

Hip-Hop's Young Boss Rap Artist Crooked I Interview

Written by Robert ID2598

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One of the west coasts most over looked hip-hop artists is rap artist Crooked I. He is well known for his lyrical flow and gangsta like persona among his large world wide fan base. He has been a staple on the west coast hip-hop and rap music scene for over 10 years.

His years of being in the hip-hop music game has left him with a trail of let downs and learning experiences that have just made him more committed and focused; not only as a rap artist but also as a businessman.

Recently Crooked I left legendary Death Row Records; a place he called home and repped for over 4 ½ years. His time spent on Death Row was a learning experience and his leaving Death Row Records seems to have opened many doors for this rap artist from Long Beach.

The business side of Crooked I is his L.A. based record label Dynasty Records and the hip-hop side of Crooked I is his talent as a rap artist.

Fans are watching every move Crooked I makes now as they eagerly await some of his long anticipated projects. A new mix tape, an album and the DVD 'Life After Death Row' are just some of the projects on Crooked I's agenda.

Since fans and the industry are watching and waiting, we had the chance to sit and ask 'The Young Rap Boss' from Long Beach about the time frame of these projects and many others that he has lined up.

I'd like to thank Crooked I for his time and his whole camp for hooking this interview up.

ThugLifeArmy.com – First off, thank you for taking time to speak with us.

Crooked I – I appreciate your time. I got to be out here for the peeps. I got to promote and

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spread the word.

ThugLifeArmy.com – What was it that made you want to pursue a career in the music business as a rap artist.

Crooked I – When I was about 4 or 5, I had managed to learn the words to some old school Sugar Hill Gang songs and I use to just rap them around the house. My mother was a singer so she was musically inclined, around the house singing and she played the piano; so music was always in the family. I grabbed onto hip-hop as a youngster, I mean I was a die hard hip-hop fan. Ever since I can remember I was a hip-hop fan; that was my first experience with music hip-hop.

ThugLifeArmy.com – Who were and are you're major influences in your music and style.

Crooked I – What really influences my style to me is life. I get inspired by anything. I look at situations where you got people out here who are homeless, crooked politicians, you have corrupt police officers; that might inspire me to write a song. Then you have different positive things that inspire me. I soak up life like a sponge man and that's what really inspires me to write; but as far as artists go, all the greats man. Everybody knows pretty much who does damage in this game and who has done damage, and who is bringing genius level material to the game. Of course artists like Ice Cube, Rakim, KRS-1, Public Enemy and the production work of people like Dr. Dre, DJ Premiere. Even if you take it to the south with the Outkast, and the Dungeon Family; you know people who really make classic material – that's who really inspire me, it ain't nobody from one certain region.

ThugLifeArmy.com – Your complex lyrical style grabbed you a lot of attention among fans with tracks like 'Rap Killer', but is it true the first song you ever recorded was when you were 8 years old titled 'Microphone Controller'?

Crooked I – Yeah man (laughs), that's the truth. Ya did some home work on your boi. Yeah that definitely is the truth; 'Microphone Controller' was the first song I recorded. My mother and her twin sister, my aunt rest in peace, they put me in the studio when I was 8 years old and I did the Microphone Controller and that was the first time I recorded a rap song. I felt good, went home playing it and I pretty much knew I wanted to do this and pursue this since then; because no

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matter what I ended up doing in my life, I always came back to the music.

ThugLifeArmy.com - When did you get serious with your rap career?

Crooked I – My mom's use to move a lot. I was born in Long Beach (California). We left Long Beach when I was young and we moved around a lot to different cities. I was serious as a kid, or I thought I was, but there is not to much opportunity in middle America like it is in L.A. or New York and different places. So moving around kinda detoured me off of the music. But when I turned 15 I moved back to Long Beach with my older brother and by 16 I had my own apartment, was out hustling on the street and I got my first independent record deal at 17; so that's when I started getting real serious. I started putting music together in the studio, making albums and projects. Pretty much from 16 or 17 I have been dead on it.

ThugLifeArmy.com – If we look back in your career it seems that things have always been against you. The deal you had at Trybe/Virgin fell thru, you were in talks with Dr. Dre for a deal at Aftermath that didn't go anywhere, then you were talking to Daz about Doggy Style Records and that fell thru, and then in 1999 signed with Suge at Death Row Records and that turned out not so good. How do all the past deals and miss deals affect you as an artist?

Crooked I – Ya know what man; I learned a whole lot on that journey right there; it's been full of up's and down's. On one hand I got to be thankful that I am still here, I'm still in the game and I'm still somebody who matters when it comes to west coast rap – I got to be thankful for that. And on the other hand it's frustrating to do all these deals and not to get to put the music out to the people. I mean I go everywhere dawg. I'm in Hawaii, in New York and there are people like you all who are like we just want to hear an album and the whole thing is that it is very frustrating; it almost seems like a curse at some point. Like 'damn they got a fucking curse on my shit', ya know what I'm saying. But that's the thing, it just builds character. I learned a hell of a lot so I am probably a little wiser than the average artist. I definitely see things and it kept me on my toes. You got to know if your not putting out platinum hits, for you to matter and for you to hold a position on your coast you gotta be hitting those streets real tough. Your material has to be on point, you got to have your skill level right. A lot of rappers started at the same time as me and their skill level has kinda fell off since then, but I always got to make sure that my 'sword' is sharpened and sharp as ever because I haven't put an album out, I haven't sold millions of records. It's like every time I step into the booth I got something to prove, ya feel me. It has been frustrating; it would be a lie if I sat up in here and said it was nothing. Sometimes I hear cats do interviews and they are like 'it's nuttin, I just started yesterday and now I'm platinum' or some cats say 'it took me along time to get on but it ain't nothing, we fitting to get this money', naw that's some bullshit. You go through up's and down's. Your human, you have personal

Hip-Hop's Young Boss Rap Artist Crooked I Interview

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relationships – the music industry has affected all my relationships with women. The Hollywood people in the industry and the fake people and the true people you come across it is one great big experience and I will probably have a nice book after it is all said and done.

ThugLifeArmy.com – How do you contribute such a world wide fan base for never putting an album out?

Crooked I – The thing about it is I have been on a lot of projects. I've been on soundtracks, I've been compilations, and I've been on peoples albums. I put out mix tapes, I've leaked stuff on the internet. I've done a lot of work in the South with local artists in the southern region. I have done work with local cats in New York and east coast – I just work ya know. The other day one of my fans on the site posted a discography of 81 songs and that was just songs I was on that he knew of; there is tons of other songs out there. I think it is the work ethic. That's one thing, Suge use to always compare my work ethic to Tupac (2Pac), when it comes to going into the studio; and I really think that is one thing that really kept me alive.

ThugLifeArmy.com – When you signed with Death Row Records was it a straight 4 year deal or was there a number of albums you were to do?

Crooked I – There were a number of albums I was suppose to do. The contract was breeched in all kinds of ways, as far as no albums ever being put out; that's a breech. You just can't hold a person on the record label without releasing no material; cause that is what the whole deal is about. But my whole thing was I'm not going to trip on the breeches because I stayed loyal. It was like a 3 album contract with an option for the contract to be extended if we where both happy with the outcome of the 3 albums. But no albums came out. So after 4 years and some change you can only take so much.

ThugLifeArmy.com – What were the issues that kept your albums from dropping on Death Row Records?

Crooked I – To me Suge Knight is use to being successful. He's use to selling a lot of records. I am going to go on the record and tell you and this is only my personal opinion, this is how I view it: You got a guy who sells millions of records, a very competitive businessman. You give him an artist that the industry has stamped. From here to the East Coast the industry said 'Ok this dude

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Crooked I is a good artist'; alright seems like a recipe for success BUT if you don't have the right distribution in place you might not be able to sell those kinds of units that you want to sell. And I really believe that that was a big problem because you see Death Row at the time, and I believe still is, was going through Koch Distribution. Nobody on Koch has ever sold a million records with one project. Like Koch Records puts out projects and they sell like 200,000 copies. They sell like 100 200 thousand copies; they make 7 bucks an album. It makes fine business sense to go over there and get \$800,000.00 off of 100,000 units, if your getting \$8.00, but that wouldn't be big enough for a Death Row record release. 100,000 units would never fly in the public's eye. 200,000 is not going to fly, not when Tupac (2Pac) put up the kind of numbers he did, and he's a legend, and the Dr. Dre days and the Snoop Dogg days and everybody putting up these millions of albums sold. And then here you come out of the penitentiary Suge Knight as a mogul and your getting on TV; your on Jimmy Kimmel, your on Howard Stern, your on MTV, on BET and your saying I got the best artists on the west coast Crooked. And then you put out the album and it only sells 200,000 – 300,000 at best; not because it is not a good album but because Koch is not really set up to sell millions of records. So that's the whole thing; I really believe that he, (Suge), knew in his mind that it wasn't going to happen. You have to remember that we put some 'testers' out. We put the "Dysfunktional Family" soundtrack out. We put out a few other things and nothing really hit past 100 thousand. So I just don't see Suge being comfortable with selling 100 – 200 thousand records. And I don't believe he will ever put out any rapper on Koch, until he gets a bigger distribution situation. I don't think any rapper is going to come out over there. Now if they do come out, I think he's, (Suge), quickly going to blame their failure on Koch. I mean he is know for selling millions of records that's just point blank. That was one thing. Another thing was a lot of people don't want to see Suge successful; and that's just the bottom line. A lot of people in the industry are intimidated by Suge. In his face they might say 'yeah, yeah we'll do what ever ya want', but when the door shuts their saying 'we're not messing with that guy' – 'We're not doing anything with that dude'; because a lot of people got comfortable when he was in the penitentiary. A lot of money was made. Hip-hop went to another level over those 5 years that he did in the penitentiary. When he went in it was basically him and Puffy. When he came out it was him, Puffy, Baby, Slim, Jay-Z, Master P; there were a lot of different moguls out there. A lot of people were making more money. Hip-hop was a bigger market; things had changed, and a lot of the exec's behind those desk were scared of him (Suge). And it didn't have anything to do with him being in there acting crazy, it is just that corporate America is sometimes not designed for a 6 foot 3 football player from Compton to walk through the building and make demands; wither it's the right demands or the wrong demands. So they get intimidated, but I blame them for being intimidated because we are all men. Don't be intimidated, but they do and then they don't want to do business. And it is very hard to do business when people are out to 'Black Ball' the CEO of the company; that is what they were trying to do. He could keep himself in the game because he's a multi-millionaire. But at the same time just look man: unfortunately Tupac (2Pac) passed away in 1996 and it's 2006. It's been 10 years and not one successful solo project has come out of Death Row.

ThugLifeArmy.com – Out of the music you recorded at Death Row Records will we ever hear any of it in the future?

Hip-Hop's Young Boss Rap Artist Crooked I Interview

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Crooked I – I believe so. I mean Suge is a businessman. If I go out here and do what I got to do and sell a couple of million records, he is going to go and put that music out because there will be a bigger demand for Crooked I music at that point. So if I sell a couple of million records he will probably put it out and he will have to pay me something. He just can't put it out and I don't get nothing. He would probably have to give me half of what ever comes back. And my whole thing is a lot of artist don't like that because they say Ok this dude is trying to confuse the market or he's trying to put it out at the same time while their putting my album out making the consumer confusing going and get that album instead of this one. A lot of people have used that tactic against artists to hurt their record sales but me personally I'm not even tripping like that. I got so much faith in what I do and what kind of movement I am creating right now and the kind of Dynasty I am creating right now that I don't even feel threatened by that. So it's like 'put it out', especially if it keeps you doing your thing. You feel like you invested some money in my career, I got out of there without having to pay one dime, he don't make no money off any records that I put together – so it's like why not get you a little change back off what ever you invested. I'm a fair businessman, I'm a businessman. I'm not trying to get over on anybody; I just got to get mine.

ThugLifeArmy.com – Are you and Suge Knight on good terms now that all the legal aspects of you leaving Death Row are resolved?

Crooked I – We are not really on no terms. I've seen him at like a restaurant – the other day he was standing right behind me and didn't know it. I walked in the club, he walked in the club and that was that. We are on no terms; ya know what I'm saying. I don't really talk to him about anything, he don't talk to me. It is what it is. My whole thing is it is a business move. Everybody has to make moves to better their own personal business, and that was a business move. I imagine that some people from his organization may not like me but I can't control their feelings, I just know how I feel. I ain't tripping, I'm out here grinding, trying to hustle and get mine.

ThugLifeArmy.com – You acted as CEO for awhile when Suge was in lock down didn't you?

Crooked I – Naw I didn't. See at the time Suge was locked down Reggie Wright was running Death Row. But I did tell Suge that I felt that he should give me an executive role over there. And there was another guy named Darren Vegas over there, we both talked to Suge about getting executive roles. You get to the point where you want to have some say so over what goes down. You want to at least bring your ideas to the table and make sure that everything gets considered. Because we were all in that together, so I thought that would have been a

Hip-Hop's Young Boss Rap Artist Crooked I Interview

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Monday, 08 May 2006 22:08 -

good move. Had Suge gave me certain things maybe we could have figured out a way for me not to leave Death Row Records. Maybe if he would have gave me my own label thru Death Row and something like a million dollars to start it. I mean it took him some money to start his label, it takes everybody money to start labels. So if he would have done something like that or brought something like that to the table then maybe we could have continued doing business; but it didn't go down like that. I just felt like it could have all ended better though, cause you got a guy – man I'm from Long Beach. Like I say in all my interviews Long Beach is a Crip City – period. There are no Bloods in Long Beach, and Death Row is thought to be a Blood affiliated label. So just being on Death Row Records could create problems in Long Beach. Especially during the times when Snoop wasn't getting along with Suge, cause you got a lot of people in Long Beach who support Snoop; so they want to say fuck Death Row too. The whole time that I was on Death Row I lived in Long Beach – my home city – my town; so I got in a lot of confrontations. Then you got people in Compton, which you know is where Suge is from, that don't like Death Row. So I would get into confrontations with people all the time; physical confrontations just by my affiliation with a record label. Sometimes it would escalate to violence. So it was like 'ok I got all this violent shit going on where I got to watch my back every fucking where I go. People are looking at my Death Row Chain as a trophy and they are wanting to get that muther fucker from me. They want to go back to their hood and say yo I got this Death Row Chain, wither it be by they took it from me, jumped me, shot me whatever. I'm doing all this; I'm on the front line, I'm representing this company, I'm making all the music I need to make, I'm in here writing for different artists – who ever he asked me to write something for, I'm doing everything I got to do – but we are not putting out a record and we're not sticking to the agreement. Like I said I have gone to venues and walked in and they have told me to walk back out. Like yo we are not having any Death Row in this building, and I would be by myself. It wasn't like I was with 20 guys or nothing, just cause I was from Death Row the whole venue would be closed to me; like just get up out of here. With that said there were a lot of up's and down's, but for the record not to come out and for us not to have a major machine to push the record it was like 'yo, ok well your done now, it's time for you to jump in the drivers seat and take off with your career. Because you put in your time over here but it's time to go.

ThugLifeArmy.com – Well you brought up Darren Vegas, he left Tha Row because of the Nu-Mixx Klazzics right?

Crooked I – (Laughs) Naw that's a new one on me. Naw he didn't put that out. He couldn't put that out, he didn't have the power to put that out. He produced a lot of songs on that Nu-Mixx Klazzics but let me tell you something. Do you think that anybody has power over Suge Knight? Think about that. That dude don't have no power to nothing out and if it's Suge Knight's company – naw he didn't have no. That Nu-Mixx Klazzics was kool but to me it could have been way tighter. But that was one of the things I was talking about over there. It was like yo we are not even suppose to touch this Tupac (2Pac) music cause it's classics for real. Now if we are going to touch it, it better be a damn good touch ya feel me? And it's not my label so I just got to sit back and watch. But I would make suggestions cause that's what it is. I wanted to see Suge

Hip-Hop's Young Boss Rap Artist Crooked I Interview

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succeed because in him succeeding I was going to succeed. So I would make suggestions but at the end of the day it is his label, he do what he wants to do.

ThugLifeArmy.com – Are you relieved to be where you are now and to have Dynasty Records?

Crooked I – Yeah man it is a big relief because it got so serious out there in them streets that it could have went either way. It could have went either way for me. I could have got mixed up in some similar shit that Tupac (2Pac) did. If your going to rep something and your going to stay down with something and your going to live and die for something and your going to risk it all; then it better be a damn good something, ya feel me. Dynasty is my family. These are people who have been with me no matter what label I'm on, no matter where I'm going, no matter what the situation – these people and my circle we got an organization COB – Circle of Bosses. These people right here have been with me forever so I'm willing to do whatever. It is whatever when it comes to that. I am willing to risk it all because I know it is a solid camp and I know we all share the same vision; and I can make decisions. That's what it is really all about. When Suge started Death Row he was in his 20's. He was in his late 20's and started an empire with Dr. Dre. He (Suge) made the decisions. Ok, I'm in my 20's. I want to start an empire and make decisions. So yeah I am very relieved. Let me tell you something dawg, when I was on Death Row a lot of old woman, a lot of people would pray for me all the time, give me holy water, give me blessed oil, give me scripture out of the bible because it was a place where people die, people go to jail and a lot of people want to see me succeed because they know that I am the type of an artist who is going to give something back to the community. I'm not trying to rape the hip-hop community without giving something back like a lot of these cats. So yeah it was a big relief and it was a relief for other people to. The thing is just having the power to make your own decisions. Hey if I'm going to crash into a brick wall it's going to be because I was driving the car, ya know. That right there is the biggest relief.

ThugLifeArmy.com – Since you left Death Row you have official released Young Boss Vol.1 and now you have Young Boss Vol.2 ready to drop with Dj Skee hosting vol. 2, how did the two of you hook up?

Crooked I – Somebody gave him my phone number and he reached out and I went by and checked him out. He had been doing a lot of the mix tapes for Game. He did the mix tapes with Ghost Unit and all that kind of stuff. I was familiar with him from that and he was familiar with me – so once we hooked up it was a real kool thing cause not only is he a good dj, he has a good business mind; and he is really die hard for this hip-hop music. Once we hooked up we just went from there. We knocked out the mix tape in like three days, like 19 joints. But then some guy at the studio dropped my hard drive and that erased my whole mix tape so I had to

Hip-Hop's Young Boss Rap Artist Crooked I Interview

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Monday, 08 May 2006 22:08 -

re-record it.

ThugLifeArmy.com – Oh, is that why it was pushed back?

Crooked I – Yeah that's why it was pushed back. He destroyed the hard drive so I had to go through it all over again.

ThugLifeArmy.com – When can we expect it to be released?

Crooked I – It has already leaked all over the internet but you should see it within the next week. I think it's done packaging. A lot of them I am just going to be handing out for free where ever I go.

ThugLifeArmy.com – Do you have any featured artists on Young Boss Vol.2?

Crooked I – I got all my crew. There's the Horse Shoe Gang. I got On-1-Squad. I got my god brother Jim Gittum, who does gospel rap, he spit a verse on there. I wanted to just shine some light on my camp because the west coast, I don't know if you noticed it, but it is just a lot of the same people. You don't really see that many new people. You don't see like in the south how everybody is coming up; fresh faces, fresh artists, fresh producers, same with the east. The west we've been real slow, we haven't been on our job with putting out brand new artists and making sure that we all help to make sure that each artist is successful. We haven't been on our job in that manner, to me. So I'm going to put shine on my people and that's what I did. Obviously I could have got some features, I have good relationships, but I just wanted to do that and the same thing with the album. I'm dealing with brand new producers, brand new artists and if we win that way then that will be the birth of more and more careers right there on that project.

ThugLifeArmy.com – The 'heated' topic among fans is the album Boss Music. When can we expect that to drop?

Hip-Hop's Young Boss Rap Artist Crooked I Interview

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Monday, 08 May 2006 22:08 -

Crooked I – I'm looking at August, because I want everything to be right. The people out there that are fans and that are supporting what I am doing, what I really want them to know is there is a lot of politics in the industry. You got a lot of cats who got these major labels and their doing their political thing. When you're an independent label you got to market your stuff a little different and you have to strategize a lot more to make sure you can get in there and compete with the big cats. So I'm making sure of crossing all my T's and dotting my i's right now and making sure that everything is right. The first single will be out, we are servicing radio with it the middle of this month. It's called 'New West Anthem', NWA – 'New West Anthem'. You will be hearing that single and the B side is called Stra8 Bosses which is like a Tupac (2Pac) remake to Stra8 Ballin. Those 2 songs will be hitting radio airwaves and we are really going to start pumpin, pumpin, pumpin. And we are looking at July/August for the album and I have the power to drop it whenever we feel the time is right.

ThugLifeArmy.com – Which artists are featured, if any, on that album?

Crooked I – I got some good surprises. I got Bun B, I had a joint with Jadakiss, I don't know if that is still going to make the cut. Just know this we got artists from each region, I should say a boss from each region representing. My whole thing though was just to come out here and show the industry that you can get down for yours by yourself to. Don't have to many features. I don't have to many features cause my whole thing is I need to showcase what I can do on this microphone my dude and what I got is going to shut them down. The album is incredible and it's a diverse album and it is going to set a whole bunch of new trends on the west coast. It will feature production by Jim Gittum, Komplex, Scott Storch, and others. You know people been biting me on the west coast since I first started in this shit because I was underground, so they thought ok we can bite this cat and put it in the main stream and make people think that we came up with all this shit, ya feel me. But this album is going to set so many trends and I am very proud of this album. I feel like this album right here is going to be put next to albums like America's Most Wanted, Death Certificate, next to albums like The Chronic, Reasonable Doubt; they are going to put this album right next to them.

ThugLifeArmy.com – How many tracks will be on it?

Crooked I – I got 19 tracks on there. Sometimes when you do 19 songs people say oh he should have just had 14 or 13, but my whole thing is fuck the formulas ya know. All these formulas that you are suppose to have like 3 16 bars verses and hooks, 14 songs on a classic album – to many songs and it ain't going to be a classic – fuck that. People still love music, there are still some people out there who still love music; and I'm going to give them the fucking music. So don't be surprised if you get 19 joints on my album and a bonus CD with 8 more

Hip-Hop's Young Boss Rap Artist Crooked I Interview

Written by Robert ID2598
Monday, 08 May 2006 22:08 -

joints that didn't make the album. That's what I'm about, I'm about giving the people the music because one day we are not going to be here and people are going to have to look back and see what the fuck was going on in those times in a different era – and they are going to be able to crack open a Crooked I album, blow the dust off of it and they are going to know what the fuck was good with the West Coast when they do.

ThugLifeArmy.com – Will the track 'Gangsta's Holiday' be on Boss Music or was that just a sample?

Crooked I – Naw that won't be on there. Man I just did that for the people because I felt nobody is talking about nothing these days. Especially over here on the west, and I keep checking the west cause my whole thing is I love the West – I love this shit. If you cut me I will bleed California – period. I want the next artist to read the interview; I want the next artist to hear me saying this shit. We aren't doing a lot of shit over here that we need to be doing and one of the things we need to be doing is speaking on real shit besides fucking bitches, smoking, and drinking and clubbing. A lot of these cats sign a big major deal and they get 9 million dollars to promote themselves and all that shit, and selling all these records – all that's cool but you can't say I don't fuck with Arnold Schwarzenegger fuck him, you can't say that on your record. Because if you say that they are going to tell you to take it off, but Crooked I can say that. I can say I really ain't feeling the LAPD and these mutherfuckin corrupt cops out here in Long Beach and I can say that I don't think that we should be going to war for oil, and I can say leave them fucking immigrants alone – cause everybody is an immigrant out in this bitch. I can say all that shit but a lot of rappers can't say that, they have a gag order on them; a corporate gag order.

ThugLifeArmy.com – Will 'Boss Music' be released on Dynasty Records and is it in any way connected with your Death Row contract.

Crooked I – No it is not connected with the Death Row contract and it will be released on Dynasty. The Death Row contract is over with. Suge opted to send me a cease and desist, because I was first going to release Boss Music earlier. When the ad's came out he saw the ad's, somebody told him so Death Row put a cease and desist order on me which stopped the whole process. Once the whole process got stopped then my distributors told me hey you got to go to court and fix this. We're not moving on nothing until this is fixed. So once he put the cease and desist paper work on me we had to take it to court. We took it to court. It was an eleven month issue. And at the end the judge said Crooked has fulfilled all of his obligations to Death Row Records. He is a free man, let him do what he do; Death Row don't get in his way let him do what he do. And it disappointed me that we had to take it to court. It really did disappoint me because my whole thing was come on man I was over there for 4 and a half years, I wrote

Hip-Hop's Young Boss Rap Artist Crooked I Interview

Written by Robert ID2598
Monday, 08 May 2006 22:08 -

countless songs. It would be 3 in the morning I'd be done. I'd be in bed in my bed at 4 in the morning sleeping, just did a million songs in the studio, Suge would call me 'Yo, can you come to the studio man, I got some mutherfuckers out here and they doing some shit, I don't like how it sounds. Man I need you to get on this shit'. WHAT it's 4 in the morning, I live in Long Beach – the studio is in North Hollywood. You want me to get up? Alright man. Put my shoes on, get up, go down there do what I got to do and not leave the studio till the crack of dawn. Just the type of loyalty I displayed, just the type of creativity that I brought to the table and just the respect I got the label; because let me tell you something man – they thought Tha Row was washed up. A lot of people on the west coast was like Tha Row will never be nothing again until I signed that contract over there. So after all that it's like come on dude your going to put a piece of paper on me to try to silence me. Just let me do what I do homie. I'm not down here trying to trash your name. I'm not out here trying to talk negatively about your organization; because to me all that is just a shield. To me when dudes do that, that's like they are really hiding behind something. To me when a guy walks out and says fuck Death Row and this and that in an interview he is appearing to look tuff but he ain't tuff. Cause he knows that since he said fuck Death Row that if he trips over a fucking piece of wood and busts his lip the cops are going to blame Death Row. So they use that as a protective shield. So it's marketing plus it's a shield for them dudes. I'm not out here yelling no fuck Death Row, I'm not out here on none of that type of shit; I'm out here a young man trying to build a business that he can pass down for generations – that is what I'm out here doing. I am trying to make classic music. I'm trying to show the west coast how to stand up and unify with each other and quit faking like their unified, and I'm trying to make good music and give back to the community and trying to keep it hood on top of all that – so that's the business.

ThugLifeArmy.com – Other than the Horse Shoe Gang do you have other artists signed to to your label that we can look to for upcoming projects.

Crooked I – Yep, I got a group called the On-One-Squad. They are coming out of Watts. They are a Crip and a Blood in a group together. They are coming out the hood with their hood shit. I'm loving it because it is a Crip and a Blood and it's showing some unity. We're not going to solve the gang bangin problem by ourselves, we can't do it. It is to deeply rooted, to many lives have been taken, to much shit has gone on, to many people have been shot, stabbed, beat up, broke bones ever since the 70's and even before that. We will never stop it but to display for the new generation that so called enemies can get along and have a lab group together, that's a powerful message to send to the new generation to maybe let them see that hey it's cool to be unified too. The way I was raised is if a mutherfucker fuck with you then you get busy but other than that treat everybody with respect.

ThugLifeArmy.com – Can you give us an update on what the Horse Shoe Gang has and is up to

Hip-Hop's Young Boss Rap Artist Crooked I Interview

Written by Robert ID2598
Monday, 08 May 2006 22:08 -

Crooked I – I got them in the studio. Let me tell you something about the Horse Shoe Gang them dudes go into the studio and they knock down work, it's amazing. They knock down their work, they study their craft, they have their head on right and they want to make a big impact in the industry; and they will make a big impact on the industry. So they are in the studio just cooking up that bomb bomb, ready to serve them on a platter and do what they do. I'm looking forward and people will hear a lot more from them this summer. We are going out on a summer tour and they will be with me backing me up all the way. When I'm doing the promo tour for the single and with everything I'm doing they will be right there backing me up. So they will be more visible and they are working man. I got nothing but luv for them dudes cause they could be out here fucking up somewhere in the streets but instead they are in the studio working.

ThugLifeArmy.com – I awhile back I got the trailer for your DVD 'Life After Death Row', is that still coming and when can we expect it to drop.

Crooked I – Yeah August 11th it will be everywhere. PLEASE go and pick that up. It's my first time as a producer of a DVD film. I'm trying to bring more and more DVD's to the table, not just about that kind of shit but just period. It's a nice piece. Everybody that has seen it is impressed with it, it's a hot piece. So I need everybody to go smash that up. It is really just turning a negative into a positive. I spent 4 ½ years on Death Row, I didn't come out with an album, I didn't get to solidify myself as one of the west coast's greatest of all time, which is on my agenda by the way, so I just said instead of just sitting back and being mad about it, I'll go out here and tell my story and get some money off of it.

ThugLifeArmy.com – I was talking to Johnny "J" and your name came up and he said that you were a dope rap artist and he would love to hook up with you. Is that something that might interest you; working with Johnny "J"?

Crooked I – Aw man no doubt. I would love to work with Johnny "J". Let me tell ya something, when I was on Virgin one time I got a CD from Johnny "J"; he sent it to Virgin. They let me hear it and I told them look man I need this beat right here; this beat this beat. They were like a naw we don't know, this beat might not be that hot. Next thing ya know I think it was one of Tupac's biggest hits. (laughs). I got nothing but respect for that dudes work.

ThugLifeArmy.com – I know you didn't get to Death Row until after Tupac (2Pac) passed, but

Hip-Hop's Young Boss Rap Artist Crooked I Interview

Written by Robert ID2598
Monday, 08 May 2006 22:08 -

did you ever meet or work with Tupac (2Pac)?

Crooked I – Yeah man, being from Long Beach and being in this music shit I was at a lot of sessions with Snoop as part of Snoop's entourage, that is how I met 2Pac. We would go to like Larabees or where ever they were recording at and if Pac was in there ya know we would go in and chop it up with Pac. The first night I met him, he and Snoop was recording a St. Ives commercial together. And I always wanted to meet that dude because I was a Tupac fan from when he dropped 2Pacalypse Now, Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z, before he got to Death Row I was a huge Pac fan, I always felt his music. When I met him that day it was a cool experience. Of course I know all the Outlawz and all of Thug Life. I met his mother as well. I got an opportunity to go to Afeni Shakur's house when I was on Death Row. Let me tell ya something dawg, maybe this is my niche. Maybe I am going to be the only cat that tells the whole fucking truth. People don't want to talk about the truth, I mean Tupac (2Pac) – a lot of these artists are different shades of Tupac. But none of them are a complete package like he was. I am just going to be real about it. A lot of these dudes, you have some guys they got the shirt off, the tattoos and the six pack like Pac. Then you got some guys who make songs like I Get Around and How Do You Want It, like Pac. BUT they don't make the Dear MaMa's or the Ambitious As A Rider's. When I sit back and study the game I see about 5 artists that I could put all in one person and it would be Tupac. But I think they purposely do it to make that bread, I really do.

ThugLifeArmy.com – There are no artists really who have the charisma that he (Tupac) had. He could pull a crowd, black white it didn't matter.

Crooked I – Naw they don't. Yeah it didn't matter and they knew that shit. But they don't have the passion that he got. Let me tell you something dawg, these dudes don't give a fuck about the community and the hood either. They just want to get out that mutherfucker and come back and floss on everybody that's still stuck in that bitch. That type of shit shows the people will never be fooled, even though they might like your music that's as far as it goes. People liked Tupac (2Pac) as a person though. Everybody felt like Tupac was their home boi, instead of a person that they just listened to as just music. If you buy a Tupac record, you kinda feel like Tupac was your home boi. But when he passed away it was almost like your good friend passed away. And a lot of these artists they are not on that level and will never be on that level, because the thing is they are just trying to rape the game, or they are just trying to hustle the game or they are trying to make a quick buck and they don't have their heart and soul in their shit. That's the difference between these dudes; you have to have your heart and soul in this shit. You have to be a real person, and these niggaz can't even go back to their home neighborhoods. That's just real talk ya know. Right now as I'm talking to you I'm driving my car through Long Beach. And I'll hop out anywhere. I don't give a fuck who is standing on the corner or what's going on, and they know it. And that's what it is all about, it's about being able to come back and show the kids and the community something other than the average drug dealer that I

Hip-Hop's Young Boss Rap Artist Crooked I Interview

Written by Robert ID2598

Monday, 08 May 2006 22:08 -

saw growing up. Show them somebody successful, show them somebody who is successful who is doing something legitimate and show them that they can do it to. Inspire them 'hey you can do this shit, just put in your work and you can do this, you can have this Bentley GT right here. But that artist doesn't exist on a higher level. Man these dudes out here, you should see them, they zoom by the ghetto. I mean mutherfucken zoom. Not even just the ghetto, I mean by their fans, by people who look up to them. I remember Tupac being active in the community. These dudes aren't active in the community. That's not their thing. They think it's all about greasing up and getting in front of that mutherfuckin camera with a million tattoos and dancing around and shit. That's what they think it's about, but it ain't about that.

ThugLifeArmy.com – Are there other artists out there that you are looking forward to hooking up with or some that you may already hooked up with that we don't know about?

Crooked I – I am really liking the New West movement. I made the song called 'New West Anthem' before I even started hearing people say New West, but now New West is starting to be something to be said. There is this young cat Mykestro, Battlecat's little brother, real tight. Bishop Lamont, I got respect for him. He is on Aftermath now, tight cat. My home girl Coniyac from Doggy's Angels, they are all doing different stuff solo. All of them they got shit they are bringing to the table right now, I get down with all of them. I get down with everybody man: Yukmouth, E-40, I get down with everybody. But there is a lot more to come. There are not too many on the west that I haven't done a song with, and there is more to come. I want to try to be somebody who symbolizes that unified unity. We talk that unity but we are not really unified. Don't be half way unified; don't try to make it look good for the cameras. Be for real about it. If I got a record out and you and another west coast artist are doing an interview and they ask you what you think about that record, if you truly like the record tell them I like that record man, man we should play that. Or let's organize and talk to these program directors down here and make them understand why they need to play more west coast music over here on our side of the map. Lets organize and put together some shows so the up and coming generation can get paid just like we are getting paid; we need to do that kind of shit dawg. But these dudes over here front, a lot of cats front; and I don't give a fuck who don't like what I'm saying – a lot of cats front like it's all good for the camera but then once the camera goes off they don't ever talk to each other or fuck with each other again. It's like damn ya all mutherfuckers where hopping around on 106 and Park on that video like you were all unified and shit, now that same mutherfucker that came down to your video and put that can't even get a mix tape verse from each other. And that's the real deal, the real truth. So my thing is we got to change that man. We have to change that, I mean the south sticks together in all walks. I'm out there and these cats from the south are sticking together, they are bringing business to each other – cause that's what it takes to thrive; they are bringing opportunity to each other. Fuck it, they are just having a mutherfucking picnic and bar-b-q with all the people having fun, hanging out and throwing parties with each other. Man the west coast clubs are a fucking ghost town out here man. You go inside a club out here, you are not going to see none of the west coast artists inside mutherfucker. I look around and the dj has said Crooked I is in the house 20 times because I'm the only one in the

Hip-Hop's Young Boss Rap Artist Crooked I Interview

Written by Robert ID2598
Monday, 08 May 2006 22:08 -

house. We need to get back in there. We need to show the people, we need to be with our people man. Our people are out here partying and doing their thing – and we need to be amongst our people man. That's just how it go.

ThugLifeArmy.com – I had heard that Game wanted you to be a part of MOB with Theclenic and Eastwood, was there any truth to that?

Crooked I – Yeah there was. They stepped to me about it. At first Game had stepped to me about doing a solo effort or something like that and it was mainly Jimmy Henchman, which is his manager, hollering at me about it. I talked to Game about it as well, it didn't work out but I got a lot of luv for Game. I got a lot of luv for Game and I know some people have mixed opinions about him but I got a lot of luv for Game because Game knows how to rap; that's one thing. West coast happens to be in a time warp sometimes, we need to get out of that shit. Sometimes it's like we are in a time warp but the mutherfucker knows how to rap and for what ever reason – if your on 50 Cents side or his side – hey he felt strongly about something and he did what he did and he smashed for his. But at the same time I got a lot of luv for him but the little deal didn't work out because I am so comfortable being a boss that it is hard for me to just step back and not be one. I mean I got some say so. If I want to put an advertisement on some toilet paper, I can do that shit. And when you get yourself in another situation you may not have any elbow room, you got to follow orders. It's not that I am not the kind of guy who thinks I know everything and have to be in control, because I'm not a control freak, but to have the power to have a vision and try to bring it to life that's valuable; and I just can't give that up just yet. But I do foresee me and Game possibly doing some business in the future. I see that because I like the dude.

ThugLifeArmy.com – That's one of the cool things about talking to you because it gives me an unique opportunity to talk to somebody who is just not a rap artist but you're a business man also. Since you are on both sides as an rap artist and a businessman, can you explain why west coast artists, for the most part, are ignored by the major's?

Crooked I – One the industry has put us on punishment man, over the death of Biggie and Tupac; let me tell you that. These are two of the greatest ever and both of them perished or got killed over here on this soil. And inside the industry there is a very bad taste in their mouth for west coast cats. Also when cats come to the west they are getting robbed and shit. Chains getting snatched, dudes getting jacked, getting robbed all the time. Now robbery goes on a lot of places but we are kinda notorious for that shit. The whole thing is you keep snatching chains up from all these dudes in the industry and the dudes in the industry aren't going to do no work with you. That type of shit right there is just hard. We can't be put on punishment for this type of shit.

Hip-Hop's Young Boss Rap Artist Crooked I Interview

Written by Robert ID2598

Monday, 08 May 2006 22:08 -

It's not me out here snatching chains. It ain't me out here – I have nothing to do with the unfortunate happenings, I'm just out here trying to do good business and resurrect my coast. Another reason why is the OG's, and this is my opinion and niggaz might not like what I got to say, but I just don't feel like the OG's are speaking up enough for the up and comers. When it comes to them corporate offices, when it comes to those places where the founding fathers of west coast hip-hop got juice and pull and power, I don't think they are going in there and using that power trying to make sure that they are preserving this hip-hop shit for the next generation of west coast MC's. I don't think they are using that power for that, I think that if they are not in your pocket, their not fucking with you. Now if you sign to them maybe they will go knock on a few doors and try to get you somewhere maybe. Name me one west coast artist who signed another west coast artist and that west coast artist sold a million records. No artist over here has ever did that. If Ludacris can sign Chingy and Chingy can sell 2 million, if Jay-Z can sign Kanye West and Kanye West can sell millions of records then why can't somebody over here do that. You just don't see it. They might sign somebody but they are not putting the big machine behind that person; they're not going all out. They're not utilizing everything they can utilize to do it. It isn't that they aren't good businessmen they just ain't fucking doing what they could do and that's the thing. I don't have to tell a lie, just look at it. The shit is right there in front of you. After the fall of Death Row, after Pac passed away; you got Xzibit, and Game and maybe Mack 10 to have some success in 10 years. You got 3 artists that you can consider kinda like new. I mean Snoop was already in it, Cube was already in it, Dre was already in it but as far as considered a new artist with some success in a ten year span, you can only name 2 or 3 people. Now you take that same 10 year span and move it to the east coast, I could name you gazillions of people. I could name you DMX and the whole Ruff Ryder camp, I could name you Murder Inc. , Ja Rule and all his camp, I could name you Jay Z and a slew of Roc-A-Fella camp; I could name you all kinds of people over there in that 10 year span. And in the south you know I could name you all kind of people with success in the south in the past 10 years. But when you look at the west success rate in the past 10 years we fail hella short. And nobody wants to face that shit. Everybody wants to act like it's all good, but it ain't at all good. And then I hear people yelling the west coast is back. Man the west coast ain't fucking back; you must think it's back cause you wasn't around when the west coast was doing their best thing. Cause when the west was doing their real thing everybody had record deals, there was 10 record deals in Long Beach alone. 10 Major record deals in Long Beach alone. You had Warren G, you had Nate Dogg, you had the Dove Shack, you had Crooked I, you had the Hostile , you had the 5 Footers, I mean the list goes on man. That's when the west was doing it. 10 record deals in Long Beach, 8 record deals in Compton; everybody had deals and the funny part about it – it trickled down to the street. Let me tell you something dawg, if you got 10 cats with record deals, then they got family members that they are feeding and employing, they got home boi's that they are employing with their money, they are taking ex-cons off the street and giving them jobs and so on and so on and it trickles down and actually makes the community better.

ThugLifeArmy.com – I got a few things here I would like you to update us on. What is going on with your company 'Roller Coaster Rims'?

Hip-Hop's Young Boss Rap Artist Crooked I Interview

Written by Robert ID2598
Monday, 08 May 2006 22:08 -

Crooked I – Roller Coaster Rims I put on pause for 2 seconds because I wanted to effect the market on the rap side real quick. And then I will go back and do the market on the rim side. We still have that in place, that is still going down, it is still all good. I just wanted to penetrate the rap market and then come back and fuck around with that.

ThugLifeArmy.com –What about Dynasty TV, is that still going?

Crooked I – Yeah, DynastyTV.com, you can go there and get all the updates, it's going strong.

ThugLifeArmy.com – I have also heard that you have a cameo role in a film titled 'Slumber Party'?

Crooked I – Yeah, that was just a little hood film. Slumber Party I did a little role in there, then I had the Bank Brothers, now I got a new one coming out it's called LBC. I do a little acting every now and then. I really don't know what the hell I'm doing on the screen though.

ThugLifeArmy.com – Is that something that interests you though?

Crooked I – Yeah, yeah it does because it's another form of expression. It's cool because I'm interested in getting influence, I'll be honest with you Robert. One thing that I'm interested in is gaining world wide influence. That way when I walk into a high school and I'm hollering at them cats about trying to do the right thing, they will be highly influenced by what I'm saying because they have seen me in movies, they have seen me in raps, they have seen me in videos; ya know what I mean. And that's another tool for that type of shit ya know.

ThugLifeArmy.com – If you were not blessed to be a lyricist or to be able to be in the music field, what do you see Crooked I doing now instead.

Crooked I – Man if I wasn't doing this right here, I'd probably be married to a billionaire bomb ass chick and using her money to travel all around the world and have fun. (laughs) And sit at

Hip-Hop's Young Boss Rap Artist Crooked I Interview

Written by Robert ID2598
Monday, 08 May 2006 22:08 -

the Lakers Game in floor seats and play playstation 2 on the plasma all day; not doing a damn thing. (both laugh)

ThugLifeArmy.com – Anything we missed that you would like to add or address.

Crooked I – Naw we kinda covered everything. I'm good, just everybody can check me at <http://www.westcoastdynasty.com>
. They can come holla at me at <http://www.myspace.com/crooked>
, I do holla at everybody on MySpace. And watch out for the DVD 'Life After Death Row' August 11
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in stores everywhere. I'm in the new issue of Smooth Magazine so pick that up. Just support this hip-hop shit and this street movement. Downloading is one thing but more important to me than the downloading issue is lets start checking out who we are supporting. Cause if we are giving these cats all this power and they are selling 3 million records but they are not giving nothing back, then that dude really don't deserve that. As fans, and I do it to, as fans we need to start checking out who we are giving all this power to man. There are a lot of situations right now in the community, we need to build more Boys Clubs, and more recreation centers and we need to do all that and rappers have enough money to do shit like that; and they are not doing it enough. So lets start checking out who we support.

ThugLifeArmy.com – Any Shout outs

Crooked I – Yeah yeah man. I am going to shout out all my COB's out there from the mid-west COB's my dude Ra Ra, Jazz. I am going to shout out my Oklahoma COB's Davis D, - East Coast COB's the entire COB family. We here Circle of Bosses and we are worldwide and just as I said on my site, you come to the video with the COB tattoo, your getting in the video. So all my peoples out there lets ride together.

ThugLifeArmy.com – Well we wish you all the best and I know that fans, not only west coast, but from west to east and all points in between and your world wide fan base are waiting for your projects to start dropping, and we wish you all the best. Peace and stay in touch

Hip-Hop's Young Boss Rap Artist Crooked I Interview

Written by Robert ID2598

Monday, 08 May 2006 22:08 -

Crooked I – Alright man and thank you man. I thank you for your time too. Hit me anytime you got the number so let me know.

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