

THIRD EDITION

NEW INFORMATION

the killing of
Tupac Shakur



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PROLOGUE

For nearly 20 years, I've endeavored to uncover the truth surrounding the killing of Tupac Shakur. Perhaps no one will ever know for certain who pulled the trigger, although police have said they know who did it. What is known is this: The gunman got away with murder.

Not since John Lennon was cut down on the streets of New York City was a major entertainment figure murdered at the pinnacle of his popularity. As in the Lennon killing, Shakur's death resonated far beyond the world of musical entertainment. Unlike the Lennon killing, Tupac's murder was never officially solved.

From the start, my goal was to separate fact from fiction in the tremendously high-profile case. Much of the information I gathered and presented in the first edition of this book, published in 1997, had never before been seen in print. In some cases, I identified errors previously reported and replaced them with the facts as I learned them and knew them to be true.

This book is based on interviews, research, and ob-

servations that began the day Tupac was shot. I gleaned information from a prodigious paper trail, including county, city, police, and legal documents and records. I perused hundreds, if not thousands, of newspaper and magazine articles. In piecing together the events of September 7, 1996, and the aftermath, I diligently and painstakingly checked and rechecked the facts. At the time, I was a police reporter by trade; it was my job to get it right.

I interviewed more than 200 people about the case. More than 100 are cited. Some of my sources provided background information only and their names were not included in the text. Although I had many conversations with Shakur family members and their attorneys, agents, and assistants, Tupac's mother, Afeni Shakur, did not submit to an interview. Instead, I included the few published comments she made about Tupac's death.

The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, known as Metro, was forthcoming at times and less so at others. Through the years, Las Vegas cops have been notoriously tight-lipped—all the way up the chain of command to the highest levels. Long-term former Sheriff John Moran (now deceased) consistently refused to talk to reporters; even when he retired in December 1994, Moran declined to give a final interview, standing his ground and closing his door to the press one last time. It's a Las Vegas tradition to snub reporters.

That attitude carried over into the administration of Sheriff Jerry Keller, who was at the helm of the department when Tupac was murdered. Although Keller did talk to the media, he often became openly indignant and critical of reporters when the questions got too tough.

And although homicide detectives and others close to the Tupac Shakur case were understandably reluctant

at times to discuss certain aspects of it, they eventually provided enough details to allow me to construct an accurate portrayal of the events surrounding the criminal investigation.

LVMPD officers, however, drew the line when it came to speaking with out-of-town reporters, purposely fielding only questions from local newsmen and women, whom they knew. As a result, the *Las Vegas Sun*'s newsroom, where I worked at the time, received calls from dozens of reporters from all over the world who had been stonewalled by Las Vegas police.

When a major story breaks in a newspaper's hometown, local reporters and editors often shine in the national spotlight. The world was watching the Tupac Shakur case unfold daily; the *Las Vegas Sun* was ahead of the curve each day, beating the competition in its quest to break the news. After all, this was our town and our story. We weren't about to let the national papers take it away from us. During the first week of coverage, the *Sun* assigned three reporters to the story, but the shooting investigation was all mine.

My pursuit of this story turned up a fascinating and convoluted sequence of events surrounding not just the shooting, but Tupac himself and the world in which he lived. This book is an accounting of all of it. The language is raw and the drama could have come straight from the wildest movie. It didn't. This is not fiction. The players in these pages are real. This is a true, violent, and sad story of an unsolved crime, based on the facts. It is the story of the killing of Tupac Shakur.

Chapter 1

THE KILLING OF TUPAC SHAKUR

The freeways crisscross Las Vegas, Clark County, Nevada, like a cosmic X in the heart of the Mohave Desert. Highway 95 connects Las Vegas to Reno in the north and Phoenix in the south. But the major artery in and out of the Vegas valley is Interstate 15; to the southwest is Los Angeles, to the northeast Salt Lake City. I-15 is widely believed to be the getaway route used by murderers the night Tupac Shakur was cut down in cold blood.

Saturday, September 7, 1996, wasn't just any night in Las Vegas. It was the evening of a championship boxing match between heavyweights Mike Tyson and Bruce Seldon. The town was packed with fight fans, including wall-to-wall celebrities. Las Vegas nears peak capacity almost every weekend of the year, but this fight, a premier event, had sold out all the hotel and motel rooms in the region and gridlocked the Las Vegas Strip.

It would end up being a deadly fight night.

Vegas is famous for its boxing events, which have been magnets for high-spending action ever since Sonny

Liston's 1963 first-round knock-out of Floyd Patterson. Muhammad Ali, Larry Holmes, Roberto Duran, Sugar Ray Leonard, Evander Holyfield, Mike Tyson, and a long list of great fighters have turned Las Vegas into a world-class mecca for boxing. Heavyweight bouts traditionally surround Las Vegas with an electrifying aura that rarely materializes during other events. Fights can gross more than \$100 million, especially when Tyson's name was on the ticket.

On this particular night, Tyson was expected to win back the heavyweight championship he'd lost six years earlier to Buster Douglas in Tokyo. High rollers eagerly flocked to the desert at the invitation of the casinos to attend the fight as an opening act to a weekend of gambling and partying. The night was ripe. A high level of expectation and excitement was in the air.

"Nothing brings customers to Las Vegas like major heavyweight boxing, and Mike Tyson is the biggest draw in boxing, so it's a big special event for this town," explained Bill Doak, marketing director for the MGM Grand where the fight was being held, just before the event.

Rob Powers, spokesman for the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, echoed those sentiments: "The [media] exposure Las Vegas will get will be incalculable."

Little did he know just how true those words would be.

Everything at the MGM Grand that night spelled H-O-L-L-Y-W-O-O-D, from its upscale stores and gourmet restaurants to the red-carpeted Studio Walk leading to the Garden Arena where two fights—one a boxing match, the other a brawl—would take place that night.

Tupac (pronounced "TOO-pock") Shakur, one of the

most notorious emcees on the 1990s' rap-music scene, was among the many celebrities who assembled at the MGM Grand for the heavyweight bout. Six months earlier, Tupac and fellow gangsta rap artist Snoop Dogg had attended the Mike Tyson-Frank Bruno fight at Caesars Palace.

In town for the Tyson-Seldon match-up, besides Tupac Shakur, were the Reverend Jesse L. Jackson Jr., an avid fight fan and a familiar face on the Las Vegas Strip on fight weekends, as well as rapper MC Hammer, television star Roseanne, basketball player Gary Payton, hip hop's Too Short, and rapper Run DMC.

They, along with 16,000 spectators in the arena and millions more sitting glued to the pay-per-view cable channel, watched as Tyson dismantled Seldon in exactly 109 seconds. The spectators barely had time to settle into their seats before they found themselves getting up again and filing out of the arena. Afterward, some spectators remained in the stands for a few minutes, booing the boxers. Fans dubbed it the "Gyp on the Strip." It marked Tyson's fourth comeback victory.

Tupac took in the fight with Marion Knight, known as "Suge" (pronounced "Shoog," short for his childhood nickname of "Sugar Bear"). Suge had co-founded and owned Death Row Records, Tupac's recording label. They sat ringside in \$1,000 seats—some of the best seats in the house—with Tupac sitting in section 4, row E, seat 2. In the margin at the top of the stub was handwritten "Tupac." Even though Death Row had earlier purchased 12 tickets, which included seats for the record label's bodyguards, only four tickets were used by Suge's crew that night: one each for Tupac, Suge, bodyguard Frank Alexander, and a friend of Suge's.

Sitting near Tupac were other celebrities, including actors Charlie Sheen and Louis Gossett Jr., former star baseball player Reggie Jackson, and Reverend Jackson.

It was later rumored that Tupac and Suge had gotten into an argument, as they went to take their seats, with several people who had been sitting in the seats reserved for Death Row. But witnesses and security officers at the fight said that no such argument took place.

The song that played over the public address system during Tyson's walk from backstage into the ring, "Road to Glory," was written by Tupac especially for Tyson. Another song, "Ambitionz Az A Ridah" from Tupac's *All Eyes On Me* album, was also written for Tyson. At the beginning of the song, Tupac says, "Yeah, I dedicate this to my nigga Mike Tyson. It's all good." Tupac was filled with pride as his good friend Mike walked into the ring and his own lyrics pounded the arena. (Before he was banned from boxing in the U.S. for a year in 1999, Tyson for the second time used Tupac's "Road to Glory" as his fight song.)

After the fight, Tupac and Suge, along with members of their entourage, were making their way through the casino toward the entrance of the hotel when they got into a scuffle with a then-unidentified black man whom police later learned was 21-year-old Orlando Anderson of Compton, California. This fight-outside-the-fight became enormously significant in light of the events that followed.

Tupac, according to the Compton Police Department's account, looked at Orlando and said, "You from the south?" Then Tupac lunged at Orlando, dropping him. Others in Tupac's group joined in. Once they had Orlando down on the ground, they kicked and stomped

on him. A few minutes later, hotel security guards broke up the tussle.

Bodyguard Frank Alexander said he, too, helped break it up by shoving Tupac against a wall. "Orlando Anderson was just standing there [in the hotel]," Frank told me in a telephone interview. He said Orlando was standing near a hotel security guard.

"Sal [Suge's friend] whispered into Tupac's ear and Tupac took off running," Frank continued. "Tupac ran up to Anderson and swung at him. Anderson swung back and a chain fell off of Tupac's neck. Tupac bent down to pick up his necklace. I went down as he did and grabbed Tupac and put him against the wall."

After security guards broke up the encounter, Tupac, Suge, and their crew immediately left. They headed for the lobby of the MGM Grand, then to the valet area in front of the hotel. They walked south on the Strip toward the Luxor Hotel-Casino, where the group was staying and where they had parked their high-priced cars. It's a 15-minute walk.

Las Vegas police were called by hotel security for backup. No one from Tupac's group was stopped or questioned by security or police. Tupac and his group, as recorded by surveillance cameras, simply walked away. No report was filed by Las Vegas police.

After the scuffle, Orlando was seen on videotape talking to LVMPD and security officers. He was standing up and did not appear to be injured. Security guards offered him first aid. He declined. They also asked him to go with them downstairs to the security office to file a complaint. He declined.

This question has never been answered: Even though Orlando declined to file a complaint, why didn't police

file a police report? In the state of Nevada, victims don't have to file a complaint for charges to be filed against a perpetrator. Suge was later imprisoned for violating parole because of his involvement in the scuffle, so, obviously, authorities felt a crime had been committed. And security guards were witnesses. Yet no crime or incident report was ever filed.

Meanwhile, back at Luxor, a block south of the MGM, Tupac went to the room he was sharing with his girlfriend Kidada Jones, Quincy Jones's daughter, which Suge Knight had booked for the weekend.

There, Tupac changed his clothes from a tan designer silk shirt and tan slacks to a black-and-white basketball tank top, baggy blue jeans, and black-and-white leather sports shoes. Around his neck on a heavy gold chain hung a large, round, solid-gold medallion. It wasn't the medallion Suge had given him when he bailed Tupac out of prison a year earlier. That one featured a diamond-studded Death Row insignia of a hooded prisoner strapped into an electric chair. The medallion Tupac wore to the fight was the size of a paperweight—and probably just as heavy—picturing a haloed and winged black man wrestling a serpent with one hand and holding a gun in the other.

Tupac didn't pack a weapon that night. He left his hotel unarmed. He also didn't wear a flak (or bullet-resistant) jacket or vest. Tupac's friends said he sometimes wore a Kevlar vest out of fear of being shot. But not that night. He always felt safe visiting Las Vegas. After all, it was a party town and he was going there to "kick it" and watch his homey Iron Mike kick butt. Besides, a flak jacket would be too hot in the desert heat. That's what he told Kidada when she packed his clothes earlier that day.

in California. It would turn out to be a fatal decision, but one to which Tupac didn't give another thought as he and his girlfriend prepared to leave for Vegas.

But to one of Suge's bodyguards, Tupac said otherwise. Frank Alexander, Tupac's personal bodyguard for the weekend, said, "There is a bodyguard who is a close friend to me, and Tupac told him he didn't feel good about going to Vegas and that he felt like his life was in danger. He didn't say it to me. But he did say it to this particular bodyguard." Alexander declined to name the bodyguard.

Still, it was rare for Tupac to wear a flak jacket, issued by the record company. Alexander said, "Tupac only wore it one or two times."

While waiting for their cars in the Luxor valet area, Tupac and his crew were videotaped on a tourist's camcorder, smiling and chatting casually with a couple of women. Kidada Jones remained in their hotel room upstairs.

When the cars were delivered a few minutes later, the group piled in and drove to Suge Knight's Las Vegas residence in the southeastern valley, on Monte Rosa Avenue in the Paradise Valley Township. The Las Vegas subdivision boasts some of the oldest estates in the Las Vegas valley and is home to many of the wealthiest and most powerful Las Vegans.

Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department Sergeant Kevin Manning, who led the homicide investigation, said the group went to Suge's house to relax. But Frank Alexander told me they went to Suge's specifically so Suge could change his clothes.

According to Sergeant Manning, the group planned on attending a benefit party at a Las Vegas special-events

night spot, located at 1700 East Flamingo Road, known then as Club 662, where Tupac was to perform with Run DMC. After his fight with Seldon, Mike Tyson also planned to make an appearance at the nightclub, which Suge ran.

At about 10 p.m., the entourage left Suge's house and headed back to the action. Tupac rode shotgun with Suge behind the wheel of a car Death Row had just obtained: a \$46,000 1996 black 750 BMW sedan, with darkly tinted windows, chrome wheels, leather upholstery, and a sunroof. The music was cranked up on the car stereo (this particular BMW model was known for its superb sound system). They were in a party mood as the caravan of luxury cars—a Lexus, a BMW wagon, a Miata, and a Mercedes Benz—carrying friends and bodyguards, followed closely behind.

Frank Alexander, a former Sheriff's Department deputy (and author and producer), was the only bodyguard riding in the caravan.

"I was supposed to have two guys on Tupac at all times," Wrightway owner Reggie Wright said. "Who didn't show up that night was [bodyguard] Kevin Hackie." Some other Wrightway bodyguards in town that night were planted at Club 662, to provide security at the party.

The group cruised four-mile-long Las Vegas Boulevard, commonly called the Strip, which was jammed with the kind of stop-and-go traffic that is the norm for a Saturday fight night. The sunroof of the BMW was open and the windows were rolled down. Suge and Tupac were hollering above the hip hop blaring from the car's speakers. Tupac and his crew, easily recognized, were turning heads on the Strip.