

Being a 'Real G' Doesn't Help Sales

Written by Robert ID1116

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In the hip-hop and rap world, a criminal background is the ultimate resume. The former drug dealer Beanie Sigel, who spent years bucking the law before getting his big break as a Jay-Z protege, has never lacked for street cred. With his menacing glare and criminal-minded rhymes, the Philadelphia native positioned himself as one of the most authentic gangstas on the rap scene.

But last year he was sentenced to a year in prison on a weapons charge, and still faces a retrial on an attempted murder charge (the first case ended in a mistrial last fall). Now, as he releases his latest album from behind bars, Sigel is among a number of high-profile rappers finding that a criminal present may not be as lucrative as a criminal past.

With the exception of arguably rap's greatest artist, west coast rap icon Tupac Shakur, most rappers who have done significant time have been unable to sustain their careers or revive them after being released. And while some have suggested that hip-hop female rap artist Lil' Kim, who was recently convicted of perjury, will gain more street cred if she goes to prison, the examples of rappers like Shyne suggest otherwise.

"There's no credibility in going to jail," declares Damon Dash as he talks about Sigel, the star of the Roc-a-fella label Dash started with Jay-Z. "I don't think it's ever a positive thing and I would never advocate anybody going to jail and I don't think Beanie would ever advocate it — Beanie did a crime, and right in front of the judge, he said, "I said I did my crime, so I'll do whatever time you give me.""

Dash talks a lot about what Sigel says and thinks — because Sigel can't do it himself. He's at a federal prison in solitary confinement (which Dash blames on overzealous corrections officials), unable to promote "The B. Coming," his third album.

So the charismatic mogul Dash has become Sigel's stand-in, doing radio spots, appearing on TV shows, conducting interviews — all the things artists normally do to push a new album.

"If they're going to try to put him in a place where he can't make money, we're going to try to reverse that, where we benefit from it to some degree, even though there's no real benefit from

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him being in jail," Dash said. "But we're going to make best of it, like making lemons into lemonade."

And Dash has made enough lemonade to go around. Before Sigel (born Dwight Grant 31 years ago) was sentenced, he finished three albums worth of material, several music videos and filmed his starring role in Dash's crime drama flick "State Property II."

Dash even recorded Sigel's attempted murder trial and his entrance into prison for documentary fodder; some segments have already been shown on BET and MTV. His album cover shows him in a prison cell, glumly looking at the camera. And the saturation looks like it's helped: "The B. Coming" debuted at No. 3 on the album charts, selling about 131,000 copies, the best debut of his career.

"We had to do enough music to keep him prevalent in the market while he was gone," Dash said, "because we didn't know how long he'd be gone."

While a numerous high-profile rappers have been charged with crimes at the height of their fame — such as Eminem, P. Diddy, Jay-Z and DMX — few have been sentenced to significant prison terms. Those who have — including Shyne, ODB, C-Murder, Mystikal and Slick Rick — often see their careers slide.

Antoine Clark, editor in chief of F.E.D.S. magazine, which chronicles street criminals and rappers, says time behind bars may help boost a rapper's tough image but won't help sell more records.

"For one, they're not going to have any promotion," says Clark. "Two, the people on the street, they want to hear a good record."

Clark pointed to Shyne, who was charged along with mentor P. Diddy in a 1999 nightclub shooting. While Diddy was acquitted, Shyne — who had impressive success as a debut artist before his criminal troubles — was sentenced to 10 years for wounding two people in the disturbance.

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Last year, Island Def Jam signed the incarcerated rapper to a reported \$3 million record deal, and he released the album "Godfather Buried Alive," which contained some raps he recorded from prison over the telephone.

Yet the album didn't even go gold, and was considered a major disappointment. In March, a judge froze Shyne's assets until lawsuits filed by victims in the case are resolved.

"These rappers, they somehow have it twisted, they think that if they go to prison, we're going to love them more," said Clark. "It doesn't really happen like that."

Another penitentiary release, on Koch Records, is the latest album from C-Murder, the brother of Master P, who was convicted in 2003 of second-degree murder in the killing of a 16-year-old boy. C-Murder (born Corey Miller) has maintained his innocence and is appealing the verdict. On Tuesday he changed his stage name to C-Miller.

In a phone interview with The Associated Press shortly after his album was released in late March, Miller said he thought his time behind bars would help his career: "I think that fans will relate to me more because I've been through a struggle ... I think they'll respect the fact that I was put in a bad situation."

However, "If I was out of prison, I would be able to promote my album more, I can go on the road and tour," he said. "Actually being in here is a setback."

Still, a source at Koch Records who did not want his name used for fear of hurting Miller's case said executives there considered his incarceration more of a positive.

"Clearly, from a P.R. marketing point of view, I would be lying to you to say the prison controversy didn't help sell records," said the executive. "There's been a tremendous amount of television coverage about the making of the record, the making of the video," which was filmed behind bars and later outraged the sheriff. It has sold just 43,000 copies in its first two weeks of

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release.

Dash is hoping the notoriety from Sigel's case will help the respectable-selling rapper go platinum. Although he certainly doesn't want his star rapper in prison, Dash is shrewd enough to see that Sigel's time behind bars can only solidify his street cred — which Dash can't help but play up.

"Where some rappers glorify things they've never done, or speak about things that they never done, when Beanie speaks he's talking about his emotions, his opinions on things that are going on directly in his life," said Dash. "It would be like, what if John Gotti could sing?"

[Source](#)