



BEAUTIFUL STRUGGLE

Sentenced to 60 years in prison for his role in a Brink's truck heist,

Tupac's stepfather, *Mutulu Shakur*, explains the lineage of Thug Life.

INTERVIEW *Mark Lelinwalla*

Tupac Shakur had revolutionary politics in his blood. The son of two Black Panthers and the godson of the famed Elmer "Geronimo" Pratt, he was raised in an atmosphere heavy with militant activism. But no one was more influential in forming his worldview than his stepfather, Mutulu Shakur, a longtime member of the New Afrikan Independence Movement.

Born in Baltimore and raised in Jamaica, Queens, Mutulu started living with a newborn 'Pac and his mother, Afeni, in 1971. He fathered 'Pac's sister, Sekyiwa, in 1977 and lived with the family for 11 years. In 1981, he took part in an armed robbery of a Brink's truck that left two police officers and one guard dead, landing him on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted fugitive list. He was captured in 1986 and sentenced in 1988 to 60 years in prison; since then, his sentence has been reduced to 28 years.

Today, he awaits his 2016 release from the high-security Florence Federal Correctional Complex, in Florence, Colorado, from where he got on the phone with XXL to talk.

What are some of your memories of Tupac as a child?

As a child...as a *man-child*. Let me just say this: From the age of one to 11, I was responsible for Tupac's life. He was my child. He was the only child I had at the time that I could have around. Tupac grew up in the struggle for the Black Liberation movement. Tupac was of the struggle. He was of whatever struggle we were in, and if we were struggling for a fight against drugs and against methadone, or if we were fighting for political prisoners and prisoners of war, the Black Liberation Army, freedom fighting, Black Panthers—Tupac was a part of that. If we were fighting for better housing or the liberation of South Africa, Tupac was a part of that. He gave a cause for me. I had a child that I can push into him what I believed would be the right way for him to be a man and how to maintain himself, his dignity and his people's dignity, and have respect for his community.

Me and Tupac hung out all the time. People would say, "Why don't you take that kid home? Put him to sleep!" He would be like, "Nah, I want to hang with 'Tulu. I want to be with you, 'Tulu." He'd just fall asleep in the meetings and all-night sessions. He was born into it. He loved it.

As he grew older, he came to represent his own movement, Thug Life.

Right.

Do you feel that, in choosing Thug Life, he set aside some of the



strong political ideals you instilled in him?

He didn't leave his ideals behind—he evolved. Tupac talked about Thug Life because he had been through the Panther life, he had been through the revolutionary life. He had been through life of resistance and rebellion against the system that he had felt and had seen had murdered his family, destroyed his uncles and aunt, who had taken his community. I was on the Ten Most Wanted list. So he wanted to rebel, and he

wanted to put that rebellion into some kind of content. So, yes, he came up to the term *Thug Life*. He supported all of the OGs of the drug game... They were the ones we sat down to help formulate the Thug code. Then the Supreme Team got involved, and the brothers up in Harlem—Black Jack and all of them people were all involved initially, before they went crazy—to help formulate the code of the Thug Life. So he didn't just get it out the sky.

Did Tupac come to visit you in jail?

He came into Lompoc [Federal Correctional Institution, in Southern California] to help me deal with a truce between the Bloods and the Crips. He came to perform in there. Everybody who has ever been in the penitentiary and ever had a commitment to their children knows that you have to have direct responsibility and communication with them. I wasn't isolated from the world. When you hear his music, when he talks about the White man's world, he talks about "ride for Mutulu like I ride for Geronimo." We're involved in the struggle. He's a Shakur. ♠