

Late Hip-Hop Icons Family Deceived Court

Written by Robert ID2653

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A federal judge is now saying that her court had been "absolutely deceived" by lawyers for the family of slain rap artist and NY hip-hop icon Notorious B.I.G. in their wrongful death lawsuit against the city of Los Angeles.

U.S. District Judge Florence-Marie Cooper's statement Tuesday came after an attorney for the city alleged the plaintiffs' lawyers lied to the judge when they claimed the city withheld documents that could have bolstered their contention that corrupt Los Angeles police officers were involved in Biggie's killing.

Cooper declared a mistrial last summer after finding that a police detective intentionally hid statements by a jailhouse informant linking the killing of the hip-hop artist to two former officers, David Mack and Rafael Perez. The judge also ordered the city to pay \$1.1 million in legal fees and other expenses to the hip-hop rap artists' family.

The 24-year-old Brooklyn hip-hop rap artist, whose real name was Christopher Wallace, was shot and killed March 9, 1997 following a party at the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles. The suspects still remain at large.

The wrongful death trial began in June, with the rapper's family arguing that Mack, a convicted bank robber, organized Biggie's killing with the help of a college friend on behalf of Death Row Records chief, hip-hop mogul Marion "Suge" Knight. But the proceedings ended suddenly when the plaintiffs' attorneys said they had received an anonymous tip from a former officer who said a police informant had tied Perez and Mack to the killing.

The tip led to an investigation of the police department's Robbery-Homicide Division that uncovered statements by a former Perez cellmate, who had told the department that the disgraced officer had confessed to participating with Mack in B.I.G.'s killing.

In a status conference held Tuesday in preparation for a retrial, defense attorney Vincent Marella showed the judge a report prepared by a private investigator for the plaintiffs indicating knowledge of the informant's remarks as early as 2002.

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After looking at the report, Cooper said she was "outraged" and admonished Perry Sanders, the attorney for Wallace's family, over the telephone.

"I believe you have absolutely deceived this court into believing that you knew nothing about this," Cooper said.

Sanders replied that after telling the court last year that he knew nothing about the informant, he realized that his defense team had been "previously contacted" by the informant. Sanders said he then "made it clear" to the court about the matter.

In an interview, Sanders told The Associated Press he believed the city's attorneys took a document that his defense team provided to them and "used it against us."

"It's inappropriate and we plan to thoroughly address these allegations in the course of the next seven days," he said.

Cooper halted the sharing of information between both parties and said she was not inclined to allow Wallace's family to file a revised version of their lawsuit, as they have sought.

The judge also noted that both parties were having a hard time trying to settle the case out of court. One month after the mistrial was declared; the Los Angeles City Council rejected the family's offer to settle the case for \$18 million.

"This might be the time to settle this case," Cooper said.