

# The FBI-CIA War on Tupac and Socially Conscious Artists

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Lamont Lilly

[Brain Food](#)

A lot of people in the United States have never heard of the counter intelligence program. They've never heard of the CIA's Operation Chaos.



Tupac Shakur: he lived life defiantly and boldly, but set off too many lethal wires.

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[John Potash](#) is the author of *The FBI War on Tupac Shakur and Black Leaders*. Published in 2007, it is just now beginning to circulate among a new generation of Black millennial artists and activists. Based on 12 years of intense research, it includes over 1,000 endnotes, an assortment of FBI documents and over 100 interviews. Potash's most recent book *Drugs As Weapons Against Us* was published earlier this year in May 2015. This interview was conducted by telephone and transcribed verbatim.[/su\_panel]

**[Lamont Lilly]: John, thanks for sitting down to talk with me. When Tupac Shakur was shot and killed in 1996 I was a**

**sophomore in high school who knew the rapper, but not the man. What inspired you to write about Tupac. You explore his life with such depth?**

[John Potash]: I was introduced to Hip Hop as a senior in high school. It was around 1982/83 when a friend I wrestled with turned me on to Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five. A few years later I got into [Public Enemy](#) and A Tribe Called Quest. I was interested in a lot of different kinds of music, but when I got into political rap, I was paying more attention. It was right after college and I was working as a drug counselor. I was counseling someone who said that their father was a Black Panther killed by the police.

As I started to research the Black Panther Party I came across an article in [1994 in the Washington Post](#) about Tupac Shakur being shot in the Quad Recording Studios. The reporter of the article stated that in another strange twist, the same police officer that showed up at the sexual assault scene a year earlier was the first one to arrive at the scene of the Quad Recording shooting near Time Square.

So, I researched more of what happened at the Quad Recording Studio and contacted Tupac's trial lawyer who was representing him in the sexual assault case, which was happening at this same time. I asked him do you think the FBI is targeting Tupac like they targeted his parents with the [Counter Intelligence Program](#) . Michael Warren who was his lawyer at the time, said yes, and no one is writing about it.

I wrote a piece on what I had found and solicited several left wing magazines, but no national magazine would publish it. However, a small local press did. I was published in leftist media on other topics, but they kept rejecting the Tupac Shakur article and the fact of a new Counter Intelligence Program working against him. But in 1998, [Covert Action Quarterly](#) (which was started by CIA whistleblower, Philip Agee accepted the article. I had about 50 endnotes for the

article which included my sources.

After that, some people who were close to Tupac opened up to me in a big way. They said you have to turn this into a book. From 1998 to 2007, I worked hard outside my regular job to complete the research. That's how The FBI War on Tupac Shakur and Black Leaders came together.

**[LL]: In your book you highlight the family legacy of the Shakurs and their long-time work within the Black Liberation Movement, dating back to [Marcus Garvey](#) and the UNIA. You clearly illustrate how Tupac was a direct descendant of the Black Panther Party and Malcolm X. In bringing this together, how did you connect with Pam Africa, Kathleen Cleaver and Mutulu Shakur, people whose contributions were obviously instrumental?**

[JP]: I think the key is that these individuals are often shut out of mainstream media. I don't know why more independent and left wing journalists did not try to cover this issue better. But I also don't know why all the left wing national magazines, which are all owned by whites, couldn't see through the propaganda on Tupac. However, Covert Action Quarterly was so respected. When I first met [Kathleen Cleaver](#) at the Black Panther Film Festival, she gave a hug and said that she had read my article on Tupac. She mentioned Afeni Shakur, Tupac's mother. Kathleen was explaining to me how this repression at the hands of COINTELPRO was intergenerational.

Pam Africa read the article because the cover of that particular issue was of Mumia Abu-Jamal, who was also himself a target of the counter intelligence program. Once [Pam Africa](#) saw my article on Tupac, she asked how she could help me get the article out more. Pam told the editor of Covert Action Quarterly how important she thought the article was. Pam and Kathleen were a big help.



Once I met them, the information opened up. They provided additional interviews and more people who could speak on different aspects of how the counter intelligence program against Tupac and his family related to Mumia. Kathleen even shared what happened to her and husband, Eldridge Cleaver (who was also a member of the Black Panther Party).

In regards to [Mutulu Shakur](#), he believed in the theory of my article, but Mutulu was shut off from the media. They put him in the most maximum security prison in the country. The only way that he could get his ideas out was through his website. That first article connected me to all of these individuals. Shortly after, journalist, Connie Bruck did a very good article on Tupac for the [New Yorker](#).

In the article, she discussed the strange circumstances surrounding Tupac's death. She interviewed Tupac's attorney, Michael Warren for several hours, yet none of his content made the article. Connie's editors at the New Yorker had cut every mention of Michael Warren. They cut everything he said. That's what we're dealing with, an incredible censorship over mainstream media. A lot of left wing writers and activists have been shut out.

**[LL]: Speaking of censorship, your book really illustrates the wide grasp that Time Warner has over the Hip Hop industry. I was completely unaware that they had censored so much of Tupac's material, excluding full songs from albums, and chopping lyrics. Has anyone recovered this material in its original form?**

[JP]: I don't know. I couldn't tell you. You'd have to talk with his mother, Afeni Shakur on that. Afeni tried to get all of his songs from Death Row, but Death Row apparently, at one point only gave her half the songs Tupac had produced. He was so prolific – amazing at how many songs he produced by the age of 25. Afeni did get a few hundred songs from Death Row, but from what I read there were still more songs Death Row was keeping from her. So, I don't know whether that was material that had been cut out or not. I don't know, sorry to say.

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**"That is the amazing power of mainstream media censorship. It just goes to show you how far their tentacles reach. What happens is that even among left wing media, foundations are often supplying them grants to causes they're sympathetic to. When independent of left wing media sources get grants from these foundations, which they need to stay alive, it becomes very difficult because those grants come with censorship..."**

**[LL]: You cover at great length, the details of Hip Hop's "East Coast vs. West Coast" feud. I remember as a Hip Hop kid in the mid 90's, that feud was huge. As youth, we were led to believe that we had to choose between New York or Cali – Biggie or Tupac. How was this divide manufactured from the perspective of U.S. intelligence, particularly in connection to the "East Coast vs. West Coast" Black Panther beef just one generation prior? It's so clear that the two generations are**

**connected, both targeted by state surveillance, political repression and media censorship.**

[JP]: There's a book called *The Media Monopoly* by Ben Bagdikian. In it, Ben shows how literally 95% of mainstream media has increasingly been controlled by a smaller and smaller amount of companies. And he kept revising that book, so it went from about 24 companies down to a dozen, and finally down to about [6 companies](#) controlling a vast majority of our information, and the information that we can find.

In the book, *Manufacturing Consent* by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, they outline how the Pentagon owns and publishes well over 1,300 magazines, and we don't know what those magazines are. It's all classified. We can guess that most of them are the magazines in your typical Barnes & Nobles. The Pentagon is by far the biggest magazine publisher in the world.

**[LL]: The Pentagon? Really?**

[JP]: Yes, the Pentagon. And this comes from military journals, as Chomsky and Herman both cite. Military journals admitted this. In the 1970's, Carl Bernstein covered the senate church committee hearings on COINTELPRO and U.S. intelligence. Bernstein wrote an article about one of those hearings that covered the media in particular. At that time the CIA director admitted that well over 400 members of the media were living dual lives and were actually working for the CIA. Bernstein named who some of these people were, which included the heads of virtually all of the mainstream media organizations – the head of Time Incorporated, the head of ABC, the head of NBC and CBS, etc. These people were working for the CIA living dual lives.

Time Warner in particular, had a vice president named Charles Douglas Jackson who went back and forth being CIA architect and head of psychological warfare under different presidents to being VP of Time Incorporated. There are documents and

evidence showing that [C.D. Jackson](#) was running psychological warfare operations through his media assets like Time Magazine, Life Magazine, and all the other magazines that Time Incorporated owns. That's how they do it, by controlling so much of the media and our sources of information. They manufacture these fake articles, and censor others, to control how we think about things.

[Operation Chaos](#), which worked with the FBI's counterintelligence program to target the Black Panthers and other left wing activists, is one example. We only found out about these programs because some [activists broke-in to an FBI office](#) in 1971 and confiscated these documents, and tried to get the word out as much as possible. Otherwise, we wouldn't even know what they were doing to us.

Unfortunately, even with finding out about these documents, they still control mainstream media. The word is still getting out. A lot of people in the United States have never heard of the counter intelligence program. They've never heard of the CIA's Operation Chaos. These are the things I'm trying to uncover and inform people about.

With the Black Panthers, they tried to create divisions and manufacture murderous rivalries – for example, between [Huey P. Newton and Eldridge Cleaver](#). They sent fake letters back and forth between the two of them. [Stokely Carmichael](#), who was at one time head of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, was also an honorary Black Panther until the FBI began sending fake letters back and forth between Stokely and Huey Newton.

This was done to split them up and create divisions. Undercover agents would infiltrate the Black Panthers and feed false information and fake letters. I argue that in some cases, agents killed and murdered comrades and associates, to make it look like a real war. In reality, it was a “manufactured” war! And there's more tactics they used.

In my next book, *Drugs As Weapons Against Us* I show how they used drugs to undermine Huey P. Newton's competence by getting him caught up in cocaine to hurt his functioning. I show how these tactics that were used against the Black Panthers were also evident against [Tupac and Biggie Smalls](#), and other rappers.

In prison, Tupac was getting these anonymous letters saying it was Biggie and Puffie (Sean Combs) who set up his shooting at Quad Studios in New York. Prison guards and inmates were telling him the same thing, total strangers. Tupac didn't know what to believe. He didn't really know what was going on at the time.

The reason U.S. intelligence was doing this was because Tupac Shakur was already a national Black leader. He was head of the [New African Panthers](#) at the age of 17 and 18 years old. That group was active in 8 cities nationwide. They were replicating what the Black Panther Party for Self Defense was doing. His mother, Afeni Shakur was a Harlem Panther leader.

**[LL]: All of this history about Tupac the revolutionary – his ties to the Black Liberation Movement. Why do so many of us not know about this side of Tupac? Assata Shakur, Geronimo Pratt, [Chokwe Lumumba](#), Huey P. Newton – Tupac was around all of them. He was learning from real-life field generals. These people are grassroots legends!!**

[JP]: That is the amazing power of mainstream media censorship. It just goes to show you how far their tentacles reach. What happens is that even among left wing media, foundations are often supplying them grants to causes they're sympathetic to. When independent of left wing media sources get grants from these foundations, which they need to stay alive, it becomes very difficult because those grants come with censorship. And this censorship is spread all over.

In regards to Tupac's activism, the New Afrikan Panthers were

the young adult organization within the New Afrikan People's Organization – youth from the ages of 13 to 28, which was close to the age of the Black Panthers when they first started. Mumia Abu-Jamal was about 14/15 years old when he joined the Black Panthers in Philadelphia.

**[LL]: That is correct, Bobby Hutton, Fred Hampton, all teenagers.**

[JP]: Yeah, that's right. So when Tupac at the age of 18 became national chairman, they were watching him very closely. As soon as he got a solo record deal with 2Pacalypse Now, within several days of his first video "[Trapped](#)," which was an MTV worldwide video release, the Oakland Police allegedly stopped him for jaywalking. Yet, they proceeded to choke him unconscious and bang his head against the curb. He was targeted immediately.

Another thing that Tupac was doing as an activist was appealing to the gangs to politicize <http://hiphopdx.com/news/id.29135/title.tupac-says-quad-shooting-sexual-assault-case-were-all-connected-in-previously-unheard-phone-call> them. This was a part of the plan to get the Bloods and Crips to call a peace truce between each other and become leftist activists. And it was working!

It was happening all across California, first in Los Angeles right after the riots that protested the beating of Rodney King, and the cops being acquitted. The peace truces began to spread, not only among the Bloods and Crips, but across the country, to the point where the Latin Kings stopped selling drugs and turned onto left wing activism. The Young Lords, the Latino version of the Black Panthers, helped that to happen.

Tupac was actually a very serious activist <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/the-death-of-the-code-of-thug-life/article4228053/>; people just didn't realize it. He was somewhat hiding it because he didn't want U.S.

intelligence to know about it. Nonetheless, that's why he was being targeted, and censored.

**[LL]: That's the same thing Fred Hampton was doing in Chicago, bringing groups together, bringing the gangs together with the community activists, politicizing this marginalized demographic, raising consciousness among the oppressed.**

[JP]: And that's why they were targeted. That's much more important than what I can even say right now. I get into the importance of that in my next book, but the fact that Tupac could do that – the fact that Fred Hampton <http://www.frso.org/about/statements/2008/fredhampton.htm> could do that, even people like Lumumba Shakur, was seen as dangerous to U.S. intelligence. People like Bunchy Carter and John Huggins, the Los Angeles Black Panther leaders who were some of the first to be murdered <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/21382-1969-the-year-the-black-panther-party-was-to-be-annihilated>, were particularly dangerous not only to U.S. intelligence but to the oligarchy as well, to those who control this country.

**[LL]: During slavery, it was common practice for slave masters to outlaw any use or presence of African drums on the plantation. They were very aware of the drum's power, mystique and many uses. In hindsight, they were afraid of Black music's ability to empower and mobilize people. This is the same reason artists like [Nina Simone](#), Jimi Hendrick, Bob Marley and Sam Cooke have always been closely monitored, even targeted. This is public information now, supported by official documents. So, why is nothing being done about this?**

[JP]: The oligarchy has too much power. I didn't know about the outlawing of drums on plantations, but that makes sense. It's all in line with what is going on today. U.S. intelligence, the ruling elite and the CIA have always wanted to control our hearts and minds. Much of this mentality and these practices come from the Nazis who "specialized" in

controlling hearts and minds. It's not always about controlling people physically. It's also about controlling people mentally, so that they control themselves.

The key is that the biggest opponent to the CIA's ability to control people's minds is the presence of politically and [socially conscious](#) musicians. These types of artists can get to people's hearts with their music, and get to people's minds with their lyrics. These types of artists can affect people's opinions and stimulate ideas. It comes from the passion within their music. Musicians are some of the biggest threats to the CIA. Leftist musicians are in opposition to the oligarchy and their entire apparatus, the CIA, the FBI, U.S. intelligence, all of them.

This is something we have to look at more closely. We don't have control over the music industry, so we have to keep these artists alive. In my next book, I'll be talking about a few white musicians as well like [John Lennon](#) and Kurt Cobain.

**[LL]: Exactly! That's right!**

[JP]: Exactly, because they had the same political passions as Tupac, and Jimi Hendrix did, too. During the last year or two of his life, [Jimi Hendrix](#) became very political. He was deeply disturbed about Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968, which eventually led him to dedicate his last album to the Black Panther Party.

Jimi Hendrix was talking about the Black Panthers in live interviews. He would say things like "Hey, if you want to oppose these warmongers, you got to get your Black Panthers together to help with this." Jimi was getting very political. He had even asked Bob Dylan to join a political organization that he wanted to start for peace. Jimi Hendrix was getting very active the last year of his life, before they killed him. Corporate media doesn't share these things with the public, which is why not much is being done to stop it.

[LL]: Speaking of controlling minds, from 1987 to 1993/94 was a period now known as Hip Hop's "Golden Age." It was a time when artists like Public Enemy, Queen Latifah, A Tribe Called Quest, KRS-One, Brand Nubian and the early Tupac were raising a lot of consciousness, particularly among Black youth. In a matter of a few brief years, however, we somehow went from "Fight the Power" to "Fuck Bitches, Get Money." The 5 elements of Hip Hop were abandoned for the "Bling Era." Are you saying that this shift was manufactured as well?

[JP]: I believe it was. I think it's pretty clear. In the very beginning nobody would sign Tupac to a solo deal except Interscope Records, and the only reason Interscope signed him was because they were an up-start label at that time. Ted Field, co-founder of Interscope was an outcast among the major labels. After he signed Tupac, it only took one year and one record (2Pacalypse Now, Tupac's most political album) before Time Warner came in and bought up a controlling interest of something like 52% or 53%.

This is when Time Warner came in and proceeded with the censorship, their industry control and their reworking of people's albums. They also bought up at least a half dozen of other Rap labels. A number of the major conglomerates also bought up labels, virtually all of the Rap labels. They also bought out the white Rock labels.

Interestingly, Quincy Jones founded Vibe Magazine in 1993, but Time Warner had a controlling interest in that, too. At the same time, corporate sponsors were controlling the content of The Source and other magazines. Corporations were [reshaping](#) how and what we thought about Hip Hop, and actively began promoting the Rappers that weren't political. As soon as they saw how big Hip Hop was becoming, they bought out as much as they possibly could, and started controlling who could make it in the Rap Industry and who could not.

This really began happening right before Tupac's second album,

“Strictly 4 My Niggaz” which was supposed to come out in 1992, but they delayed it for a year until 1993. They didn’t want it to come out until after the 1992 presidential elections because Tupac was speaking out against George Bush on that album. This is the seriousness of what we’re talking about here, the power of artistry.

**[LL]: In chapter 39, you discuss the mysterious death of Reggae legend, Bob Marley. Bob officially died from “malignant melanoma” (a brain tumor), which derived from a very rare and dangerous type of cancer first found in the big toe of his right foot. In connection with Bob’s death, you interviewed filmmaker and former Black Panther, [Lee Lew-Lee](#) . Can you briefly describe the circumstances surrounding Bob’s death?**

[JP]: The [CIA’s MK Ultra Program](#) was a huge program investigating all different kinds of drugs that were to be used as weapons against both foreign and domestic opposition, particularly leftist opposition. Part of their program was to figure out what substances could be the quickest and most effective at causing cancer. These substances were intended to get into the body of people they wanted to assassinate.

Bob Marley had already survived [one attempt on his life](#) in 1976. He was certainly their opposition, not only due to his music, but he was also close friends with the socialist Prime Minister of Jamaica, Michael Manley. The CIA supported Manley’s opponent, Edward Seaga.

Because Marley was so influential throughout Jamaica, much less the entire the world, they knew he could easily tip the election for Manley. First, they tried with bullets. Hired gunmen associated with the opposition party, [who were paid by the CIA](#), fired tons of bullets at Bob Marley’s house.

They hit Bob. They hit his wife, Rita Marley. They hit his manager, Don Taylor. So, Prime Minister Manley invited Marley to his secure compound manned with armed guards in order to

protect him. However, they let in the film crew who was filming Marley's upcoming concert and documentary. What they didn't realize was that the then director of the CIA, William Colby, had his son ([Carl Colby](#)) to infiltrate the film crew. During a filming session they gave Bob Marley a gift, a pair of shoes.

They knew it was customary for a Rasta to try on a gift as soon as you get it. Bob Marley tried those shoes on immediately. As soon as he tried them on, he felt a stab in his toe. He took his foot out and it was a small metal object. No one thought anything of it at the time.

It wasn't until a few months later that he was playing soccer and crushed his toe. Doctors revealed that his toe was full of cancer. About a year later, the cancer had spread throughout his whole body, and eventually killed him in 1981. Sam Cooke, Jimi, Tupac, Bob...these aren't just coincidences.

**[LL]: I've come across several books in my lifetime that have really pushed me to think more critically. I have to say this particular book has definitely been one of them. It was almost like learning about Tupac and the Hip Hop industry all over again. Have other young people asked about this book? There's a [new wave of consciousness](#), and Black millennial activists are leading it. This kind of reading is the perfect eye-opener.**

[JP]: Well, the feedback has been mostly positive. Most people have at least been open to the ideas I've laid out here, except mainstream media. They just generally won't touch it. Radio sources are a bit more receptive; not much, but enough to get it out. I've done several radio programs in Los Angeles and New York...and Chicago and Philadelphia. But these sources aren't really "mainstream." They're [alternative sources](#) with mass followings, like Pacifica Radio, which is a left wing network.

In regards to young people, I have had the privilege of appearing at Morgan State University in Baltimore, and several other historically Black colleges. There has been some acceptance of my work, but even those spaces have still been difficult. People are worried about keeping their jobs and their positions.

For example, Bowie State University brought me in to speak through an association with a professor there. However, when one of his colleagues tried to support my work too, and expressed interest in being a PR representative for my book, he ended up getting accosted by the police at a protest and fired from his job. We would send packages back and forth through the mail, and our packages would already be opened upon receiving them. Campus police said he brutalized them. This was nothing but censorship, against a Black professor.

Unfortunately, Black radical thought is not always welcomed, even in the spaces one would think that it should be. Oddly, I heard that someone in Durham, North Carolina mentioned my book in a newspaper editorial, but I haven't seen it.

**[LL]: Lol...unfortunately, it wasn't me, but I'm not surprised to hear that. There's a heavy Hip Hop influence here throughout the Raleigh/Durham area. There's also a rich legacy here of Black resistance, Black culture and Black art. A few months I ran into your book at an Anarchist book fair in Chapel Hill. Young artists and activists are finding it for the first time, almost 10 years later. Thank you so much John for getting this out. And thank you for sitting down with me.**

[JP]: Thank you, Lamont. It's good to know the book is still moving around. I'm really glad Sister Pam Africa was able to connect us. She's so amazing; Pam wrote the foreword. Great interview, thanks for talking with me. Let's stay in touch. ■

NC-based activist, Lamont Lilly is a contributing editor with the Triangle Free Press and organizer with Workers World

Party. He has recently served as field staff in Baltimore, Ferguson, [Oakland](#), [Boston](#) and Philadelphia. In February 2015, he traveled to both [Syria](#) and Lebanon with Ramsey Clark and Cynthia McKinney. Follow him on Twitter [@LamontLilly](#).

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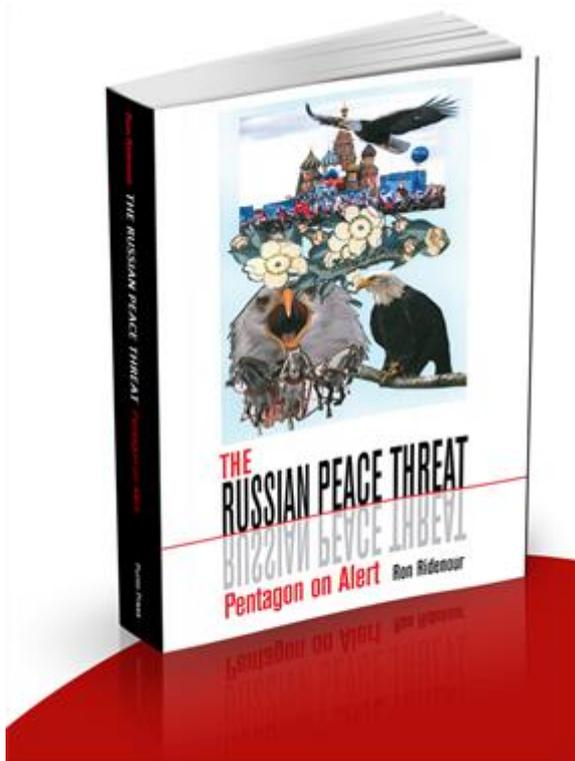
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