

Old hip-hop foes Combs, Dogg unite for Europe tour

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By Terhi Kinnunen

HELSINKI (**Reuters**) - U.S. rap stars Sean "Diddy" Combs and Snoop Dogg, once bitter rivals in a notorious feud between east and west coast hip-hop in the 1990s, said on Friday they had buried the hatchet once and for all.

At a news conference in Helsinki to launch a joint European tour, they said they had "moved on" from the days when members of the two music scenes clashed rather than collaborated.

"That was a time in history," Combs told reporters ahead of the tour's opening concert. Snoop Dogg's Web site lists 22 gigs, ending in Nottingham, England, on April 2.

"We want to entertain, we want to make music, we want to make people feel good. We ain't no gangsters. We are men first, we are fathers," added the 37-year-old, who wore a white T-shirt, red cap and dark shades.

"Everybody has a past, everybody grows up, matures and moves on. And right now our mission is to make people dance and feel good."

During the 1990s, Combs and Snoop Dogg were on opposite sides of a high-profile hip-hop feud between the east and west coasts of the United States.

Combs, as head of the New York-based Bad Boy Entertainment, represented the east, while Snoop Dogg was signed up to his big rival Death Row Records based in Los Angeles.

Although the battle was fought largely through public pronouncements and antagonistic lyrics, it did occasionally spill into violence.

SHOOTINGS

Tupac Shakur, a hugely successful rapper in the 1990s who recorded some albums on the Death Row label, was shot in Las Vegas in 1996 and later died of his wounds.

The following year, and 10 years ago to the day on Friday, Notorious B.I.G., a leading east coast rap and hip-hop star, was killed in a shooting in Los Angeles.

Snoop Dogg, 35, whose real name is Calvin Broadus, said Notorious B.I.G. would be amused to see the two musicians linking up.

"He ('Biggie') is going to be smiling when he sees me and Puff (Combs) on the stage today," said the California rapper, who was wearing a brown tracksuit jacket.

"That is all that matters, that the spirit of hip-hop lives on. Everything that was not right, we are getting right."

Combs added: "God works in mysterious ways. This day was not booked up when we started the tour ... It's definitely an emotional day for me and Snoop as well. We never forget our brothers."

While the talk on Friday was of maturity and peace, both rappers have had run-ins with the law recently. Combs is being sued by a man who said the artist punched him outside a Hollywood nightclub, a charge he denies.

And Snoop Dogg pleaded innocent in January to charges of deadly weapons possession after he was stopped by airport security with what they said was a collapsible baton.

RAP HISTORY

In the early eighties, Rappers like “EASY E”, “DR. DRE”, “ICE CUBE”, and “DJ QUICK” were nothing more than young kids growing up in the harsh streets of Compton. Snoop Dog was in North Long Beach, which is on the border of Compton, involving himself with a Crip gang.

Easy E, DR. DRE and Ice Cube were hanging out in the area of Atlantic Dr., a street in Compton known for the sales of narcotics, and a known hang out for “Atlantic Drive, N-hood and Kelly Park Crips”.

The influence of rap started in the Jamaica, then New York City, eventually getting to the west coast. Compton rappers began to sing songs about the street life, growing up as a gang member in Compton. They began making underground tapes, which spread like crazy with the youth of Compton, and they loved it. These rappers would call it “Gangster Rap”.

Easy E admitted in a interview that he was able to start his record label from money obtained from selling Cocaine on the streets of Compton. DJ. Quik also started his own record label called Total Trak Productions. If you have any doubts DJ Quik has gang ties, all you really have to do is listen to the lyrics of his songs. If that’s still not enough the initials of his gang is, “TTP”, which of course stands for “Tree Top Pirus”. The initials of his record label are “TTP”, Total Trak Productions, you can make your own assumption, but we know the truth.

The early nineties were upon us, Gangster rap had put the city of Compton on the map. N.W.A.’s “Straight Outta Compton” album that featured the song “Fuck The Police”, made the city well known across the world.

It was about this time when known “Mob Piru” member Marion Suge Knight wanted to start Death Row Records.

Suge’s Death Row Records was making money in the millions with Tupac and Snoop Dog pumping out the hits. Sean Puffy Combs “Bad Boy” label on the East Coast was also a huge success with Christopher “Biggie Smalls” Wallace and “Sean” becoming best of friends. Suge Knight’s “Death Row Records” was constantly being investigated for numerous crimes.

Rap music had come a long way too, but the East Coast vs. West Coast clash was about to begin, and it was for real. The top performers in the rap industry were gathered in Los Angeles for the Soul Train Music Awards in 1994, which included Snoop Dog, DJ Quick, etc. Also at the event, the CEOs of the biggest rap labels, Puffy Combs of “Bad Boy Records” in New York City on the East Coast and Suge Knight of “Death Row

Records' strait out of Compton on the West Coast. Also present were the respective entourages of the two groups that consisted of off duty police officers from Compton and L.A.P.D., and of course, the gang members from Los Angeles and Compton that made up the crew.

The East Coast vs. West Coast rivalry had made its way into the lyrics of the songs and had become increasingly personal. This begun to parlay into the utmost disrespect aimed at members of "Death Row" and "Bad Boy Records".

This was gangster rap, and industry whose code was the code of the gangs in the street. Within the gangs there are certain lines you don't cross. Certain things you do not say, and when you're disrespected you hit back hard, or you're a punk. To people who were involved in gangs or who knew gang culture it was only a matter of time until people started dying.

The awards show was televised and went on as scheduled. The east coast/ west coast rivalry and disrespect shown was quite evident to those who understand gangs. To the mass audience it probably played out as the many publicity rivalries established in wrestling and boxing. The show was over for now, and the rap industry insiders went to the after party at the El Rey Theatre. The off duty cops were there but they were by far outnumbered by the gang members. A fight began involving DJ Quick, TTP, and mob gang members against the victim. In the end the man was beat and kicked until he was dead. As is usual in gang related assaults and murders, everyone began leaving in a hurry, and nobody knew anybody or saw anything.

Due to the many problems with the "El Rey" murder case, the investigation soon fizzled out with the usual "we know who did it, but get someone to testify" that is so common in gang cases.

The American public, who had been in such an uproar at the beginning of the gangster rap over its profanity, violence, and "Fuck the police" messages, had been somewhat quelled by the free speech at any cost liberals, and warning stickers on their kid's C.D.s.

Gangster rap had become mainstream America, and the kids were idolizing those that preached the narcotics, gang lifestyle. Crips and Bloods were in cities across America, and middle class kids were emulating them, talking, and dressing like them, and joining gangs like them. The gangster rap murders to come would further open the eyes of the public, but would often leave more questions as to why, than there answers.

Federal Task Forces formed to investigate the gang narcotic ties within the rap music industry and specifically Death Row Records.

By the time Suge Knight was sent to prison several years later, the Task Force had nothing to violate him on, and he ended up being violated due to his part in the assault of Orlando Anderson (the night Tupac was shot), based on the interview of Anderson by the Compton Police Department's Gang Unit.

Essentially, there was no task force with the ability to gather the needed intelligence to adequately investigate a gang narcotic based industry that was growing rapidly. An industry where extortion, intimidation, and murder was common place and involved cities around the country, but it's roots were in Compton.

The night Tupac and Suge Knight were shot in Las Vegas, Las Vegas Police Department found that just prior to the shooting, a Compton gang member by the name of Orlando had been beaten by Suge, Tupac, and Mob gang members at the MGM Grand.

The only Orlando that we knew as a Compton gang member was Orlando Anderson of the South Side Crips (SSC). The SSC are enemies of the associates of Death Row Records (DDR), which include the Mob Pirus, Leuders Park Piru, and Elm Lane Piru, but there were no know major incidents between the sets for sometime.

Tupac and Suge were shot the night of September 7, 1996. Most of the Compton gang members involved had returned to Compton on September 8th, and 9th. As we were coordinating with LVPD, contacting informants, and gathering information, the City of Compton was the battleground. The next 5 days in Compton, the toll would be 3 murders and 11 attempted murders as a result of this feud. The Gang Unit was working many hours investigating these murders and attempted murder scenes. Interviewing numerous gang members and informants, conferring with LVPD and LASD, and kicking in doors seizing several weapons, ammunition, and gang intelligence information and photos.

We would serve these warrants within 2 weeks of the death of Tupac Shakur. This was the Compton way, quickly and decisively stopping the ongoing feud in Compton.

The Compton Gang Unit was subpoenaed for Suge Knight's revocation hearing in December 1996, based on information, photos, recovered during the warrants and our interview of Orlando Anderson. The Death Row Task Force was unable to produce anything compelling enough to hold Suge in violation.

Detective Richardson testified to what Anderson had really told us about the assault in Las Vegas. Detective Richardson testified, and the Judge revoked Knight's probation and sentenced him to the maximum 9 years.

The affidavit written regarding the murder of Tupac Shakur would in a few months again be broadcast on the news across America. Particularly, the beginning that stated, "There is an ongoing feud between Tupac Shakur and the Blood related Death Row Records with Rapper Biggie Small's and the East Coast Bad Boy Records which employed South Side Crips gang members as security".

Informants interviewed by us around the time Tupac was murdered had established connections between South Side Crips and New York based Bad Boy Records, and Biggie Smalls.

The shooting of Tupac was still fresh in the minds of many who attended the 11th Annual Soul Train Awards in Los Angeles on May 9, 1997, but nobody expected what would happen next. The party for the awards was held at the Peterson Museum in Los Angeles many of the rap music insiders were present including "Bad Boys" Puffy Combs and Biggie Smalls. Suge Knight was glaringly absent due to his incarceration, however many of Death Row Records people were there. Also present were many South Side Crips.

As the Bad Boys entourage, including Puffy and Biggie, loaded into two brand new SUVs, and several vehicles as they left the event. A dark green or black impala SS drove next to Biggie's vehicle. The lone occupant – a male dressed in black Muslim garb opened fire with a 9 mm. Handgun. Biggie was hit several times by the gunfire. A short time later he would die of his injuries. Though there were several off duty and on duty police personnel, and hundreds of fans near the shooting, the gunman escaped without as much as anyone getting a license number. The Gang Unit met with the Los Angeles Detectives and discussed the murder of Biggie Smalls. The Los Angeles Department had over twenty detectives assigned to investigate the case. During the meeting, it was decided that the prevailing theories of the murder were as follows. That it was a Death Row Records hit in retaliation for the shooting of Suge Knight and Tupac Shakur. The other theory, it was a South Side Crips hit for money owed to them by Bad Boy Records and Biggie Smalls for security fees owed, or money owed for the murder of Tupac.

Immediately after the murders of Biggie Smalls, attention again shifted to the Compton connections. Simultaneously, an international gang feud within South Side Crips had erupted with several persons wounded and one killed. We investigated these shootings and immediately wrote a gang search warrant affidavit. Los Angeles Police Department accompanied the Compton Police Department on the service of the warrants. Evidence seized included a new black Impala SS.

By July 22nd, 1998, the Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls investigations had been stalled, and Suge Knight was doing time for probation violation. Orlando Anderson was suing Tupac's estate and Death Row Records for the assault on him. Tupac's mother Alfeni Shakur was in turn suing Orlando Anderson for the wrongful death of her son.

The suspect in Tupac's murder- Orlando Anderson was himself killed in a gang drug related shootout in Compton that left three dead in June 1998. The next day a small article appeared in the Los Angeles Times entitled "Suspect in Tupac's Murder Slain in Shootout

We also continued to talk with informants regarding Death Row murders and the murders of Tupac and Biggie Smalls. We never anticipated that our years of intelligence gathering was going to be brought to an abrupt halt, before being able to complete our investigations which we believe would have produced the identity of the murders in all these crimes.