**Machiavelli vs. Makaveli**

September 27, 2009 by [ssmory](http://polsci101.wordpress.com/author/ssmory/" \o "Posts by ssmory)

We have learned the ways of Machiavelli in our beloved Political Science 101 lectures and readings but I am wondering, how many people know the ways of “Makaveli?”

Makaveli is the alias used by the late American rapper, Tupac Shakur, used on his last studio-recorded album The Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory. The album was released in November 1996, two months after Tupac was shot and killed but is not considered a posthumous album because it was completed when he was still alive. The main question I want to raise is this: **why would Tupac choose the alias of Makaveli? What parallels are there between him and Machiavelli?**

Tupac read much of Machiavelli’s books when he was imprisoned for 11 months in 1995. When he made his last album he consciously changed his alias. In fact, the name “Tupac Shakur” is not even on the album cover, only “Makaveli” is. He obviously saw some connections between himself as an artist and Machiavelli’s philosophies.

The first parallel that can be drawn is the mystery behind the aim of their works. Machiavelli’s The Prince can be distinctly interpreted in two different ways based on what class you are looking from. It could be seen as a cry for a job from the nobility or an unveiling of the nature of politics. To the nobility itself, they were able to take it as sound advice and it helped save Machiavelli from his imprisonment. On the other hand, it exposed what people need from governing bodies and shows them what is wrong with theirs.

In Tupac’s work, many things are seen two-faced as well. His songs could be interpreted in different ways based again on your class. It could be seen as a something for the ghetto class to relate to or something to expose the harshness of ghetto culture to higher classes. Both Tupac’s music and The Prince seem to accomplish both interpretations through one art form.

Another large parallel is their views on strategizing concerns. Machiavelli stated that, “people should either be caressed or crushed.” [1] Machiavelli used this phrase in the sense that rulers either needed to be great allies to other countries or to make mortal enemies of them. This requires much strategy as to knowing which states are most important and powerful to turn friend or foe. Tupac was a big believer in this too. He “caressed” his fellow gangsters through the political concept of Thug Life, which essentially was supposed to expose ghetto life to the portion of America that can fix it. Tupac drew parallels between the Thug Life movement’s exposing of ghetto life to when images of the Vietnam War were first shown on TV. [2] The images he created were supposed to inspire action and change to improve the quality of ghetto life just as the images of Vietnam helped put an end to the war. This concept embraced those who were living this lifestyle and somewhat inadvertently alienated upper and middle class people. It was seen as glorifying violent culture and anger towards authorities. Tupac created these polar opposites Machiavelli talked about with the strong masses of the ghettos across America behind him, with a few crooked cops alienated against him.

Machiavelli says in The Prince, “So we may conclude that good advice, no matter who it comes from, really comes from the ruler’s own good judgment, and that the ruler’s good judgment never comes from good advice.” [3] Tupac seemed to be a big believer in this theory throughout his career. People constantly told him he was too violent, tried to spoil him with living the rich life of a rap star and forgetting about the movement he was fighting for, and tried to change his music in both style and topic. Throughout all that, he knew to stay true to whom he was and where he was from regardless of what others tried advise him of.

The last main concept of Machiavelli’s I will delve into is that of the theory, “it is much safer to be feared than loved.” [4] It is hard to say whether or not Tupac followed this theory. He certainly was feared by many people but also loved equally if not more than he was feared. It is clear through his music he did not feel safety but it is also clear he didn’t care. He was shot five times in 1994 but was not killed. This shooting combined with a prison sentence made sure that Tupac knew he was far from safe. However, when he got out of jail, he recommitted to music and started recording more than ever. [2] He did not change the style and emotion in his music from before, showing that regardless of how much danger he was in, he was going to do what he was going to do. He was feared, loved, and by some, hated. According to Machiavelli, this hatred created by his alienation of the upper classes would be his downfall, as Machiavelli believed a ruler should, “avoid those things that will make him a subject of hatred or contempt.” [5]

Tupac used the alias Makaveli and clearly has many parallels to the theories of Machiavelli in The Prince in his attitude, political actions, words, interpretations, and most importantly, music.

[1] Wootten, David. “Modern Political Thought.” Machiavelli, Niccolo. “The Prince.” Chapter 3. Page 11.  
[2] Tupac Resurrection. Lauren Lazin. Tupac Shakur. Documentary.  
[3] Wootten, David. “Modern Political Thought.” Machiavelli, Niccolo. “The Prince.” Chapter 23. Page 48.  
[4] Wootten, David. “Modern Political Thought.” Machiavelli, Niccolo. “The Prince.” Chapter 17. Page 35.  
[5] Wootten, David. “Modern Political Thought.” Machiavelli, Niccolo. “The Prince.” Chapter 19. Page 38.  
Most of the facts about Tupac were taken from previous cited Tupac Resurrection and my general knowledge of his music catalog.  
<http://polsci101.wordpress.com/2009/09/27/makavel/>

**Theory Portfolio Assignment**

In this unit we will be studying the theories of Machiavelli and many others continuing our study of the development of Western political thought- this unit specifically focuses on absolutism, the enlightenment, and the development of democracy. For each different theorist/idea/concept we cover this unit, you will have the assignment to find a contemporary parallel. This contemporary parallel should be a modern representation or use of the idea/concept/theory, whether it is a news article, video footage of actions or speeches by current world leaders, something you see going on in local politics, or even something like this article about Tupac.

To complete the assignment, you will need to turn in a portfolio at the end of the unit that demonstrates your understanding of the theories/concepts we cover along with their contemporary parallels and your explanation of how that modern article or other media show this concept’s presence in our world today. This portfolio will be part of your final assessment for the unit, along with a more formal test. This is meant to be a more creative assessment, so have fun with it but also make sure you clearly demonstrate understanding of the theories/concepts. I will show you an example and give you a rubric for the portfolio later on in the week detailing each theory/concept to be included along with expectations.