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Analysis of Nas' *Life's A Bitch*

Life's A Bitch

By Nas & AZ

[Intro: AZ & Nas]

Ayo what's up, what's up, let's keep it real son
Count this money, you know what I'm sayin'? (Yeah, yeah)
Ayo put the Grants over there in the safe you know what I'm sayin'? (Yeah, yeah)
'Cause we spendin' these Jacksons
The Washingtons go to wifey, you know how that go
(I'm sayin' that's what this is all about right?
Clothes, bankrolls and hoes you know what I'm sayin'?
Yo then what man, what?)

[Verse 1: AZ]

Visualizing the realism of life in actuality
Fuck who's the baddest, a person's status depends on salary
And my mentality is money orientated
I'm destined to live the dream for all my peeps who never made it
'Cause yeah, we were beginners in the hood as Five Percenters
But something must've got in us 'cause all of us turned to sinners
Now some rest in peace and some are sittin' in San Quentin
Others such as myself are trying to carry on tradition
Keeping this Schweppervescent street ghetto essence inside us
'Cause it provides us with the proper insight to guide us
Even though, we know somehow we all gotta go
But as long as we leaving thievin', we'll be leavin' with some kind of dough, so
Until that day we expire and turn to vapors
Me and my capers will be somewhere stackin' plenty papers
Keeping it real, packing steel, getting high
'Cause life's a bitch and then you die

[Hook: AZ] (x2)

Life's a bitch and then you die, that's why we get high
'Cause you never know when you're gonna go
Life's a bitch and then you die, that's why we puff lye
'Cause you never know when you're gonna go
Life's a bitch and then you die, that's why we get high
'Cause you never know when you're gonna go
Life's a bitch and then you die, that's why we puff lye

[Verse 2: Nas]

I woke up early on my born day, I'm twenty, it's a blessing
The essence of adolescence leaves my body, now I'm fresh and
My physical frame is celebrated 'cause I made it
One quarter through life some godly-like thing created
Got rhymes three sixty-five days annual plus some
Load up the mic and bust one, cuss while I pus from
My skull 'cause it's pain in my brain vein, money maintain
Don't go against the grain, simple and plain
When I was young, at this I used to do my thing hard
Robbin' foreigners, take their wallets, their jewels, and rip they green cards
Dipped to the projects flashing my quick cash and
Got my first piece of ass smokin' blunts with hash
Now it's all about cash in abundance
Niggas I used to run with is rich or doing years in the hundreds
I switched my motto, 'stead of saying, "Fuck tomorrow"
That buck that bought a bottle could've struck the lotto
Once I stood on the block, loose cracks produce stacks
I cooked up and cut small pieces to get my loot back
Time is illmatic, keep static like wool fabric
Pack a four-matic to crack your whole cabbage

[Hook: AZ] (x2)

Life's a bitch and then you die, that's why we get high
'Cause you never know when you're gonna go
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Life's a bitch and then you die, that's why we get high
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'Cause you never know when you're gonna go
Life's a bitch and then you die

Allusions

*Keepin' this Schweppervescent street ghetto essence inside us
'Cause it provides us with the proper insight to guide us*

AZ refers to the carbonated drinks company Schweppes using a marketing slogan "Schweppervescent" as a play on the word "effervescence." This could also be viewed as the commercializing words, sell a certain lifestyle even more, that perhaps even to the point where individuals may not know the root word "effervescence." Also AZ is playing on that the ghetto essence cannot be escaped it is imbedded within them, literarily bubbling out

*I'm destined to live the dream of all my peeps who never made it
'Cause yeah, we were beginners in the hood as Five Percenters
But somethin' must've got in us, 'cause all of turned to sinners*

The Five-Percent Nation, or sometimes referred to as NGE or NOGE, the Nation of Gods and Earths, or the Five Percenters is a way of life found in 1964 in Harlem. The NGE teachers that black people are the original people of the planet Earth, and therefore they are the fathers or "Gods" and mothers or "Earths" of civilization. The Nation teaches a set of principles by Allah the Father, is key to understanding humankind's relationship with the universe. Members of the group call themselves Allah's Five Percenters, which reflects the concept that ten percent of the people in the world know the truth of existence, and those elites and agents opt to keep eighty-five percent of the world in ignorance and under their controlling thumb; the remaining five percent are those who know the truth and are determined to enlighten the rest.

AZ is rebellion against their original teachings, in so that the allure of wealth is more appealing and a better way to survive in the world, than what was decreed by the Five Percent Nation.

Word Choice

And my mentality is money – orientated

AZ uses the British "orientated" instead of the States' "oriented" as a way to show the listener that African American in youth are indeed educated and can use language correctly. Besides AZ telling the listener what his goals are he is also trying to destigmatize Black youth that they have a command of language better than most individuals

Form

(Hook x2)

*Life's a bitch and then you die
That's why we get high
'Cause you never know when you're gonna go*

*Life's a bitch and then you die
That's why we puff lye
'Cause you never know when you're gonna go*

The chorus appears twice throughout the song, once after AZ's first verse, then again after Nas' verse. It contains four lines in a simple alternating rhyme scheme (ABAB): The rhyme scheme and pattern reflects how history people are born and die. It is a repeated process much like the rhyme scheme.

This chorus, while short and unadorned, serves its lyrical purpose for the piece. AZ delivers his thesis to the listener, the statement which has been building up bar by bar in his preliminary verse. He delves into the liberation with which acceptance of a palpable end to life can bring to the intellect. We as humans do not know the time and day of our demise, nor do we necessarily want to, so there is no need for concern. "*Life's a bitch and then you die; that's why you get high,*" the line is almost rebellious in its nature. Conventional wisdom tells us that life is a gift and that anything is possible, that drugs are a negative entity not to be utilized, yet for Black youth drugs either a way to escape their harsh reality or since death is imminent, might as well enjoy life while you can.

Having AZ rap the chorus also alludes to his rap name in that "AZ" or A to Z or beginning to end for a Black youth's life is just being born and eventually dying with all that is in between is numbing yourself to your reality. or enjoying life as much as possible. The close proximity of the letters AZ could be a play on how quick life and death are for African Americans.

Theme

The poems chosen were:

"Oh, the Places You'll Go!" – Dr. Seuss

<https://www.ncra.org/files/mcms/f54dbcd1-4e78-47b1-916c-c73d66200335.pdf>

"The Road Not Taken" – Robert Frost

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44272/the-road-not-taken>

"Life's A Bitch" – Nas & AZ

<https://genius.com/Nas-lifes-a-bitch-lyrics>

The thematic significance across the poems dealt with choice. The optimistic openness and choice that individuals have in "Oh, The Places You'll Go!" is lowered in Frost's "The Road Not Taken," choosing one path closes the door on another path, that there is potential for regret or a mistake to be realized by your choice. The theme of choice becomes almost obsolete in Nas' "Life's a Bitch" where the stark reality is that the only choice is escaping reality by enjoying life as much as you can due to the high possibility of dying young. This would be a great 3-4 class lesson using each of these poems to highlight the themes of choice and concluded with that many groups in society do not have hope.

Resources for *Life's A Bitch*:

Schweppes commercial:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PibdzCBuHmg&feature=youtu.be>

Images of Queensbridge Projects (Where Nas grew up):

https://www.google.ca/search?q=Queensbridge+Projects&client=safari&rls=en&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjK85iHyLfVAhXKxFOKHUPQARgQ_AUICygC&biw=1369&bih=739

I am still on the hunt for this one short story that deals with the money as a curse for African Americans. Will update once I find the title and author.

Poems

“Oh, the Places You’ll Go!”

by Dr Seuss

(excerpt)

Congratulations!

Today is your day.

You're off to Great Places!

You're off and away!

You have brains in your head.

You have feet in your shoes.

You can steer yourself

any direction you choose.

You're on your own. And you know what you know.

And YOU are the guy who'll decide where to go.

You'll look up and down streets. Look 'em over with care.

About some you will say, "I don't choose to go there."

With your head full of brains and your shoes full of feet,

you're too smart to go down any not-so-good street.

And you may not find any

you'll want to go down.

In that case, of course,

you'll head straight out of town.

It's opener there

in the wide open air.

Out there things can happen
and frequently do
to people as brainy
and footsy as you.

And then things start to happen,
don't worry. Don't stew.
Just go right along.
You'll start happening too.

OH!
THE PLACES YOU'LL GO!

You'll be on y our way up!
You'll be seeing great sights!
You'll join the high fliers
who soar to high heights.

You won't lag behind, because you'll have the speed.
You'll pass the whole gang and you'll soon take the lead.
Wherever you fly, you'll be best of the best.
Wherever you go, you will top all the rest.

Except when you don't.
Because, sometimes, you won't.

I'm sorry to say so
but, sadly, it's true
that Bang-ups
and Hang-ups
can happen to you.

You can get all hung up
in a prickle-ly perch.
And your gang will fly on.
You'll be left in a Lurch.

You'll come down from the Lurch
with an unpleasant bump.
And the chances are, then,
that you'll be in a Slump.

And when you're in a Slump,
you're not in for much fun.

Un-slumping yourself
is not easily done.

You will come to a place where the streets are not marked.
Some windows are lighted. But mostly they're darked.
A place you could sprain both your elbow and chin!
Do you dare to stay out? Do you dare to go in?
How much can you lose? How much can you win?

“The Road Not Taken”
by Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.