

# Murder

WHO SHOT 2PAC AND BIGGIE SMALLS? THESE QUESTIONS HAUNT HIP-HOP AS WE ENTER 2001 WITH THE CRIMES STILL UNSOLVED. WE REPORTED WHAT CATHY SCOTT FOUND. NOW, ACCLAIMED JOURNALIST MR. JAN GOLAB HAS UNCOVERED A THEORY ON WHO BUCKED DOWN B.I.G. IT INVOLVES LAPD CORRUPTION, A GUN-TOTING MUSLIM AND TIES TO A CURRENTLY INCARCERATED TOUGH GUY.

# was the case

INTERVIEW

SOREN BAKER



The Notorious B.I.G. has had a spectacular life after death. He's been eulogized ad infinitum and both of his posthumous albums have sold more than 1.5 million copies. But will the killer of the slain Brooklyn rapper ever be found?

It appears unlikely, especially after talking to Jan Golab, an award-winning freelance journalist who's been writing about the Los Angeles Police Department since 1982.

Golab wrote the book "The Dark Side of the Force: A True Story of Corruption and Murder in the LAPD" and has covered the murder of Biggie Smalls for *Salon.com*. He's also working on a book about the LAPD Rampart scandal. According to Golab, one LAPD investigation into Biggie's murder, headed by detective Russell Poole, pointed at two former LAPD officers: David Mack, who was convicted of armed bank robbery, and Kevin Gaines, who was killed in a shoot-out with another cop.

Both Mack and Gaines were said to be members of the Bloods who regularly attended Death Row Records functions. Mack's col-

lege friend Amir Muhammad (a.k.a. Harry Billups) has also been linked to the crime. In the following Q&A, Golab explains his findings and whether or not he thinks Biggie's killer will ever be found.

**XXL:** LAPD detective Russell Poole's investigation into Biggie's murder found 20 clues linking college friends Mack and Amir Muhammad to the murder of Biggie. What were some of these leads?

**GOLAB:** What I should emphasize is that this is one theory. There were a number of theories involved in the Biggie case. There were over 250 clues that the detectives followed up and there were two primary theories. One, that it was a result of the feud between Puffy and Bad Boy and Suge Knight and Death Row. The other was that it was gang warfare as usual, a dispute over money with the South Side Crips. But with the theory involving the feud between Puffy and Suge Knight, there were a number of other clues that surfaced that pointed detectives toward David Mack.

Mack was a dirty cop who was arrested for robbing a bank of \$722,000. After he was arrested, he admitted in jail that he was actually a Blood gang member. The trail to Mack started with Kevin



THIS PAGE:  
THE NOTORIOUS B.I.G. OPPOSITE: THE POLICE SKETCH OF THE MURDER SUSPECT.



THIS PAGE,  
LEFT: BIGGIE SMALLS. RIGHT:  
JOURNALIST JAN GOLAB.  
OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT: DAVID  
MACK, RIGHT: AMIR MUHAMMAD.

Gaines, another officer, who was killed by an undercover narcotics cop in a traffic dispute a week before Biggie's death. As they investigated the shooting, Poole discovered that Gaines had gang ties.

First of all, the vehicle he was driving, a green SUV, belonged to Sharitha Knight, who he was living with, and she was the estranged wife of Suge Knight. Poole also heard from informants that Gaines was moving money and drugs for Knight.

The LAPD looked into this—there was no question that this was a valid and logical possibility [for Biggie's murder]. The other thing was that the killing of Biggie itself appeared to be very well planned. It wasn't just a chance encounter. The way it occurred, Biggie was leaving the Petersen Automotive Museum after this *Vibe* magazine party. There was a caravan of vehicles and the shooter had to know which vehicle Biggie got in, which seat he was in, and which way they were driving—because he basically pulled up right along side Biggie's vehicle and fired his gun right into the shotgun-seat passenger door. It would seem that this would require some type of sophisticated communication. It had to be planned. It wasn't just some guy driving along, "Hey, there's Biggie, let's go shoot him."

When you have a well-planned murder like that, the heavier motive is more likely. It's more likely to be [a result of something] like this feud rather than a more simple dispute over a few thousand dollars, although [the LAPD] didn't exclude any possibility. But witnesses reported hearing police radios held by unidentified males at the exit of the Petersen Automotive Museum. They reported seeing a number of bow-tied Black Muslims. The shooter was also identified as a young Black male in a suit and bow-tie, Muslim attire. As Poole is looking at this, he realizes that the things that have led to Mack were the use of police radios and the fact that it was well-planned. Mack used police radios and was the meticulous planner on the bank robbery. Mack also owned a black Chevy Impala, which was identified as the shooter's car—another clue.

When detectives went to Mack's place after the bank robbery,



they found a shrine to Shakur. You've also got to remember that Mack was described by informants as a confidant of Knight. Poole knew that this cop, Mack, grew up with Knight in Compton and is an admitted Blood. Also, the detectives, when they searched Mack's house, they found a storehouse of ammunition and guns. He had over five 9mm guns and what was described as a cabinet full of ammunition, which included all kinds of foreign brands. The ammo used to kill Biggie was an unusual foreign brand called Geco. But they never seized the ammunition and the Impala because they didn't know that it was pertinent to the bank robbery. An eyewitness, a guy named Damien Butler who was sitting right behind Biggie when he was killed, picked Mack's photo out of a photo line-up and said he definitely saw this guy standing at the carport entrance, where they went in and out of the Petersen Automotive Museum.

So Poole had an eyewitness placing Mack at the scene of the crime, the same place they heard police radios. Then, the other big clue was that the shooter possibly had a Middle-eastern name, possibly Amir. When they went back and looked at the people who visited Mack in jail for the bank robbery, the first guy to visit him was Amir Muhammad, also known as Harry Billups. Poole said, "Holy cow. We've got to check this guy out." It turned out that Muhammad had put a false social security number and a false address on the visitor form, which further heightened their suspicions. Then they did a computer check to try to find the guy. They came up with seven or eight previous addresses, all of which were no good.

**XXL: Why do you think the police department sat on this information?**

**GOLAB:** Poole wanted to continue searching for [Muhammad]. His superiors were like, "No." They didn't want to find him because it led to a cop.

This is part of the litany of Poole's whole story involving [the LAPD] Rampart [scandal]. What Poole has to reveal about the halting of the Biggie Smalls case is one of many examples of the LAPD refusing to investigate crimes that lead toward a cop. Basically the [LAPD response to the] Rampart scandal has been about containment and cover-up, rather than exposure. Poole had all these clues that pointed to Mack. As Poole points out, being a detective isn't about being a psychic. You follow your leads and you see where they go. You don't know who's guilty, but you follow what you've got.

There's no question that he had enough clues that warranted following up on Mack. But the LAPD didn't want to do that ... they never followed up. Also, Poole had a whole bunch of evidence that Gaines had gang connections, but he was dead and the LAPD didn't want him to pursue his financial records, according to Poole. They didn't want any further embarrassment.

**XXL: Much of your information came from Poole's investiga-**

tion for the killing of 2Pac. The theory is that 2Pac was killed by Puffy and that Suge killed Biggie in retaliation. There have been other bizarre theories floated around. Some people have suggested that Suge had 2Pac killed. But Suge was grazed in that attempt, so I don't know. That's a bizarre theory.

But, I would say that the basic mainline theory was that one was retaliation for another. That's why this all tied in. Knight was going to retaliate, but he was in prison at the time so he was going to have an operative do it. Since Mack was a cop who knew how to meticulously plan these things and was a friend of Knight's and also a great admirer of 2Pac, it looks like a real strong possibility on that theory.

**XXL: Do you think that either Biggie or Tupac's murders will ever be solved?**

**GOLAB:** That's a good question. Poole believes that the Biggie killing could be solved. He revealed to me and supported something that's already been reported. It's been said that the Las Vegas detectives weren't very eager to solve the 2Pac killing because they didn't want to bring a whole lot of attention to Las Vegas. If they solved it, it would be a big media trial and could be a potential OJ-type circus. Poole visited Las Vegas and talked to the detectives in Las Vegas and basically confirmed that their attitude was, "Yeah, we don't really want to solve this." Also, the attitude



"THE ATTITUDE AMONG MANY OF THE PEOPLE AMONG THE LAPD WAS THAT THEY DIDN'T WANT TO SOLVE BIGGIE, BECAUSE IT WAS GOING TO LEAD TO A HIGH-PROFILE BLACK GANGSTER WHO WAS LIKELY TO GET JOHNNIE COCHRAN AS A LAWYER. IF IT WAS KNIGHT, IT WAS GOING TO BE ANOTHER OJ CIRCUS ALL OVER AGAIN. IT'S A NO-WIN SITUATION FOR THE POLICE."

tion, and he's a former LAPD detective. How would you evaluate his work?

**GOLAB:** You often hear glowing reports about people, but this was beyond anything that I've heard. I've talked to DAs and his former bosses and they all said stuff like, "He was the best detective." I had one District Attorney say that he had worked with every heavy-weight homicide detective in the LAPD and that Poole was the best that he'd ever encountered. I got nothing but the best about this guy. There's no question that he was one of the best. That's why he was chosen for RHD, the Robbery-Homicide Division, which is the elite detective division in the LAPD. Out of that, he was chosen for the special task force, which became the Rampart task force, because of his expertise. He was considered a crime scene expert.

**XXL: From what you can tell, are the murders of Biggie and Tupac related?**

**GOLAB:** Yes. The theory was that Suge had Biggie killed as retal-

among many of the people among the LAPD was the same, that they didn't want to solve Biggie, because it was going to lead to a high-profile black gangster who was likely to get Johnnie Cochran as a lawyer. If it was Knight, it was going to be another OJ circus all over again. It's a no-win situation for the police.

But Poole felt that they had enough [evidence to solve the crime], at least in the Biggie killing. A lot of times in gangland killings, there's no witnesses. Here, he had quite a few witnesses, at least two—maybe three—that helped make a composite drawing of the shooter [see page 70]. Quite a few others had seen him well enough to identify him at least as a bow-tied Muslim. There were plenty of witnesses of the car, the ammo. They had a lot of different clues and theories and Poole felt that this could have, and should have, been solved. ♠