

Death Row Records

Written by Westside ID7

Wednesday, 22 September 2004 20:04 -

Marion 'suge' Knight

Death Row Records CEO Marion "Suge" Knight is receiving a bad deal from all the haterz.

He was there for Tupac when Tupac got locked down in New York. He put the bucks up to get Tupac out on bail pending appeal. He was one of Tupac's home boyz. And still the haterz believe shit that the media and others put out there, just to smear the name of **Marion 'suge' Knight**.

If you have thoughts about **Suge** based on what the media has said or Daz or any of those other haterz, I wish you would think again. You see everybody talking this "well Tupac wouldn't ride with 50 or Ja or Eminem"---BUT Tupac did roll with **Suge**. That is a fact, not something made up by one of you "cyber gangstaz". The media and others have twisted things and manipulated things to affect the way this man is perceived; the same way they have twisted thoughts of Tupac.

It is not fair that the press and others have made him this "monster" or the "fall guy" for what happened to our Tupac. If there was evidence of such things, I am sure the police would have acted on it. We are all looking for someone to blame for the loss of Tupac. We feel we have been cheated and we want revenge. Let's just make sure we are taking our revenge out on the right people.

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Tupac was only at **Death Row** for 9 months. In those 9 months look at all the tracks he laid for us. Look at all the tracks we would not have if **Suge** didn't get

Tupac out and bring him to

Death Row

.

Suge

was a major "player" in giving us some of the greatest tracks of Tupac. And we thank him by dissing and hate"n on him. Man to me that is wack thinking.

Suge Knight built one of the biggest money making black owned businesses. He took a little label and was running with the majors – he became a major. Being signed to

Death Row

was something a lot of people wanted at that time. So from

"Funky Enough" Records

thru

"Futureshock" Records

to

Death Row Records

,

Suge Knight

has become an icon not only in west coast rap but in the music industry itself.

*About changing the name from "Futureshock" to Death Row - According to Jewell "This guy named DJ Unknown came up with the name "Def Road". Dre asked me what I thought about the name. I was like , "Naw, Death Row, nigga, if anything,"cause all of us got (court) cases."

Marion 'suge" Knight

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Marion 'Suge' Knight was born April 19, 1966, in the Compton area of Los Angeles; his trademark nickname 'Suge' is short for "Sugar Bear."

Suge was awarded a football scholarship to UNLV, where he also made the dean's list. After college he played NFL ball for the Los Angeles Rams for a short time.

After the NFL Suge took on the music field as a concert promoter and a bodyguard for celebrities including Bobby Brown. Thru this experience he gained the knowledge he would later use to form Death Row Records. He watched and learned how the game was played.

Suge formed an artist management company and signed prominent West Coast rappers the D.O.C. and DJ Quik. Through Quik, he met several members of N.W.A., this included the 'budding' producer Dr. Dre.

Members of N.W.A. and their label, Ruthless Records were having problems. Suge got a contract release done for Dre that for what ever reason strained the relationship between Suge, Easy E (CEO of Ruthless Records) and Jerry Heller (who was their manager).

And the year was around 1991. Suge vowed to make the Row " The Motown of the 90's"

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He secured a distribution deal with Interscope, and Dre's solo debut, *The Chronic*, became one of the biggest-selling and most influential rap albums of all time. It also made a star of Dre's friend, Snoop Doggy Dogg, whose debut album, *Doggystyle*, was another hit. As Dre's signature G-funk production style took over hip-hop, Death Row became a reliable brand name for gangsta fans, and even its lesser releases sold consistently well.

Suge's label made millions in record sales. Some 40 million units were sold during the '90s alone, and all of its first six releases produced double-platinum selling albums.

Tupac brought Death Row to the highest plane of all the artist. His work ethic and multi platinum record sales made him one of Tha Rows most valued artist.

After the death of Tupac Suge was being abandoned by all the people he had helped along the way. Many artist that Suge got in the game and kept out of jail, seemed to run off.

Suge once spoke on all of the Death Row artists he had been able to keep out of jail. On his fingers, Suge counted them: "Nate Dogg, three Taco Bell robberies, and he's ID'd in two of 'em--he should have been in for 15. Snoop Dogg, 25-to-life on murder; we got him off scott free. And Dre should have done about eight on battery and vehicle stuff." And then there was the experience of paying off the parents of an 11-year-old girl raped by another of his former rappers. "This stuff has come home on me," the 34-year-old Suge admitted. At the time he said this he was being interviewed by Thomas Carney of Los Angeles Magazine – while sitting in jail. The result of that 1997 conviction were Suge was convicted of state and federal charges that he had violated his probation from previous convictions. At the same time attempts by law enforcement agents to hit Knight with more serious charges, such as being connected to the

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1997 murder of East Coast rapper Biggie Smalls, have been frustrated by lack of direct evidence, and the confusion caused by the rampant corruption of the L.A. police department. So all in all when ever they wanted to mess with Suge the ol probation violation is the one they always have used.

Death row is on a come back now it seems. Suge is rumored to be signing new artist and there are things going on over there.

Maybe the future will be brighter for Suge and the Row. One thing is for sure, police officials and some people just don't like Suge. For what ever reason love him or hate him, you have to admit he is a strong bright businessman. So for those who say Tha Row is dead, Just look at Suge and remember how he took a small company and put it and the west coast sound on the map. He can do it again. We will have to watch and see.

Suge Knight Interview..... Credit Goes To:: <http://www.hitsdailydouble.com>

Mule Creek State Prison is the fourth jail rap entrepreneur Marion "Suge" Knight has been locked up in since he was given a nine-year sentence in October '96 for violating probation. He's also spent time in prisons in Chino and Delano, CA and at the California Men's Colony in San Luis Obispo. Mule Creek is located in Lone, about 48 miles north of Sacramento. It's a one-street town where even his childhood pal—a retired policeman who grew up with Knight in Compton and has worked for him since '94—won't eat breakfast, terming the eggs at one local

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establishment "too damn greasy."

We're picked up, along with two of Suge's PR reps, at the airport and driven to the prison. Mule Creek is a nondescript stretch of land just across the street from a modern, gated development built around a golf course, with houses that would probably fetch half a million back in L.A. The only signs it's not a community college campus are the empty gun turrets rising like forbidding beacons above the barren, treeless landscape, the electronic fence with the sign, "Warning! Fatal Shock," and the coiled barbed wire snaking around the top.

The officers at the check-in desk make us take off our shoes and belts and empty our pockets of anything larger than a dollar bill for the food vending machines before entering the facility. No tape recorders, no pens, no cameras, no pennies. I will be forced to conduct this interview with half scraps of paper and a stubby pencil, scribbling furiously. We pass through double gates, with one door sliding closed before the other one opens. We walk into a drab-looking cafeteria in which the denim-clad convicts and their visitors walk around the room hand in hand, or sit side by side at uncomfortably low tables (so no contraband can be passed underneath), playing cards, backgammon, checkers, dominoes or simply staring straight ahead. Kids roll around on a mat in a fenced-off section, and the atmosphere is not unlike visiting day at camp. The prisoners are of all varieties, corn-rowed young hip-hoppers looking no older than 20, elderly ghost-like figures who seem familiar from a hundred prison movies. Junk food from the machines is piled high on one table: a microwave chimichanga, popcorn, a Greek "giro," French fries and fruit, all awaiting the entrance of Suge Knight, the man who built Death Row into the world's largest hip-hop record label, a company that earned \$125 million in just four years, launched West Coast gangsta rap and put such legends as Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Tha Dogg Pound and Tupac Shakur on the map. According to his enemies, he is a dangerous thug, but to his friends, a loyal and dedicated supporter.

Suge limps in with a cane, his left ankle in a cast from a basketball injury in the yard as he saunters and garrulously greets fellow inmates. Knight is still an imposing figure at 6' 4" and 300-plus pounds, head shaved with a trademarked black beard, his body now a V from working out on the bars (free weights are banned at state prisons so inmates don't get too strong for the guards). Still, the man's been humbled. He's long since given up the Beverly Hills offices, Las Vegas' Club 662, the Can-Am Studios in Tarzana. His company may have fallen from its once-grand heights, but Knight is more than eager to talk. He gets frequent visitors, but he hasn't met face-to-face with anybody from the press since his infamous jailhouse interview with NBC "Prime Time" reporter Brian Ross shortly after his arrest in October '96. It was then Superior Court Judge John Ouderkirk ruled Knight had violated his probation by getting into a scuffle with Orlando Anderson at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. The fight was caught on videotape the night Tupac Shakur was shot while sitting in the passenger seat as Suge drove his BMW back from a heavyweight fight September 7, 1996. The rapper died six days later. Suge had been on probation from a '92 pistol-whipping of producers George and Lynwood

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Stanley, who had refused to get off the pay phone in his office.

His friend drives people up to see Suge on visiting days every weekend, Thursday through Sunday. Those who've come by include Interscope's Jimmy Iovine, Priority's Bryan Turner—with whom he still has a deal—Interscope head of sales Steve Berman, promo veteran Marc Benesch, ex-Death Row publicist George Pryce and his one-time lawyer David Kenner, now stricken with cancer.

"Jimmy's a good guy," Suge insists. "I like him and respect him as a family man and a human being. He's also a smart record man. Dre went back to the Death Row formula when he did 'Dr. Dre 2001.'" The first record Dre did on Aftermath flopped. People can act like the Death Row concept is over, but to be successful, you have to follow the format we established. But I'm not bitter... This is 2000; I can't do business like it's '91 or '92." Remembering me from a previous conversation for HITS back in October 1995, at the height of the Michael Fuchs/C. Delores Tucker/William Bennett outcry against gangsta rap, Suge feels comfortable expanding on his legacy. "What made those records so important was, everyone was really living the life back then," he explains. "It wasn't like today, where they're rehearsing a script, where it's all an act. Today's gangsta hip-hop isn't real if it doesn't follow the guidelines we set at Death Row." Knight claims that his experience in prison is the best thing that could have happened to him, making him sit back and take stock of his life.

"I had no time to reflect before. Jail is the worst place you can be, but it does give you an opportunity to grow, to focus on what's important. It's good to get all this rest, not have your phone or pager constantly going off. I've found peace."

Suge likens imprisonment to being able to witness your own funeral, so you "know who your real friends are, who cares about you. I wouldn't want any of my artists to be in prison. That's why I bailed out Tupac..."

He claims he's not bitter at anyone, not Dr. Dre or Snoop Dogg, though he hints people have taken advantage of his absence to "pick at [his] label's carcass" and swoop away his artists. Suge says his own knowledge of the business is what led people to try to keep him down. "I'm the only black guy from the ghetto who knows the value of owning your masters, publishing, marketing and promotion. And that's not old-school—that's still current today."

Talk of Eminem brings a wide grin to Knight's face.

"I like him, he's very fucking funny...hilarious," acknowledges the man dubbed Sugar Bear by his mother for his "sweet" disposition. "But why is it OK for a white kid to curse and deal with harsh topics and not a black man?" Some things never change, even when a guy's been in

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prison for four years.

"One thing's for sure... If you take a person who has a choice between a fake Gucci and a real one, they'll take the real one," he says. "These rappers have lost touch with their ghetto peers. I want to pass the baton to the young guys. When I get out, we're going to put out the real thing. When I get home, all the real rappers will come to me. I can still go to any ghetto in the world, anywhere, and instantly be at home."

Death Row now boasts a slew of young, mostly unknown, talent, including Tupac collaborators Outlawz (who recently sued Suge—a charge he dismisses), Above The Law's Hutch and soul crooner Michel'le as well as younger rappers Crooked I, Doobie, K-9, The Realest, Swoop G, El Dorado, Top Dog, Mac Shawn, Capricorn, Bad Habitz, Lil' C-Style and Soopafly.

Knight takes solace from the fact his company needs him to return to its former heights. He has several private pow-wows with his childhood pal and the two publicists who accompanied us. Although Knight is listed as executive producer on the just-released "Death Row Uncut," the notorious home video featuring vintage footage of Tupac Shakur, Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg, he steadfastly denies he is violating the court order against conducting label business while behind bars.

"I am Death Row," says Suge. "Nobody who's been on Death Row hasn't had success.

They've all had to go back to their roots to survive. Remember that, Snoop and Dre: You have to come back!" He laughs heartily. "I'm a businessman, an entrepreneur," he asserts. "I'm not an artist. I'm from the ghetto. Guys like Dre and Snoop only passed through the ghetto—they don't live there. But I'm not the bad guy I'm made out to be. When you take a stand on life in America, do things your way and own your own, that can be scary for people. "I like Dre. We've always been friends. But he wants to be white. I can't do that. You can live like a white person, but you can never go back. When you start in Compton, though, prejudice is not taught because you're around broke muthaf**kas just like you all the time. Sports is not racist, either, because you're on a team, and the same thing for music."

He brushes off the fact that neither Dre nor Snoop have come to see him in prison, but it rankles him nonetheless. "I don't have a relationship with Dre. We're from different sides of the world, different lifestyles, different cultures. I'm from the ghetto. I wanted to make money and I saw what drugs could do. I never sold drugs, nor used drug money to start this company. But both of them only wanted to party."

He follows with a paranoid rant against L.A. District Attorney Gil Garcetti and a supposed Democratic conspiracy to keep him behind bars, which involves Time Warner, one-time Warner Music Group and HBO head Michael Fuchs and C. Delores Tucker, who made an infamous \$80 million bid to set Suge up in his own PG-rated rap company after urging TW to cut ties with Interscope, largely because the label was distributing Death Row back in '95. We begin to talk about his early days in the business, when he allegedly strong-armed Ruthless Records' Eazy-E and manager Jerry Heller to let Dr. Dre out of his deal so he could join Knight's fledgling company. "Those contracts were like the days of Chuck Berry and Little Richard, when the acts had to tap-dance for a deal, like strippers with \$20 in their G-string." While Suge has already

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served almost four years of his nine-year sentence and will probably be out in six months, when he will have served half his time, he is remarkably sanguine about his incarceration. For someone used to traveling in the finest cars, eating the finest foods and squiring the most beautiful women, he is remarkably angst-free about his lack of even the simple freedom to put a dollar bill in a vending machine. "You go in, you get sentenced, you do your time," he muses. "To be honest, I know when I'm coming home. I want to spend time with my family. I don't want a media circus when I get out. The first thing I want to do is take an hour-and-a-half warm bath." The worst part of the experience for Knight is having to wear shoes in the shower. "To be honest, I've grown mentally, physically and spiritually. I work, clean my body and sleep. I've been reading some history books, the Bible...that kind of thing."

I ask Suge if he's read Ronin Ro's mostly uncomplimentary '98 book, "Have Gun Will Travel: The Spectacular Rise and Violent Fall of Death Row Records," which paints him as a ruthless and violent outlaw with a charitable penchant for giving away turkeys to the poor on Thanksgiving or sponsoring a luncheon for single mothers at a Beverly Hills hotel on Mother's Day. "Yes, it's very comical," he says dismissively of the tome, guffawing, but his mood immediately turns somber. "It's a conspiracy to make me a monster."

About the story that Suge threatened to push Vanilla Ice over a balcony to force him to sign away his publishing rights, he snorts: "I'm not stupid. I'm smart enough to have a publishing administration deal with Sony. I never preyed on the weak. I'm not a bully. I pick on my equals." He dismisses his supposed feud with Puffy Combs, then comments on Combs' celebrated champagne-bottle and telephone-receiver attack on Interscope executive Steve Stoute. "He definitely disrespected Puffy, but Puffy shoulda used lawyers instead of bodyguards."

Suge stiffens when I bring up the deaths of Tupac Shakur and the Notorious B.I.G.—two killings that many have insinuated he had something to do with. "All I remember is getting a bullet in my head," he says of the Tupac murder. "It's like my grandmother said, 'Whatever hand you're dealt, that's what you have to deal with.' You can't justify what goes on in life." As for telling NBC's Brian Ross he wouldn't help the police even if he knew the killer, he remains adamant: "I've never tried to be a detective. We're not in heaven—this is the real world. Whoever did this, they know who they are and they have to live with themselves. I would never be a snitch. We have to forgive, not punish. Jesus died for our sins. Who are we to judge? I try to go by society's rules as best as I can, but I don't like rats."

He denies any involvement with Biggie's March '97 shooting death as well, insisting, rightfully, that he was in prison at the time. The police have tried to link him to the crime through a car that allegedly was on the scene and was owned by Suge but have come up with no conclusive proof. "They were ready to let me out of prison until Biggie was shot, then they put the judgment on hold," he said. "I was never accused of having anything to do with it...but I'm still stuck in jail." He goes on to claim his deals with Tupac, Snoop and Dr. Dre were more than fair, and that he's since come to terms with Afeni Shakur to release a massive, four-CD box set on the rapper he's dubbed "The Safe" because it will come in the shape of one. Clearly, Suge Knight prefers

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to look ahead. "I don't want to talk about the past because we can't change it. We have to move forward and give these new kids the opportunity to reach their own goals. I want to enlighten them and make them entrepreneurs. I may not be much of a rapper, but I'm a good businessman."

Suge will soon follow up his best-selling home video with an accompanying audio CD, "Too Gangsta For Radio." When I suggest he sign hebe-hoppers M.O.T., he laughs, jokes of a jailhouse conversion ("I'm now a little Jewish myself") and suggests renaming them Hamen after the Purim villain. When pressed, he'll talk about his prison experience, writing for the first time since college, getting into shape when he first spotted his fat stomach "hanging out over this little bitty bunk," which prompts him to poke me in the belly and urge me to lose weight. "It makes you appreciate what you don't have—a refrigerator, gourmet food. It's going to be wonderful just to have a lobster and a steak. Prison is a place nobody wants to be... I view this as God making me a man, testing me, having me survive in the jungle, making the lions and tigers my friends." While insisting he doesn't consider himself rehabilitated because he's done nothing wrong, he still admits: "If you are mortal, you make mistakes. But when someone puts a period behind something, why put a question mark? I look at it like this: Whatever I needed to learn, I've learned. I know I'm wiser, smarter, more disciplined, stronger and more spiritual. I've grown for the better. I don't stay the same; I don't thrive on the negative. I feel real safe here because I know my environment—I know what I'm dealing with. It's like the devil you know is better than the one you don't."

On the seeming current calm in the gang wars, Knight says: "There's always going to be a fascination with what's going on in the ghetto. People might not hang out like they used to, but when I get home they'll come around because they're still out there."

As for the current N.W.A. reunion, Knight reiterates he holds the rights to the band name but says about the current "Up In Smoke" tour: "It's good, but they should have kept it more in the community. And they're using the same props as we did in '92—the skull, the low-rider car..."

He says happiness is now the most important thing in his life. "I'd rather have an artist sell a million records and appreciate me than sell five million and have them be unhappy with me." The next generation is key. I owe them a chance so they don't end up in jail like me. I would never bring harm to kids. Society paints their own vision; they believe what they want to believe. "I feel I was taught a lesson. One minute I'm running a multimillion-dollar business, the next I was in prison and my artists weren't my artists anymore. People have to ask themselves if they've been fair to me. If somebody is your friend, they should be loyal, especially for someone who did so much good for them. "But I've paid my debt. I won't give anyone the satisfaction of admitting defeat. I'm a better man. I needed to sit back and watch for a while...take a break from the fast lane. I have prayed for the best and prepared for the worst. I'm not counting the days or months until I'm out, because that's hard time. If your friends love and respect you,

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that's all you can expect." Knight gets up to leave, slowly lifting himself out of his chair with his cane."I'm the only one left," he says. "Everyone else has sold out. Death Row is the last of the U.S.-only labels. I'm living the American dream."

With that, prisoner #K43480 walks back to his jail cell.

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Esquire interview with □ Suge Knight

Founder, Death Row Records, 37, Los Angeles

Interviewed by Ross Johnson

Respect is everything.

When I was a kid in Compton, the other kids would say, "When I grow up, I want a Chevy." I would say, "I want a Porsche or a Rolls-Royce." I wanted something other than what I saw in the ghetto.

My first memory is of my father picking me up.

My father was a janitor who worked his way up to truck driver. He'd get home and be so tired, I

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would take his shoes off and he'd fall right asleep in front of the TV. No matter how hard he worked, he barely had enough money to buy himself an extra beer. He could have easily left the family like a lot of other fathers do. But he was loyal.

One thing I knew was that one day, I'd be paying a debt to the system. If you grow up in the ghetto and you're active, you're gonna get caught up.

I used to go to football practice in college and see how many teammates I could hurt.

Still, today, you could take any guy in the NFL and I could put a helmet on and a pair of shoes, and I could knock 'em on their ass.

Any time somebody comes to visit you in prison, that's good.

When we did the first hit record for Death Row, The Chronic, I treated it like it was a football team. It was double days in hell week. We had a quarterback, a center, offensive linemen; everybody had to work together, eat together, sleep together. And you heard that.

Who was the most talented rapper? Tupac. By far.

Ninety-eight percent of the people in show business know the show part. They don't know the business.

Solitary confinement is punishment. When you fuck up or they want to break you down, they put you in the hole. Your food is two colds and a hot. It's not enough to feed an eight-year-old.

What they don't tell you is how many people die in solitary confinement.

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I don't know about reincarnation, but I've been places where I've never been before and I know what to expect.

It seems like the more enemies you have in life, the better off you are. An enemy can't get close enough to you to do anything to you. He can't go to your house and turn around and steal from you. He can't come to you and borrow money. People who think everyone is their friend are leading a dangerous life.

I know the difference between something real and bullshit.

I enjoy myself with women. All my life, I've had a piece of a bitch.

You can't have it both ways on the death penalty. You can't say you believe in God and then go for an eye for an eye. I don't think you should kill a guy like McVeigh. Somebody who kills a lot of kids like he did, he just wants to get it over with. So what you do is you put him in prison for the rest of his life, and you put him on the main line, and you let the real convicts make him suffer.

Red is a great color. Burgundy is even better.

The difference in playing basketball on the streets and in prison is that you don't call fouls in prison.

The worst part of prison was when my son would come to visit me. He'd ask, "Daddy, you coming home tonight?" When it was time to say goodbye, he didn't want to leave.

The key to running a business is to stay hands-on. If you really want to make something happen, you've got to lead by example. Even if you're the CEO, you've got to answer the

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phone.

Nobody in the music business ever calls you up and says, "Look, youngster, I hear you're in the music business. Here's my number, and if you need anything, let me know."

Never give up. Whether it's sports or fighting, you're gonna win.

Any time you do time and get out, just to hear a car run and smell gasoline is a blessing.

The only time you see women in prison, they're in police clothes. And they're big women.

Some guys have it real fucked up in prison, real hard. Some guys will be doing somebody's laundry. Some guys will be on their stomach with the pillow in their mouth. Some guys will be getting stabbed. If you're a man on the streets and you eat well, you'll eat well in prison. It just might be different food.

If me and Puffy Combs were on a deserted island together, it would be cool. I wouldn't have to tell him nothing. He would get the fish, cook the fish, get the firewood, start the fire.

My pit bulls and my rottis love me 'cause I wrassle with their asses. If they bite me, I'll bite 'em back.

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More to follow

The story goes on.

History is yet to be wrote.

Click the LOGO to see our Death Row Pic's