

ARTS & BOOKS

Rap wars and (almost) peace

By Benjamin SAFAR

A decade ago East Coast and West Coast rappers were at daggers drawn, literally. Today they are planning concerts together. How did this happen ?

In 1996, Tupac Shakur a charismatic West Coast rapper from Death Row records was shot dead in Las Vegas. Notorious B.I.G., the leading star of Bad Boy records and paragon of East Coast-style rap music, was killed the following year in Los Angeles. These two gruesome murders crowned years of violent rivalry between East and West Coast rappers, during which insults, threats and public fights were recurrent.

West Coast or gangsta rap became popular in the eighties with artists like Ice Cube and Dr Dre, who created Death Row records with Suge Knight in 1991. This leading label produced Tupac Shakur and, later on, Snoop Dog. Nowadays, leading West Coast rappers include Snoop Dog, Xzibit, Coolio and The Game.

Experts claim that East Coast rap has darker, less funky tones and more spasmodic rhythms than the West Coast variety. Its first heroes were rappers like Notorious B.I.G. and NAS; today it features artists like Eminem, 50 Cent and P.Diddy. P.Diddy owns Bad Boy records, founded in 1992. He was Notorious B.I.G.'s producer; when the latter died, P. Diddy composed the famous song "I'll be missing you," which he performed with Notorious B.I.G. partner's Faith Evans.

In the last few years, the rivalry between these estranged families has gradually abated—so much so that P.Diddy and Snoop Dog will give a concert together in Amsterdam at the end of March. This would have been unthinkable ten years ago !

However, there are still serious bouts of violence in the rap world. Actually, the violence never really stopped. For instance, in 1999, Bugz (one of D12's original members) was shot dead in Detroit; in 2000, 50 Cent was shot and wounded in New York. Last year, two of Eminem's longtime friends were assaulted in Detroit; Obie Trice was shot and wounded, and a few months later, Proof (another D12 member) was killed outside a nightclub. However, these violent episodes are no longer directly linked to the East Coast / West Coast feud.

The murders of Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac are still quite present in their fans' memories. Two years ago, there was a new episode in Notorious B.I.G.'s lawsuit, in which the plaintiffs claimed that a corrupt officer had planned the slaying of the rapper. Last year, Tupac's ashes were transferred to South Africa, his country of origin.

Sources:

"Rapper's Family's Suit Goes to Trial," *Los Angeles Times* 22 June 2005.

"Family of Notorious BIG wants to expand Lawsuit" *Rap central.co.uk*. 13 July 2006.

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