

Hip-Hop Gangsta Rap CD Gang Peace

Written by Robert ID1676

Saturday, 16 July 2005 02:51 -

Can hard-core hip-hop and rap music get Sacramento's gangbangers to put down their guns? Michael Colen thinks so. He's calling for a six-month truce between local gangs through a gangsta rap album, the kind of streetwise hip-hop that focuses on tales of gangbanging. But some experts are wary that the truce will work.

Colen, 30, is a rap artist known as First Degree the D.E. and executive producer of "Gang Wars: A Message to the Sactown Bloods and Sactown Crips." The CD features Colen, along with local gangsta rappers and former gang members, rhyming about Sacramento's gang-plagued neighborhoods.

In the final song, "Sactown Gangbang," Colen calls for a truce among all local gangs - including Crips, Bloods, Asian and Latino gangs - which would begin Tuesday and last through January, after the Hmong New Year's Festival. Colen also is organizing a peace rally Sunday at Mesa Grande Park.

The CD will be released nationwide Tuesday through such stores as Tower Records and online through Amazon.com.

"This is not about cash," says Colen, who's worked with gang-prevention programs around south Sacramento. "This is me trying to make a difference the way I see it needs to be done. It's about getting the target audience's attention - the people who are killing each other - and letting them know that they're important to our society."

Crips and Bloods are typically African American gangs that formed in the early 1970s in Los Angeles and spread throughout the country. Gang murders between Sacramento-area Crips and Bloods date to the early 1980s and continue today. In March, Deantwan T. Thomas, a 17-year-old Luther Burbank High School student, was gunned down in south Sacramento in a Bloods-Crips clash.

There are an estimated 5,000 gang members in Sacramento County, but experts agree that the gangs are not as motivated to kill as they were in the last gang crime wave in the early 1990s. There have been 11 gang-related homicides out of 56 overall this year in the city and county of

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Sacramento, according to the Sacramento Police and Sheriff's departments.

In the past two years, about 20 members of the Crips and Bloods have been convicted of murder or attempted murder, said Rod Norgaard, the deputy district attorney who supervises gang prosecutions in Sacramento. He added that Bloods and Crips have been as violent as Asian and Latino gangs over the past 2 1/2 years.

Norgaard said several apartment complexes in the Valley Hi area are rife with gang violence.

"When I go out there, when I've interviewed people, I find they are very young - the most dangerous individuals," he said. "There's just a disproportionate amount of gang members in that community."

Valley Hi is also Colen's community. He's lived there since the mid-1990s but grew up closer to Greenhaven, where he was friends with people who considered themselves Bloods.

Colen graduated from California State University, Sacramento, with a degree in communications. He gained recognition as a musician alongside a rapper who identifies with the Crips, he said.

But Colen has been criticized for sending a mixed message with his "Gang Wars" CD. The album cover depicts gangsters dressed in red and blue and features such songs as "Crip Steppin" and "Blood Walk." Though the CD is trying to deliver a peace message, the lyrics are filled with violent imagery, and the music thumps with a menacing tone.

Sacramento police spokesman Sgt. Justin Risley said publicizing the gangs' names gives them the notoriety they crave and creates tension that leads to more crimes. He criticizes the publicity but lauds the overall effort.

"We support anyone who wouldn't condone violence, who adds value to the community," he

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said.

Colen believes young people don't want to be lectured to, but might respect a message through music they understand: gangsta rap. So Colen recruited a crew of gangsta rappers from south Sacramento, including T Nutty, Be Gee and G Macc.

"This album is not for the old folks," says Colen, "but the generation that grew up on "Grand Theft Auto." They listen to this music anyway. So I kind of wanted to lure them in. It is hard-core, but they will hear that it's not disrespectful."

But some teens who got an early listen to the CD expected a more violent and confrontational tone. They thought Colen's "Gang Wars" would be more like "Bangin" On Wax: Bloods and Crips," an infamous 1993 album that featured Los Angeles gang members trading insults.

("Bangin" on Wax") was hate music," says Colen. "They were not only proud of where they're from, but they're hating the other side. This album has no shots, whatsoever. You can be proud of where you're from but not hate and risk your future."

Some artists involved with "Gang Wars" also had concerns. The original title of the CD was "Sactown Bloods vs. Sactown Crips," and insinuated that the rappers on the CD were active gangbangers.

Colen recently changed the title to "Gang Wars: A Message to the Sactown Bloods and Sactown Crips" and added a disclaimer to reinforce the CD's goal of unity.

"My first reaction (to the CD) was probably the first one that a lot of people are going to have," says Anthony "Be Gee" Noose, who raps on the tracks "Blood Walk" and "Me & My Bloosinz." "I didn't want to be misrepresented personally. But there are Bloods and there are Crips and there is a common ground. I'm just letting the youngsters know that there is life beyond all the frustration you're feeling right now."

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Gang truces have had mixed results in the past. In 1993, William "Blinky" Rodriguez brought together members of 76 Latino gangs in a Southern California park near the place his son was shot by gang members. He told them of his battle with forgiveness and asked them to consider it.

Within a year, gang homicides plummeted, due in part to a peace treaty and in part to the Northridge earthquake, Rodriguez said.

But an attempt at a truce could backfire completely, said Malcolm Klein, a University of Southern California gang researcher. He said the gang leaders could leave not with a message of peace but rather an influx of in-telligence about each other and an unhealthy dose of attention.

"You bring leaders together and you give them legitimacy, which is what they want," he said. "That's the notoriety and the status that they joined a gang in the first part to gain."

Colen is still hopeful that a truce will work, though he knows his tactics are controversial.

"One thing we can agree on is that this (CD) will get the target audience's attention," says Colen. "This is the most pressure I've been in. But I've got to be on the front lines."

If you go

What: "Valley Hi Peace Rally"

When: Sunday at 1 p.m.

Where: Mesa Grande Park, 4325 Valley Hi Drive

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Information: E-mail mrthede@hotmail.com

If you would like to hear a sampler of this album click the source tab below and visit

www.sacbee.com