

[December 19, 1993]

He should be someone that kids can look up to: a young man from a disadvantage background whom, through talent and hard work, became the fastest-rising star of his profession. Instead, 22 year-old Calvin Broadus entered a West Los Angeles courtroom on November 30<sup>th</sup> for preliminary hearings on murder charges stemming from an August 25<sup>th</sup> incident in which - while being driven in his Jeep - Calvin's bodyguard shot a suspected gang member whom, they claimed, had once assaulted Calvin. He turned himself in minutes after appearing on the MTV Music Video Awards on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, and - just as quickly - was out after posting a \$1 million bond.

This isn't the first time he has been in trouble. Shortly after graduating from high school, he was arrested for cocaine possession, shattering his father's dream of Calvin playing big-time college hoops. But fortune was smiling on the lad, for he soon caught the attention of Andre Young, co-founder of NWA (Niggaz With Attitude). Calvin took the name Snoop Dogg (childhood nickname "Snoopy "; "Dogg" from a cousin), performed the on the single "*Deep Cover*", Dre's first solo effort after leaving NWA, and wrote most of the lyrics and performed on Dre's multi-platinum smash "*The Chronic*". On November 23<sup>rd</sup>, Dre's label, Death Row Records (started last year for \$250,000, it has generated sales of over \$35 million) released Snoop's eagerly-anticipated "*Doggystyle*", which entered the Billboard charts at #1, something no other debut album has ever done.

But the stakes in this game are higher than how fast an album can go platinum. For rappers are not only fighting for the pocketbooks of music fans, but for their hearts and minds as well. Gangsta rap is the reflection of a culture based on an ultra-macho and self-destructive code of behavior based on an undeclared war against the Establishment, using the self-image of blacks as society's victims as its basis, doing nothing less than exploit the black-on-black violence which is the direct result of the makeshift values of a generation of unwanted and neglected children – an inconvenient truth black leaders and politically correct-obsessed whites refuse to acknowledge nor accept. "*Doggystyle*" reflects this:

See, it's the west coast thing where I'm from  
And if you want some, get some, bad enough, take some  
But watch the gun by my side  
Because it represents me and the mother-fuckin' east side

Dre's "*The Chronic*" takes that rage to a celebratory level:

Rat-a-tat and a tat like that  
Never hesitate to put a nigger on his back

He also proudly struts his misogyny like a twisted badge of honor -- a trademark of gangsta rap that few black women seem to find offensive:

If your bitches talk shit  
I have to put the smack down

No stranger to the police himself, Dre is currently serving three year's probation for, among other things (big shock!), assaulting a woman.

Meanwhile Tupac Shakur, another ultra-successful member of the Death Row family, has been preaching a kinder, gentler message:

I wonder why we take from our women?  
Why we rape our women?  
Do we hate our women?  
Time to heal our women

But with his arrests for sodomizing a young woman in New York, and shooting two off-duty cops in Atlanta, Tupac is clearly not the champion of young black men he wants you to believe he is.

Though rap has been around for years, the real buzz is gangsta rap has achieved the Holy Grail: it has "crossed-over". Not only have inner-city blacks made Snoop, Dre, and Tupac very rich, but non-blacks have contributed generously to Death Row's coffers, perhaps out of a misguided belief that rappers and gang-bangers are the only legitimate voices of the black experience.

Sadly, we don't hear of the real black experience, of the decent, hard-working people who provide for their children, give them love and security, impress upon them a value system to build their lives on, and help them resist the tremendous pressure against "selling out," knowing that the result will be a wasted life.

Urban parents must struggle not only to keep their children from the pull of the streets, but fight the fears and hatreds of their neighbors and the self-appointed community leaders who cynically retain power by playing the Race Card. Only after the politics of victimization is finally denounced - and its proponents discredited - will rappers and gang-bangers stop being idolized by urban youngsters. Then every child will be free at last to go as far as their dreams will take them.