



Reflections of a River Rat:

Before Will Smith, Aaron Burr, Frank Sinatra and Billy Martin behaved badly

The TV credits still were rolling from the Academy Awards when my phone dinged. My son, Liam, who works on TV sets and production crews in Los Angeles, had shared a post that I'll paraphrase:

"CODA wins the Oscar for best picture. It was a great night in Hollywood for communicating with your hands!"

America long will recall the sensational moment that Will Smith strode onto the stage to slap comedian Chris Rock for his sophomoric mocking of Smith's wife, moreso than Oscar devotees will remember CODA. It's the film about a talented high school singer, the only hearing person in her family, who is torn between her studies and aiding in the success of her parents' fishing business.

After The Slap, the Internet blew up. Smith tearfully apologized to everyone but Rock. Ticket sales for Rock's current comedy tour surged. Smith apologized to Rock. Rock apologized to Smith and wife Jada Pinkett-Smith. Smith resigned from

the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Yawn. Soon, The Slap will descend into oblivion.

But this was not the first celebrity feud. Nor will it be the last:

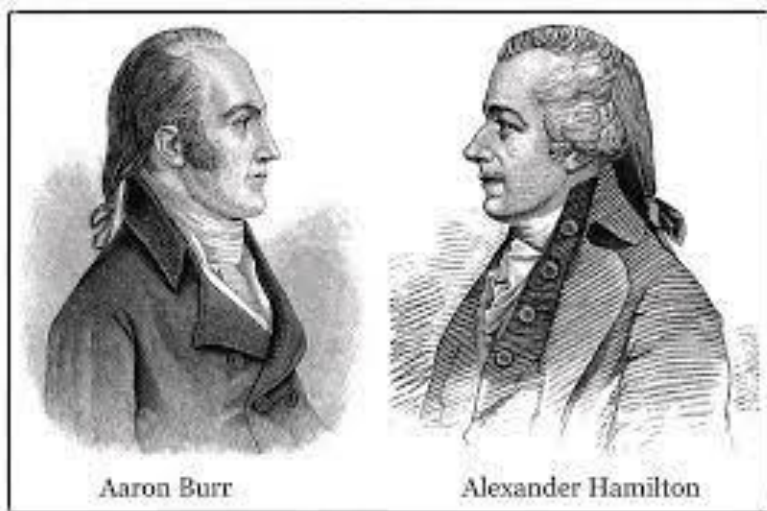
RELIGION

This stuff has been going on before Moses came down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments. Remember the biblical story of Cain and Abel?

The sons of Adam and Eve were busy working and making sacrifices to the Lord when Cain, the farmer, murdered his younger brother Abel, the shepherd. Cain was jealous that the Lord favored Abel's sacrifices over his. Cain was condemned to a life of wandering. This made the Kardashians seem tame.

POLITICS

Ever hear of Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton? Lin-Manuel Miranda invested a creative fortune and reaped a financial windfall by resuscitating their tragic feud on Broadway with his hip-hop infused mastery.



Fifteen years of sniping and dirty political tricks climaxed on July 11, 1804, when Burr and Hamilton dueled. This was no ordinary feud. Burr was serving as Thomas Jefferson's vice president at the time he confronted Hamilton, the former Secretary of the Treasury.

Their grudges dated back to 1790 when Burr defeated Hamilton's father-in-law for a New York Senate seat.

In 1804, Burr had declared his candidacy for New York governor, but Hamilton endorsed his opponent. For Burr, the final straw was a newspaper letter in which Hamilton was said to have besmirched Burr's reputation. The details of the letter were not published, but Burr had had enough. He challenged Hamilton to a duel.

That led the pair to the dueling grounds at Weehawken, N.J. Hamilton fired his shot into the trees; Burr's round struck Hamilton in the stomach. Hamilton died from his wound the next day. Burr's political career spiraled into freefall along with his beloved Federalist Party.

ENTERTAINMENT

Frank Sinatra's velvety voice and enduring songs preserved his reputation as The Voice or Ol' Blue Eyes, but he was not remembered for a single fight, but for several. Around Hollywood he was known for his obsessive compulsive, brawling, philandering, gambling, drunken, petulant ways. Will Smith threw a slap without a hitch in his swing; Sinatra relied on a clenched fist.



Sinatra built a reputation as a fighter with the Harry James band in the 1940s. He showered and changed clothes so often he was dubbed "Lady MacBeth." His first heavily-publicized bout occurred in Ciro's nightclub in Los Angeles on April 9, 1947. A columnist for The New York Daily Mirror, Lee Mortimer, was alleged to have slurred Sinatra's Italian heritage. Sinatra responded by landing a punch to the jaw, landing him in a Beverly Hills courthouse. The matter later was settled out of court.

There were stories of Sinatra paying a waiter \$50 to punch writer/producer/Hollywood gadfly Dominick Dunne, or summoning a valet to throw a plate of spare ribs at a woman that he argued with over politics.

Sinatra got his comeuppance on Sept. 11, 1967 when he was incensed that his credit was suspended at the Sands Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. He had amassed a \$200,000 debt when he was cut off by management. Sinatra crashed a cart through the glass entrance and threatened to fight the telephone operators if they wouldn't put his calls through to casino manager Carl Cohen. When Cohen agreed to meet, Sinatra heaved a table at him. Cohen ducked the table and threw one punch, knocking the caps off Sinatra's two front teeth. So much for doing it my way.

SPORTS

Pro sports are riddled with memorable brawls. The Indiana Pacers (Ron Artest) squared off with the Pistons (Ben Wallace) at The Palace in Detroit, dubbed the Malice at the Palace, in 2004. The San Francisco Giants (Juan Marichal) and the Dodgers (John Roseboro) fought at home plate in 1965, leading to a bench-clearing brawl amid an August pennant race.

But the most notorious fight – actually it was a profane screaming match – occurred in the New York Yankees dugout between manager and player.

To set the stage, you have to know the history of Billy Martin. He was kicked off his high school baseball team in Oakland, Calif., for fighting, but worked his way up through the minors before Casey Stengel traded for him before the 1949 season. Martin befriended Yankees slugger Mickey Mantle and pitcher Whitey Ford, then earned MVP of the 1953 World Series.

It was a surreal stretch in which the Yankees appeared in the World Series 14 times in 16 years from 1949 to 1964. But management deemed Martin a bad influence on Mantle. All three stars were present when the Yankees brawled with a bowling team at New York's elite Copacabana on May 15, 1957, Martin's 29th birthday. Martin was traded to Kansas City a month later.

Fast forward to the 1977 season. Martin, now manager of the Yankees, wanted to sign Oakland hitter Joe Rudi but owner George Steinbrenner insisted on power

hitter Reggie Jackson. So Martin refused to put Jackson in the cleanup spot all season.



Their feud came to a boil on June 18, 1977 in Boston. The Yankees entered the weekend series with a $\frac{1}{2}$ -game lead over the rival Red Sox in the AL East, but would leave down $1\frac{1}{2}$ games. After losing Friday night, the Yankees trailed 7-4 in the sixth inning at packed Fenway Park. Jackson's lackadaisical effort on Jim Rice's bloop single turned it into a double.

Martin was incensed and sent journeyman Paul Blair out to replace Jackson while 34,000 fans

buzzed and national TV cameras rolled. By the time Jackson made the jog of shame to top step of the dugout, Martin was waiting. The screaming match ensued. They accused each other of being shown up. Martin twice had to be restrained from trying to fight his millionaire All-Star.

After the game, Martin told reporters, "If you don't hustle, I don't accept it. If a player shows up the club, I show up the player." Soon, the NY tabloids dubbed the Yankees "The Bronx Zoo."

The season had a happy ending. Jackson hit three home runs to earn World Series MVP, was dubbed Mr. October, and the Yankees won their first Series title in 15 seasons.

Martin had this love-hate relationship going on with Steinbrenner. He served five stints as manager and was fired five times. Midway through the 1978 season, he was fired by Steinbrenner, then punched reporter Ray Hagar during a November interview at halftime of a Reno Bighorns game in the Western Basketball Association. By mid-May 1979, Steinbrenner wanted Martin back so he was made to apologize, and a settlement with Hagar was reached.

In the summer of '79, Martin reached his nadir in a hotel bar in Minnesota. He got into a beef with Joe Cooper, a marshmallow salesman. Martin decked him, but the marshmallow jokes persisted. Martin was fired the next day.

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