

Introduction

In 2000, 22 year-old rising rap star McKinley Phipps Jr alias “Mac” was arrested for murder. A 19 year-old was shot dead outside of a Louisiana club where Mac was to perform, the police quickly deeming the artist as the primary suspect. The admissible evidence that resulted in him being detained? Mac’s rap lyrics. (Slide 2)

According to British newspaper **the Guardian**, the prosecutor stated “*Murder, murder, kill, kill, ’ and ‘pull the trigger, put a bullet in your head.’ Those are some of the lyrics that this defendant chooses to rap when he performs.*” While these lyrics are violent in nature, this did not merit Mac’s arrest. Even after a security guard at the venue pleaded guilty to murdering the teen, prosecutors still pushed for the trial. Mac was convicted and sentenced to 30 years in prison.

Despite forthcoming evidence that should have absolved Mac, the artist was released in June 2021, but with 10 years on parole. 21 years of his life were spent serving time for a crime he did not commit.

(Slide 3) As both an avid Dua Lipa and pop music aficionado, I do not consume a ton of rap. While I do not condone the often aggressive undertones some rap songs have, this constitutes a double standard, as many pop artists have geared their sound towards pop-rap or pop-trap to monetize off the style.

Mac is not the only artist to have his own music turned against him. Rappers continue to face repercussions for their lyrics in the court of law, even if they are untrue. Prosecutors using this libelous tactic to specifically target rappers is unethical.

Let's take a deeper dive into this problem.

Problem

When an artist goes into the studio to record a track, it is ludicrous to consider them “on record.” An artist's music is solely for art and entertainment purposes, and should never be used to depict their character in court.

Young Thug and Gunna are the latest rappers to face repercussions for their lyricism. Prosecutors were able to push for their arrest in late 2022 on racketeering and organized crime charges, with their lyrics as substantial evidence.

On the report of **ABC News**, Fulton County District Attorney Fani Wells defended her tactic stating “I think if you decide to admit your crimes over a beat, I’m gonna use it.”

Though Young Thug is admittedly guilty on charges of organized crime for his role in founding “Young Slime Life” or YSL, a gang affiliated with the Bloods, splicing his discography and taking tracks out of context to build a case should be outlawed immediately. **Newsone** reports that one track heavily cited during the indictment was Thugga’s “Slatty,” where 48 seconds into the song he raps “I killed his man in front of his momma, like f*ck lil’ bruh, sister and his cousin / I shoot out / Kill ‘em not leaving a trace.”

According to **Cornell Law**, the legal principle innocent until proven guilty assures that “*any* defendant in a criminal trial is assumed to be innocent until they have been proven guilty.”

This poses the question “is it fair and impartial to use one's art as permissible criminal evidence?”. Allowing prosecutors to accept speculation and allusion as concrete evidence disfavors the defendant and should constitute an unfair trial.

Solution

(Slide 4) The closest thing to a solution comes from Senate Bill S7527 or “Rap Music on Trial”, passed on May 17th 2022.

According to the **New York State Senate**, the bill lessens the effect that lyricism has in the courthouse, but does not completely ban the process.

Beyonce’s husband Jay Z organized and advocated for the bill. The rapper’s lawyer, Alex Spiro wrote for multiple state lawmakers to pass the bill.

Teaming up with other artists like Meek Mill, Fat Joe and Robin Thicke, the bill was publicly supported, Jay Z stating lyrics are a “form of self-expression and entertainment.”

(Slide 5) While the bill is passed by the Senate, it was archived on June 1st 2022 still needing to pass the Assembly. Clearly, there is no rush to correct this error in the justice system.

However, Senators and Representatives are public servants. By using our voice to contact our local Representatives, we can assert that this flaw in the American justice system deserves immediate attention.

Conclusion

(Slide 6) To conclude, rap music is still considered controversial today. While many argue that it is a “bad influence” and can pressure youth into alcohol and drug consumption, this argument is baseless. To quote the NRA’s age old adage, “guns don’t kill people, people kill people.” Rap lyrics do not actively pressure people into a certain lifestyle. People pressure people into a certain lifestyle. Thank you.