the mill of Ice-T, who eventually played a good cop for 16 years in the hit series *Law & Order*, which rendered him more riches than *Cop Killer* could ever have done. 50 Cent gained fame from his criminal past as well. Nowadays, he only wears a bullet-proof vest on stage to support the gangsta image that he knows will sell records. However, when he once wrote “God bless...” on the CD cover of a fan because he wanted to send out a positive message, the boy enraged and accused him of molesting his album.

Some people still want to see Sambo laugh. Or armed and dangerous. No matter what side of the flipcoin is chosen, neither will ever be the right one. Someone who is forced to live a derivative will never be able to solve the riddle to his true identity. This answer can only be provided by those who imposed it. People who are white today, are most likely the product of the history their ancestors chose. People who are black are probably the product of a history that their ancestors did not choose. Consequently, the question is not theirs to answer. As Baldwin stated: “The question society has to ask itself is why it was necessary to have a nigger in the first place. I am not a nigger, I am a man. But if you think I’m a nigger, it means you need it. And you’ve got to find out why” (Peck, 2016). Until today, the silence is deafening.

Still, fake identities have real consequences. And so there are many to lament. As recent biographical evidence amounts, some gangsta rappers do not turn out to be the cold-blooded criminals they initially pretended they were. Instead, their criminal imago seems to have been intentionally created by the record industry in order to make more 'do'. As a result, some gangsta rappers have been lured onto the criminal path or even got killed. The beautiful and talented Tupac Shakur, whose mother was a proud Panther, was never meant to die so young. He went to Art School to study acting and ballet. He didn’t even have a criminal record when he became famous. In *Unconditional Love* he sang: “My mission / Is to be more than a rap musician / The elevation of today’s generation / If I could only make ‘em fuckin’ listen”. Some say the industry enticed him to live on the wild side to sell records (White, 1997), and that fiction soon became truth: in 1993 he got into a gunfight with two off-duty, intoxicated police officers, in 1994 he was convicted for battery and possession of a loaded and concealed firearm, and in 1995 he was convicted of holding down a female fan while she was sodomized by his friends (Philips, 1994; McKinnon, 2006). In 1996, he was dead.

### Exit

I have been a forensic psychologist for almost 25 years now. Last month, I talked to a 19-year-old who allegedly battered his 16-year-old wife and their new-born son while being extremely drunk. It was not his first time. I thought the guy was nice. He was polite, put effort into making contact with me, and apparently enjoyed a lively conversation. But he refused to talk about himself. Maybe he was afraid to share too much information. After all, he was about to stand trial. He wasn’t very bright, either; that could also be a problem. But he did rap. I looked up his clip on YouTube. Shot in a coarse-grained black-and-white and dressed up like a real hustla in clothes and jewelry I knew he could never afford living on the dole, he sang about his father beating up his mother who was a heroin addict, his father molesting his younger sisters, and throwing his only son from the stairs, his own wish to take care of his baby in the right way, and his fear that he might not make it that far.

The video was shot in Oradour-sur-Glane, a French village besieged on June 10<sup>th</sup> 1944. First the nazi’s drove together all male inhabitants and gunned them down. Then they locked all the women and children in the church and blew it up. I asked the boy why he chose this place. “Because my life is a war”, he said, “and I feel lost”.

A knock on the door by the guard ended a chance for a true talk once again. When will time be really up?

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## Movies/documentaries

"13<sup>th</sup>" – American documentary about the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the United States Constitution by Ava DuVernay (2016).

*Freeway: Crack In the System* – American documentary about crack dealer Rick Ross by Marc Levin (2015).

*I Am Not Your Negro* – American documentary about writer James Baldwin by Raoul Peck (2016).

*Straight Outta Compton* – American movie about rap group N.W.A. by F. Gary Gray (2015).

*Superfly* – American movie about a drug dealer by Gordon Parks Jr. (1972)

## Songs/albums

*6 'n the Mornin'* – song by Ice-T from the album *Rhyme Pays*, Sire Records Company (1987).

*Ain't No Fun (If the Homies Can't Have None)* – song by Snoop Doggy Dog from the album *Doggystyle*, Death Row Records (1994).

*As Nasty As They Wanna Be* – album by 2 Live Crew, Luke Records, (1989).

*Chains Remain* – song by Naughty By Nature from the album *Poverty's Paradise*, Tommy Boy Records (1995).

*Cop Killer* – song by N.W.A. from the album *Body Count*, Sire/Warner Bros. (1992).

*Crooked Ass Nigga* – song by Tupac Shakur from the album *2PACALYPSE NOW*, Interscope Records (1991).

*Gin and Juice* - song by Snoop Doggy Dog from the album *Doggystyle*, Death Row Records (1994).

*I Shot the Sheriff* – song by Bob Marley & The Wailers from the album *Burnin'*, Harry J. Studios (1973).

*Murder Was The Case* – song by Snoop Doggy Dog from the album *Doggystyle*, Death Row Records (1994).

*Policeman* – song by Oscar Jenkins, Fred Cockerham and Tommy Jarrell from the album *Stay All Night... and Don't Go Home*, County Records (1973).

*Straight Outta Compton* – album by N.W.A., Ruthless Records (1988).

*The Message* – song by Grand Master Flash & The Furious Five from the album *The Message*, Sugar Hill Records (1982).

*To Live and Die in L.A.* – song by 2Pac from the album *The Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory*, Death Row Records (2006).

*Unconditional Love* – song by 2Pac from the album *Greatest Hits*, Amaru/Death Row/Interscope (1992).