

# The Bridge Wars and Beef the Blue Print for Hip Hop success?

By Khalif 'Ras' Williams



The spirit of competition has been a staple in Hip Hop since the very beginning. The most intense form of competition in Hip Hop with the most potential for danger would be battles between emcees. There have been many notable and important battles from Kool Moe Dee vs Busy Bee to Common vs Ice Cube, Ruthless Records vs Deathrow, Luke vs Deathrow, Lil Kim vs Foxy Brown, MC Lyte vs Antoinette, De La Soul vs Naughty by Nature, Biggie vs Tupac to 50 Cent vs Ja Rule or Jay-Z vs Nas. The one battle that was one of the longest running but arguably the most important battle in the history of Hip Hop, the one that set the precedent for all others that came after it in regards to the impact a battle can have on ones career is The Bridge Wars.

Did the Bridge Wars create the blueprint for Hip Hop success through beefing? It is a part of the answer but not the end all be all root cause, it is but one element. In any medium of expression where the ego is the driving force or the drive to be the best is the motivating factor competition is inevitable. Hip Hop is no less different from warfare, politics, the Olympics, all competitive sports, fields involving technological development, inventions, the medical field and etc. All of the previously mentioned arenas are areas of life in which to be at the top of pile as the best is of utmost importance and as such creates an environment and spirit of competition that can fuel some of the most incredible innovations and feats of human achievement or some of the cruelest acts of destruction depending on its application.

This very mentality of pushing the envelope of innovation for the bragging rights to the title of the best is what drives human innovation and moments of excellence as benchmarks for younger generations to strive towards. Hip Hop is no different. This spirit of competition existed long before Hip Hop it is an expression of human nature. Hip Hop being a street culture existed in the most urgent and challenging human scenario possible poor, educationally deprived, politically forgotten, urban landscape rife with corruption and racial tension that was unfathomable. The “undesirables”

of New York City wanted a voice for the angst and rage of their struggles, Hip Hop was and still is the medium to express this voice.

In late 1985 MC Shan and Marley Marl released a single that would catapult them into a battle that would carry on well into the new millennium with a multitude of characters getting involved ending with a final parting shot by MC Shan on the 2001 compilation album *QB's Finest*. Before finally being squashed once and for all in 2007 with Marley Marl and KRS One collaborating on the album *Hip Hop Lives*. Why this battle is arguably the most important in Hip Hop history is because it had all the potential and elements of a battle that could have easily gotten violent but didn't. It also got very personal and was no hold barred both sides said things that could only be described as same the take no prisoners approach later emulated by Big and Tupac as well as 50 Cent and Ja Rule and Nas and Jay-Z.

The Bridge Wars started as a misunderstanding that spawned a voice of dissenting views by BDP thus spawning the career of KRS One while simultaneously ending the career of MC Shan. The famous lines said by MC Shan that prompted BDP's retort was:

*You love to hear the story, again and again,*

*Of how it all got started way back when,*

*The monument is right in your face,*

*Sit and listen for a while to the name of the place,*

*The Bridge,*

*Queensbridge*

Although MC Shan and Marley Marl were shouting out the early days of Hip Hop in Queensbridge Projects, and the pioneers of the QB Hip Hop scene. BDP took the statement to mean that they believed Hip Hop culture started in Queensbridge Projects and the song was the way to convince the world that it started there. To set the record straight in 1986 KRS One and Scott La Rock of Boogie Down Productions released *South Bronx* and eventually *The Bridge is Over* both songs ended up on their critically acclaimed debut album *Criminal Minded*. In the song *South Bronx*, KRS attacked Shan directly at his failed first attempts at a music career with his little known MCA single *Feed the World*. He also alluded to Shan's drug addiction issues as well as his little known beef with LL Cool J at the time about beats Shan claimed LL stole from his cousin Marley Marl. The song alluding to LL was on the A-Side of *The Bridge* single called *Beat Biter* that was basically overshadowed by the Bridge Wars to the point it is forgotten entirely by most. KRS summarized his attacks in the lines from *South Bronx* below:

*Party people in the place to be, KRS-One attacks,*

*Ya got dropped off MCA cause the rhymes you wrote was wack,*

*So you think that hip-hop had its start out in Queensbridge,*

*If you popped that junk up in the Bronx you might not live*

KRS later throws more personal lyrical jabs with lines like:

*Show all the people in the place that you are wack,*

*Instead of trying take out LL, you need to take your homeboys off the crack*

MC Shan responded with *Kill That Noise* off of his *Down By Law* album to address the beef:

Kill that, kill that noise

(South Bronx)

Kill that, kill that noise

(South Bronx)

Kill that, kill that noise

I must say MC's got a lot of spunk  
To get up on stage and pop so much junk  
I'm not worried cause I don't get waxed  
And you wouldn't believe how hard I max  
School's in session, I'm about to teach  
Versatile with a style that you just can't reach  
Lesson number one: first strike aim  
You shouldn't do things to degrade my name  
Your records won't sell cause the people won't buy em  
A sucker MC's like chicken - I fry him  
I started with a smash, I'ma leave with a bang  
And to put it to you bluntly - MC's can't hang  
Your boys and your family will be grieving your death  
Weeping while they're sweeping up the pieces I left  
You can come all alone or bring all your boys  
But if you knew what I knew, then you'd kill that noise

It would be many years later before he would openly discuss the misunderstanding of his lyrics in interviews in 2003's Beef Series and on Jayquan.com in the FOUNDATION interview:

**JQ :** Did you ever say in any song, interview or anywhere that Hip Hop started in Queens ?

**Shan :** I only said HOW it started in QUEENSBIDGE, not over the world. The new *Source* magazine says I still stand on the fact that Hip Hop started in Queens - writers get it twisted. The song the Bridge starts off saying M.C. Shan & Marley Marl in the house tonight - they wanna tell you a story about where THEY come from.

In the 2003 *The Beef* Documentary Series by QDIII, KRS One states in no uncertain terms that if Shan never responded to his diss records he would essentially have no career. It was off of this battle and their subsequent verbal jabs the legend of KRS One was born. While Shan wanted to end the beef, KRS would shrewdly use it to catapult himself to an immortal place in Hip Hop history. The Bridge Wars and the murder of Scott La Rock were the two transformative events that shaped the entire legacy of KRS One. After *Kill That Noise* Shan took a backseat in this battle and other groups stepped in to take the torch they felt MC Shan had dropped with what most touted as a really lackluster responses to the scathing disses launched by BDP. That being said, in all fairness lyrically Shan went for his but his responses never had the impact of KRS One's which is why most say KRS won that battle. A similar questionable ending to a lyrical battle was the Super Nat vs Craig G battle in which until this very day many argue about whether Craig G really won or not.

After MC Shan's *Kill That Noise*, BDP responded with *The Bridge Is Over* one of the most memorable diss records in the history of Hip Hop. In it KRS takes on the Juice Crew and Affiliates with deadly verbal poison. In later years he publicly apologized to Roxanne Shante because he felt he went too far back then especially after his transformation spiritually and in consciousness. His ferocious approach to emceeing can be ascertained from the excerpt below:

Di-di di-da, di di-di, dida di-day, aye!  
All you sucka mc, wont you please come out to play, cause  
Heres an example of Krs-One, bo!  
Heres an example of Krs-One  
They wish to battle BDP, but they cannot  
They must be on the d\*ck of who? DJ Scott La Rock  
Cause, we dont complain nor do we play the game of favors  
Boogie down productions comes in three different flavors  
Pick any d\*ck for the flavor that you savor  
Mr. Magic might wish to come and try to save ya  
But instead of helpin ya out he wants the same thing I gave ya  
I finally figured it out, Magic's mouth is used for suckin  
Roxanne Shante is only good for steady f\*\*kin  
Mc Shan and marley marl is really only bluffin  
Like Doug E. Fresh said I tell you now, you aint nuthin  
Compared to Red Alert on KISS and Boogie Down Productions

It was after *The Bridge Is Over* that other artists got involved in the Bridge Wars while MC Shan's career fizzled into relative obscurity. The same happens in Hip Hop today where multiple artists will jump in on a beef trend and team up with another artist or other artists that have the same lyrical opponent as oneself. Below is a brief chronological list of songs and artists that all chimed in and took sides during the Bridge Wars:

**MC Shan** - "*The Bridge*"

**Boogie Down Productions** - "*South Bronx*"

MC Shan - "*Kill That Noise*"

Boogie Down Productions - "*The Bridge Is Over*"

Craig G - "*Duck Alert*"

Roxanne Shanté - "*Have A Nice Day*"

Rockwell Noel & The Poet - "*Beat You Down*" and "*Taking U Out*"

Boogie Down Productions - "*Still No. 1 (Numero Uno mix)*"

MC Mitchski - "*Brooklyn Blew Up The Bridge*" (Defending BDP)

MC Shan - "*Juice Crew Law*"

Cool C - "*Juice Crew Diss*"

MC Butchy B - "*Go Magic*" and "*Beat Down KRS*"

Just Ice featuring KRS One "*Moshitup*"

Boogie Down Productions - "*Black Man In Effect*"

The master plan laid by the Bridge Wars was that healthy competition can really catapult one to tipping point of stardom and notoriety like it did for KRS One or it can ruin ones entire career as in the case of MC Shan. Beefing in Hip Hop is really a razors edge between fame and cataclysm and only masters of the art of propaganda and mental chess not discounting a little luck become it's true beneficiaries in the end. Even the idea of coat-tailing off of one persons beef and making it one's own cause can stimulate record sales and exposure for some one who otherwise might remain unknown. 50 Cent love him or hate him is the poster child for what beef and propaganda in the right hands can do for ones career.

50 went from someone the industry was terrified of dealing with after being shot and the backlash from his *How to Rob* single to reaching the top of the charts by lyrically and psychologically terrorizing artists he has any sort of potential issue with. 50 has had personalized beefs with Young Buck, Ja Rule, The Game, Fat Joe and Rick Ross by using photographs, recorded phone conversations and even stooping to having family members expose the short comings and mishaps of his rivals. He even took things a step further by turning on his own crew Mob Style giving them the kiss of death unbeknownst to Game and or Young Buck while plotting their ruin at the same time. Jay-Z was known for using a personal picture of a Ballet dancing young Prodigy from Mobb Deep in his stage show to embarrass Mobb Deep and call their gangster bluff. Tru Life actually ran up on Mobb Deep's (though neither Havoc nor Prodigy was present) crew with guns in a studio session years ago behind an ongoing beef. Prodigy is well known throughout his history in Hip Hop for fighting and beefing with a slew of artists including Saigon one of his more recent beefs before his current incarceration on gun charges. Tupac claimed to have slept with Biggie's wife and

focused on that as a tool of his "gloves are off" approach. An approach which rappers are all too often taking in their lyrical jabs thus in some cases reversing the non-violent trend in Hip Hop rivalry depending on how personal one chooses to get or how low one chooses to go.

Each circumstance of Hip Hop rivalry whether it gets violent or not depends on a myriad of circumstances in order to get to the point of personal danger for the artists involved. The Bridge Wars had all the makings of a beef that could have easily turned violent but ultimately sportsmanship and the spirit of Hip Hop prevailed. Nas and Jay-Z ultimately showed us the way to reconciling seemingly irreversible beef trends while at vying for the title of number one without losing one's life or career in the process but still, upping the ante of lyrical skill and dexterity to push Hip Hop to even higher levels of critical and artistic acclaim. Again I ask the question did the Bridge Wars lay the blueprint for Hip Hop success through beefing? The answer is no, but The Bridge Wars became the timeless everlasting blueprint on how it is done and the seeming pot of gold and fame at the end of the odyssey for the winner... Judging from the tidal wave of artists that took a similar route history might say yes. Thus The Bridge Wars potentially becoming the benchmark for how low one might have to go and how this can manifest into taking one's career to the next level. The real question is at what cost?

## Sources:

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QD III's Beef Documentary Series Parts 1 and 2