

The Death Row Records and Bad Boy Entertainment beef of the 1990's was the most prolific quarrel in the history of rap. The tension that exploded in the mid 1990's involved huge rap stars on the West Coast including: Dr. Dre, Snoop Doggy Dog a.k.a. Snoop Dog, and Tupac Shakur a.k.a. 2pac, while on the East Coast stood: Sean "Puffy" Combs a.k.a. Puff Daddy, now known as P Diddy, and Notorious B.I.G a.k.a Biggie. The ensuing tension provoked violence, which led to the murders of many of rap's leaders.

Rapper's reputations have always built on a reputation of coming from the hood. Whether true or false, these personas include gangbanging, drug dealing, and violence. The latter became true during the hard times of the East Coast and West Coast feud. The struggle began as rappers began ferociously and constantly verbally attacking one another in their albums. These strong public denouncements stemmed from the competition between the coastal rap record companies, Death Row and Bad Boy.

The strength in these companies came from its leaders. Marion Knight was born and raised in Compton, California. Although growing up in Compton, Knight, unlike most, avoided ties with the Bloods street gang. During his childhood, he acquired the nickname "Suge" from when his parents used to call him "Sugar Bear." Luckily for Suge, he worked himself out of the ghetto. After a brief stint in the National Football League and a short-term job as Bobby Brown's bodyguard, Knight created Death Row Records. From the beginning, Death Row Records was corrupt. Michael Harris, a convicted drug dealer, initially financed the company itself. Fortunately for Suge, Death Row Records grossed hundreds of millions of dollars selling records because of Suge's artist scouting talent. Unfortunately for Harris, he never saw any return on his primary \$1.5 million venture.

After Suge Knight formed his empire, he quickly formed ties with the Bloods, which he had avoided in his youth. Knight was a known “head buster,” violently brutalizing anyone stupid enough to cross him. Because of his aggressive tendencies, Suge understood the necessity of having allies. The Mob Piru Bloods were the answer to Knight’s troubles, and Suge quickly assimilated into their culture. After the alliance was formed, Suge began wearing red suits to signify his entrance into the Bloods. He even went so far as to paint his house red. Suge was continuing to set the stage for violence to erupt in the future.

While P Diddy is not flawless, Suge Knight makes him seem as innocent as a catholic schoolgirl. Puffy admits that his father was a drug dealer, but his father died when Diddy was two. P Diddy attended Catholic school in the suburbs and Manhattan, where he was very religiously active. Puffy actually received a college degree in business from Howard University. Nevertheless, it was Puff Daddy’s drive and natural talent for scouting rappers landed him a job at Uptown Records, where he worked his way up to vice-president. Diddy was fired prematurely from the position because the president of Uptown was feeling the pressure of competition for his job. Diddy signed with Arista Records a few months later. After this experience, Puff Daddy went on to form Bad Boy Entertainment and begin his own empire with clean money unlike Suge Knight.

Both of these larger than life rap record presidents had the drive to succeed in their industry. Due to the tension between the two biggest rap record labels, P Diddy allied himself with gang muscle to protect himself from Suge Knight. It was only natural that P Diddy join the Crips, the Bloods’ archrivals to create even more tension. Thus,

Diddy was pitting himself against Suge in the gang world as well as the business world. However, Diddy was more discretely involved in the gang world, unlike Suge. The stage was finally set for the conflict between these two to jump from records to real life.

Contrary to popular belief, Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. were friends until late 1994, even though their record companies had been having a verbal quarrel for years. However, November 30, 1994 would change the mood of the rap scene for years to come. 2Pac was on enemy turf, facing charges of sexual assault in New York City. While in New York, Tupac decided to cut a remix with an East Coast rapper, Little Shawn. Little Shawn was 2pac's last East Coast ally. The recording was to take place at Quad Studios in Times Square. The mix of rappers in the studio at the time was quite suspicious: Junior M.A.F.I.A., a Biggie sponsored rap group, Biggie, and Puff Daddy. All of which were obviously connected with Bad Boy Entertainment. While entering the elevator, three black men robbed Tupac and his crew at gunpoint. When Tupac tried to stop his assailants, he was shot five times. Amazingly, 2pac was still fit enough to exit at his floor and pace back and forth about how he had been set up. After his trial for rape, Tupac was sentenced to four and a half years in prison for sexual assault. Tupac derived his theory that Notorious B.I.G. and P Diddy had placed a hit on him in jail. Immediately before his parole, Tupac strengthened his bond with Suge by signing a three-year contract with Death Row.

For the next two years, tensions grew as Death Row employee and known Blood member, Jake Robles, was shot and killed by one of Diddy's bodyguards during a fight between the two labels' groups. Soon after Robles's death, a personal friend of Diddy's, Anthony Bell, was severely beaten and robbed by Suge Knight and his Blood thugs after

failing to provide Suge with Puff Daddy's personal address. Interestingly, the spark that ignited the powder barrel was probably the smallest. While shopping at a Foot Locker, three Bloods were beaten by a group of Crips and one of the Crips stole a Death Row medallion from one of the beaten Bloods. This final act would result in the deaths of many more rappers.

After a Mike Tyson fight in Las Vegas, the Crip who stole the medallion was spotted in the hotel lobby by the Death Row crew. The Death Row group, including Tupac and Knight, began to beat the Crip, who later refused to press charges against the group. Later the same night, the Death Row group headed towards Club 662, a Blood club. While stuck in traffic, Tupac began flirting with a car full of girls. While distracted, Tupac was shot four times in the chest by a man in the backseat of a car that pulled up next to them. Suge, who was driving at the time, was able to extricate Tupac and himself from the situation even though he had also been shot in the head. Suge crashed the car, but Tupac was rushed to the hospital by way of an ambulance. Amazingly, Shakur lived for six days after the shooting, while Suge was relatively unharmed. Surgeons were able to remove Shakur's lung to curtail internal bleeding, but after multiple resuscitations, Tupac was allowed to die. Tupac's murderer was never found.

Six months later, Biggie was on the West Coast in Los Angeles, California presenting for the Soul Train Music Awards at which he was booed off the stage. It was believed by the West Coast that Biggie had hired the hit of Tupac so the public despised him. Later that night, as the Bad Boy crew was headed to an after party, the caravan stopped at a red light. A car pulled up beside Biggie's vehicle, and Notorious B.I.G. was

shot several times. The convoy rushed to the hospital, but Biggie was pronounced dead on arrival. Biggie died of almost the exact circumstances as Tupac Shakur. Similarly, Notorious B.I.G.'s murderer was never found.

Of course, many speculate that Biggie had 2Pac killed. Notorious B.I.G. not only hated Tupac because of the feud between the labels, but also because of 2Pac's song "Hit 'Em Up," in which Tupac brags of having sex with Biggie's wife. However, some suspect Suge of setting the hit up himself. 2Pac had been unsatisfied with Death Row's treatment of him and was beginning to look for a new label. However, Death Row still had two hundred of Tupac's unreleased songs. Fascinatingly enough, dying has the tendency to increase a rapper's popularity. Thus, to Death Row, Tupac was worth more dead than alive. If this is true, Suge had created the perfect cover with his East Coast vs. West Coast quarrel.

Similarly, while Knight was initially suspected of murdering Biggie to avenge the death of Tupac Shakur, but it is possible that P Diddy wanted Notorious B.I.G. dead as well. Biggie was becoming interested in leaving the music business altogether because of all of the controversy. However, the public doesn't like a rapper who deserts his posse and P Diddy might have feared loss of sales. So, in turn, Notorious B.I.G. was also worth more dead than he was alive to Bad Boy Entertainment. This is seen clearly by the 690,000 copies of Life After Death, an album created after Biggie's death, which sold in its first week.

Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G., both of the most promising rap stars of the 1990's, were killed within one year of one another, changing the face of the rap world forever. While these two giants were among the first to die in the East Coast versus West

Coast rivalry, they were certainly not the last. In fact, the deaths of Puff Daddy and Suge Knight's poster children increased the hatred and bloodshed between East and West. While the East Coast West Coast beef may have been created on fictitious grounds, its innocent pawns faced the angry jaws of its reality.