

Since hip hop received national acclaim in the early 1980's, hip hop began to branch off from its New York roots into different cities across the country. Los Angeles, California became the next site for hip hop to blossom into something great. When hip hop was first emerging, there was not coastal wars; people were simply searching for the best hip hop they could find. However, New York had been the locus for hip hop since its origination and it was not looking to be beat by the new kid on the block. Hip hop became eventually very regionalized because of the local authenticity of what was being rapped.

New York had been classically intolerant of hip hop produced in other regions even from the beginning. The pioneering rappers from the Bronx initially were not accepting of rap being produced in Brooklyn. Once Brooklyn was accepted, hip hop from Queens wasn't accepted and later Long Island. Once rap expanded beyond New York, they eventually maintained a united front of any non-New York rap. The opposition to hip hop produced outside of New York wasn't simply disinterest, but blatant public dissing. New York clubs and radio stations wouldn't play rap produced outside of New York and DJ's in the clubs attacked non-New York rappers. New York writers, the foremost in the world, published articles, which described other rap as "country" and "wack." What New York didn't realize was that when they attacked a rapper from a particular area, they criticized the entire area. In contrast, the West embraced both its own and Eastern hip hop. There were many radio stations that played East coast rap, even the underground hip hop, and the DJ's of the west coast acknowledged the skills of New York rappers.

Due to gang involvement on the West Coast, disses were interpreted differently. In New York, assaults stayed on the vinyl, but a rip in California meant a physical fight next time the person was seen. Independent record labeling also fuelled this behavior because these criticisms affected their record sales so much. The East Coast always complained about the West Coast's hunger for money. Nevertheless, the East Coast rappers were getting paid, so why shouldn't the West Coast? The music industry is a business and money is a huge part of both East Coast and West Coast hip hop culture.

Another qualm the East Coast had with the West was that they thought the West Coast was not possible of producing rap other than gangsta. It is true that Snoop Dogg and Ice Cube were the forefathers of West Coast rap, but West Coast hip hop styles quickly grew. From Ras Kass to Soul of Mischief, there were many different styles of free flowing rap other than gangsta coming from the West Coast.

One of the first major incidents of violence between the East Coast and West Coast involved a notorious West Coast DJ, Omar Parker, who spun hip hop records at Berkeley. Parker had moved from Los Angeles to New York and began to establish his skills as a DJ in that area. Omar began to spin West Coast rap one night and was shot in the back shortly after and told to "take that wack Cali music out west." While Omar was the first to lost blood during the coastal battle, Tim Dog was among the first to draw blood on record. Dog's "Penacilin on Wax," provoked many L.A. groups when Dog began screaming, "Fuck Compton" in his album. Ironically, Tim Dog now lives in Los Angeles and regrets ever producing this album.

Nothing in the history of hip hop compares to the Death Row Records and Bad Boy Entertainment beef of the 1990's. It was the without doubt the single most prolific

quarrel in the short life of rap. The tension that exploded in the mid 1990's is the perfect embodiment of the hip hop beef. This quarrel 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 rap's greatest stars.

Rapper's reputations have always built on their street credibility of coming from the hood. Whether true or false, these personae 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 their 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" 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 of being excessively violent with no protection, 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 setting the stage for violence to erupt in the future.

While P Diddy is not flawless and has had his troubles with shootings, 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 unlike Suge Knight begin his own empire with clean money.

Both of these larger than life rap record presidents had the drive to succeed in their industry. Because of 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 guns were finally loaded and conflict was inevitable 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 Tupac and his crew was 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, which he was initially in New York for, 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 involved the simple theft of a piece of jewelry. 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 taken off life support and 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 the West Coast's theory 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 dissatisfied 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, 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 continued the hatred and bloodshed between East and West.

After the huge label conflict, there was a dramatic shift in the nature of West Coast hip hop. The underground hip hop scene exploded in California and these unsigned groups began receiving national acclaim. Political rap was the central focus of most of these hip hop underground groups, which eventually spawned a new generation of rapper. West Coast rap artists such as Emcee Lynx and Company of Prophets became political activists and social spokespeople for various movements. No political rap is more notable than the songs produced during this era in California.

The mainstream hip hop being produced by the West Coast became popular once again with white audiences. However, continuing purists maintained their East Coast loyalty. Critics continued their bashing of West Coast rappers and labeled the West Coast rappers as immature. New East Coast styles were departing from the typical pop rap of the Puffy's Bad Boy empire. This was becoming evident in rappers such as Nas and Wu-Tang Clan, in which beats became fewer and the lyrics more alarming. Most importantly though, the East vs. West conflict of the 1990's opened the doors for other regions to produce hip hop stars. Atlanta, St. Louis, Chicago, and New Orleans became newest sites for hip hop sounds to be developed.

As the 1990's ended so did the West Coast's dominance of the rap industry mainly due to the shift to underground hip hop. The East Coast moguls' Jay-Z and P Diddy had tightened their grips on the hip hop scene. Nevertheless, Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre continued to keep the West Coast sound alive even if it wasn't thriving. They

unknowingly were making it possible for The Game to begin to attain such heights as Tupac Shakur had. With great success comes great conflict however.

The East Coast has its rising stars of the 21st century as well. 50 Cent is one of the most prominent stars of today having two very successful albums and a documentary that was just released in theaters. Although The Game and 50 Cent once associated in G-Unit, a collaboration of some of today's brightest rap stars, they are now rap nemesis's.

The feud began when 50 Cent, the leader of G-Unit, removed The Game from the group. The conflict involved The Game's solo album, "The Documentary," in which The Game wanted to collaborate with artists whom G-Unit were quarreling with. 50 Cent took this as a great disrespect to himself and exiled The Game from G-Unit. 50 also felt that he didn't receive enough credit for the launch of The Game's album. Quite similarly to when the Bad Boy and Death Row conflict was escalating, during a dispute between the rappers at Hot 97 radio, one of The Game's associates was shot.

Due to the severity of the situation, 50 Cent and The Game held a formal press conference in which they declared that they had reconciled. Due to the theories of Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls having been killed to boost record sales, rap enthusiasts automatically assumed the quarrel and shooting was a publicity stunt to boost their record sales. This theory was formed primarily because both artists had just released solo albums. However, it was easy to determine that the "reconciliation" was simply forced because of the shooting at Hot 97.

Soon after the resolution, 50 Cent and the remaining members of G-Unit began denouncing The Game once again. They attacked his street credibility not through vinyl, but through the media. This is unacceptable in the hip hop culture. Problems are either

settled on records or on the streets, not by the media. 50 also declared that without the assistance of G-Unit, The Game would not be able to produce any hits on subsequent albums should there ever be any. Shortly after, 50 Cent sued Jimmy Henchmen, The Game's manager, for unauthorized filming of a documentary examining Kelvin Martin, the man from which 50 Cent took his alias.

After all of the abuse that The Game had taken, he finally responded at Summer Jam, a popular hip hop concert event. The Game responded with the song "300 Bars and Runnin'," in which he directly attacks 50 Cent and his posse. While 50 Cent is unsure of whether he was offended by the song, he shot back with his "Piggybank" video. In the video, he has The Game dressed as a Mr. Potato Head.

It is simply the beginning of the feud between these two artists. Whether or not the 50 Cent and The Game quarrel will reach the heights of the Tupac and Biggie quarrel is yet to be known. Beefs and regionalization of rap will always remain part of hip hop culture. So long as the two exist, there will always be conflicts between rappers from different areas. However, because of its East Coast vs. West Coast nature, the 50 Cent and The Game conflict does have the makings to become a serious beef in hip hop for years to come. Whether these artist's learn from the spilt blood of their predecessors or continue the beef outside of vinyl, these events will have a huge impact on the future of hip hop in today's pop culture and the direction hip hop will grow.