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# Timeline

**1969:** Sean John Combs is born November 4, 1969, in Harlem.

**1972:** Sean's father, Melvin Combs, is murdered.

**1981:** Combs's mother moves the family to Mount Vernon, New York.

**1988:** Combs goes to Howard University.

**1990:** Combs drops out of school to work at Uptown records.

**1994:** Combs is fired from Uptown Records and starts his own company, Bad Boy Productions.

**1997:** Combs becomes a star with "Can't Nobody Hold Me Down."

**1998:** Combs is nominated for five Grammy Awards and is named rap artist of the year. Combs also starts the Sean John fashion label.

**1999:** His second album, *Forever*, is released. The video "Hate Me Now" creates controversy. Combs is arrested twice that year.

**2000:** Combs produces the TV show *Making the Band*, which features his knack for managing talent and producing music.

**2001:** Combs produces the TV show *Run's House*, starring Reverend Run, a member of Run-DMC, one of Combs's musical heroes. During this year, Combs changes his name from Puff Daddy to P. Diddy. He releases his third album, *The Saga Continues...*

# A Child of Two Worlds

Sean Combs climbed to the top of the music business in record time. As a business person, he went from *intern* to executive. As a creative person, he started as a producer and also became a performer. Then he tried his hand at fashion. He created a successful clothing business and his own scent. Next he tried acting. Combs is a man of many talents. He is also known by many names: Puffy, Puff Daddy, P. Diddy, and now Diddy.

Combs did not come from a rich family. But he got his drive and style from his parents and grandmother. He strives to be the best at whatever he does. Those qualities helped him succeed. They also helped him overcome his troubles along the way.

Sean John Combs was born on November 4, 1969, in Harlem, New York. His mother, Janice, was a model. She also worked as a teacher. His father, Melvin, drove a taxi. Janice and Melvin wanted to make a good life for Sean and his younger sister, Keisha. It wasn't easy. The family lived in the Esplanade Gardens housing projects.

One day in 1972, everything changed. Sean's father was killed. Sean was only three. Janice told him that Melvin had died in a car accident. Sean learned the truth when he was 14 doing some schoolwork at the library. There, he read the real story of



**Sean Combs lived in Harlem until he was 12 years old.**

his father's death in a newspaper. Melvin had been a drug dealer, working with Frank Lucas, a famous Harlem gangster. There was no car accident. Melvin had been shot in the head.

Combs never got over the pain of his father's death. He still feels the loss today. He misses being able to share his successes. He misses the opportunity of getting fatherly advice. Now Combs has children of his own—Justin, Jessie James, Christian, Chance, D'Lila, and Quincy. And he wants to be the father he didn't have.



Janice Combs worked hard to send her son to Mount Saint Michael Catholic School.

After Melvin's murder, Janice worked three part-time jobs to support the family. Combs's grandmother helped take care of the children. The two women held the family together. In some ways, Janice had stepped into the role of his father. His grandmother was like a mother.

Janice pushed herself and her children. She wanted to show them a world beyond poverty and crime. When Combs was six years old, Janice hosted a fashion show. Combs was able to flaunt his style on the runway. One summer, Combs went to a Fresh Air Fund camp. He stayed with an **Amish** family in Pennsylvania.

But meanwhile, Combs needed to survive on the streets of Harlem. Once when he was nine years old, some kids stole his money. He was on his way to the store. He came home in tears. His grandmother hugged him and told it was all right. His mother told him to go back out and get the money. He did. Combs learned to stand up for himself at a young age.

When Combs was 12, Janice moved her children to a safer neighborhood. Janice took them to Mount Vernon, New York. It was not far from Harlem. But it was a world away. There was green grass and Little League. Combs ran two newspaper routes and worked part-time jobs. He had **hustle** like his dad.

Janice sent her son to a private Catholic school. Tall and fast, he ran track. He also was a defensive back on the football team. The football team won the division championship in 1986. Combs dreamed of playing professionally. In his senior year, that dream died. Combs broke his leg and had to sit out the rest of the season. His leg was broken, but his spirit wasn't. Combs decided to make it in the music business.

Combs often went to Harlem to visit his grandmother. He would sneak out at night to see live concerts in the city. He saw his favorite rappers perform. He saw Run-DMC at Madison Square Garden. He still remembers when Run told everyone to hold up their Adidas. All around, sneakers went up into the air. Combs was impressed by that kind of power.

Combs met famous rappers like Kool Moe Dee. He even performed as a dancer in several music videos. Combs knew that music was his destiny. He dreamed of working at a record label. But Combs did more than dream.

After high school, Combs went to Howard University. It is a black college in Washington, DC. He became popular for throwing large parties. He invited hip-hop artists like Slick Rick to Howard. His friends from that time say he was flashy. He liked to be the life of the party. The university could see that Combs was an excellent *party promoter*. They asked him to plan some of their events.

One event started out great but turned tragic. In 1991, Combs helped organize a celebrity basketball game with a performance by Heavy D. It was a charity event to raise money to fight AIDS. The place was packed, with more people waiting outside. At one point, the people outside crashed through the doors. Nine people died, and more than 20 others were injured.

That night Combs's life turned upside down. He was trying to raise money for a good cause, and now people were dead. People were *suing* him.



As a teen, Combs was inspired by Run-DMC.



# Vocabulary

|               |             |  |
|---------------|-------------|--|
| A&R           | (noun)      | a department in a record company. A&R stands for “Artists and Repertoire.” The A&R people are responsible for finding talent and keeping them popular. |
| acting credit | (noun)      | a list of acting jobs  |
| airwaves      | (noun)      | the sound put out by radio stations  |
| Amish         | (adjective) | referring to the Amish, a group of religious people who live simply, without electricity   |
| beef          | (noun)      | an argument  |
| broadcast     | (verb)      | to show on TV  |
| charge        | (noun)      | a crime that a person is accused of after being arrested   |
| consequences  | (noun)      | the negative results of an action  |
| controversial | (adjective) | likely to start an argument  |
| craft         | (verb)      | to make something with care  |
| crossover     | (adjective) | popular with more than one kind of audience, such as hip-hop and pop   |
| debut         | (adjective) | first, introduced into the world for the first time  |
| diss tracks   | (noun)      | songs that are meant to insult someone   |
| eerie         | (adjective) | strange and a little creepy  |
| entourage     | (noun)      | a group of people who travel with a celebrity as friends or workers  |
| eulogy        | (noun)      | a speech that is given at funeral to honor the person who has just died  |
| freestyles    | (noun)      | raps that are made up on stage, not written in advance   |
| found         | (verb)      | to start a business or other organization  |
| Godzilla      | (noun)      | a giant lizard monster from old movies   |
| hearse        | (noun)      | a special kind of car used for funerals  |