**R.I.P. Nate Dogg (1969 – 2011), or,**

**Mourning One Death, Against the Backdrop of Worldwide Disasters**

By: David Maryasin

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It wasn’t the best week in which to pass away if you were an R&B crooner that most rap fans had taken for granted.  It seemed futile – absurd, even –  to mourn the loss of one life, just one, while on the other side of the world bodies washed ashore an island-nation by the thousands and radiation looms.  Or while the foreign mercenaries of an unbelievably megalomaniacal, haggard old billionaire unleash automatic machine-gun fire on burgeoning young democrats fighting for right.  Something about that old adage that the death of one man is a tragedy but the death of millions is a statistic.  Something about so much current exposure to unfathomable losses of life that numb the senses to a death. A death - one, solitary, isolated, premature.

Nate Dogg (nee Nathaniel Dwayne Hale) was distinct in a musical genre that is given to repetition.  That his presence on a hook was often an absolute necessity was a foregone conclusion.  There’s hardly a picture on the entire Internet of this man smiling, but when you heard his voice on a record the effect was instantly soothing and agreeable.  I’d like for you to try to put on singles such as ‘Regulate,’ or ‘The Next Episode,’ or ‘Shake That,’ or even ’21 Questions’ and not bop your head.  You’d have to either be dead, or hate rap entirely (which, as far as I’m concerned, essentially means you hate life anyway).  Nate pioneered a style of singing that practically made him his own subgenre of music - the definitive vocalist of West Coast G-Funk hip-hop.

Some say life only just begins at 40 (…Hello Mother, Hello Father).  At 41, you barely qualify as old enough to be President of the United States (the official age minimum is 35, but try even getting a campaign together if you aren’t at least as old as JFK and Barack Obama were – 43 and 47, respectively.)  At 41, you’ve spent only a bit more than half your life as an adult.  In the U.S., you should be able to expect to live to 78.

The truth is, we as Americans don’t have fear-of-God-instilling natural catastrophes (Katrina excluded) or ruthless dictators (George W. Bush excluded) that threaten to shorten our lives.  We do, however, have poverty, and we have poor health habits. Obesity is an overwhelming national disaster.  Heart disease, diabetes, colon cancer follow close behind.  Just about every single person I have ever loved in my entire life has at some point been a regular smoker.  Drug abuse.  Our jobs encourage us to sit for 8 hours a day.  The demands of modernity have reduced healthy physical activity to a luxury, a commodity few can afford.  Running around your city in an effort to make sure life works doesn’t count.  That’s exhaustion, not exercise.  Apparently, we’ve even become too busy to GET busy: articles in newspapers and blogs recently abound suggesting that young career-driven (and often equally substance-using) New Yorkers are finding themselves in fewer intimate (or even casual) relationships.

Our health is all we have.  We live on borrowed, precious time, but cajole one another into obligatory overconsumption: of food, of material goods, of gossip, of resources, of energy, and of ourselves.  On a metabolic level, speedy or superfluous caloric intake ages the body’s cells more rapidly than a reserved, sustained diet.  This principle holds true for the rest of our lives as well.

Nate Dogg wasn’t even a particularly notorious fast-lifer, but 2 strokes in 10 months is hard to come back from. Rap-life often means life on the road: long tours, fast food, lack of rest, physical exertion, and sometimes, hard-partying.  In the hip-hop community, untimely deaths are too common:  Big Pun at 28, Pimp C at 38, Eazy-E at 31, Guru from Gangstarr at 48, Ol’ Dirty Bastard at 35 – and that’s excluding all victims of homicide. Black Americans are at heightened risks for every single leading cause of death in this country, and more than twice as likely as whites to die of a stroke. I don’t mean to crash the party, but these numbers have consequences.  We’ve got to start taking better care of ourselves, and of each other.

I was at the bar drinking myself sober the night the R&B legend passed — birthday party, celebrating life, the ides of March indeed.  There is irony in all things, and no less in our own perpetual balancing act of trying to prolong our lives, while shortening them as well. Slow down homies; we all get to where we’re going – eventually – anyway.  
  
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