

TWENTY SEVEN

ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINE

ISSUE #68
2021

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INSIDE**

TRA
THA
TRUTH

+

Mysonne

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The word “chaos” is defined as complete disorder and confusion. That seems to be the perfect word for the state of the world at the moment, especially over the last year and a half. At the same time, that may not be the correct word at all. It really just depends on who you’re asking.

This special edition issue was originally supposed to release to coincide with the release of Trae tha Truth and Mysonne’s joint album, “If You’re Scared Stay Inside” which was released February, 2021. Unfortunately, things didn’t line up accordingly and we almost scrapped the issue completely because so much time had passed. These brothers have been and continue to do great work in our community and I’ve realized that publishing this piece does more justice than it does sitting on our hard drives.

Also, special RIP to Lyric Chanel and prayers to her family and those who love her.

Tyrone Davis



TWENTY4SEVEN
ENTERTAINMENT EVERLASTING MAGAZINE

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TRA THA TRUTH

WWTD (WHAT
WOULD TRAE DO?)

Words + Interview By Tyrone Davis

I heard Trae tha Truth's music for the first time when I was in college around 2004. I had just become a huge fan of the Houston rap scene a few years prior so I was interested in any artist coming out of the city and the surrounding areas during that time. He is one of my favorite artists from that era and I have been actively following his career ever since.

Aside from his extremely long catalogue of music, Trae is well-known for his activism, charities, relationships and overall business savvy, which he has demonstrated time and time again. When does he have time to take a break? I'm not sure.

This interview made me reflect on quite a bit, not only about Trae himself and his journey but also about my own life and journey. I learned a lot about myself while attending college and that time frame is when I decided to pursue the entertainment business and become an entrepreneur. It has been a long road.

Life is funny. I went from listening to this man's music in my dorm room to crossing paths with him a few times over the years with the first time being during Twenty4Seven Magazine's first year in business at an event in Miami over 10 years ago.

Now, his is one of our cover stories. In this interview, we spoke about seeking justice for Breonna Taylor, the Capitol riots, Reparations, black empowerment and his latest joint album with NYC's Mysonne, "If You're Scared Stay Inside". Check it out.

How did partnering with Mysonne and his organization "Until Freedom" originally come about?

It started when we were on the road. George (Floyd) was one of my partners and when I went to Minnesota, Mysonne picked me up from the airport. We were there standing for the cause and after that, we never looked back because after that we started working with stuff for Breonna Taylor and we ended up moving to Louisville to fight for her.

When you say you moved to Louisville to seek justice for Breonna Taylor, what all did that entail and what was life like on a daily basis during the process?

I moved out there with *Until Freedom*. We did everything and became a part of the whole city and community from protests, feeding the community, assisting and doing anything that we could as if that was the town we were from. We even went to jail a few times.

Is there a particular method to protesting, a certain protocol to go by, etc.? How do you pull off a peaceful protest without emotions running high and things spiraling out of control?

It goes different ways like the protest in Houston with 80,000 people. Emotions definitely always run its course in these type of situations because you never know how hurt someone is, what they may be going through or what they are feeling at the time. So, you have to be compassionate and considerate of that but at the same time, you can't lose sight of what we are out here to do. I think it balances out in the areas that it is supposed to balance out but some of them, there has to be chaos.

You guys were arrested twice at some point during the protests. What were the charges and outcomes? Also, do you take arrests like those less serious when you are being arrested for a cause or being arrested as a collective?

They gave me 2 felonies. We got felonies...I don't even remember exactly what the charges were. We dealt with it...It was for a cause. When you stand for what you stand for, you gotta be prepared for everything that comes with it.

Break down your fight for "virtual funerals" within the prison system.

There is a crazy story with that. So what happened was, George Floyd's nephew was locked up and there was no way that we could get him out in time for George's funeral. So, I called and pulled some strings and was put in touch with the head sheriff in the county and he arranged for them to put him in a private room so that he could see the funeral live. From there, we never looked back. It is a good thing because they know I fight for the people and the inmates and allowed me to seal that.

During the Capitol riot, we heard a lot of, "If they were black/Black Lives Matter (fill in the blank)". Do you think we are stating the obvious at this point? Why or why not?

I think that was something that we have seen. All walks of life, all races and all classes of people got to see America for what it really is. We were uncomfortable in general and that made a lot of people who normally feel comfortable feel uncomfortable. It was an opportunity for people to see what really happens in America.

What is your take on Reparations? Do you think we will ever get them?

I feel we need them. Do I think we will ever get them? It is hard to say. They spend money on everything else but I don't think they want to make us a priority.



PHOTOS
COURTESY OF
TREA DAY PR

One of the big talking points when discussing reparations or anything that should benefit black people directly, it seems that “people of color” get thrown in the mix and black people never seem to actually benefit from any policies on a major scale as a means to rectify what we’ve specifically been subjected to in this country as a people. What say you?

That is why I say it is important for us to vote. Even though we are doing what we do, we are not voting the right people in place that will make those policies go for our benefit. None of them are for us right now so it becomes a situation where we have to vote to get the right people in place and hold people accountable for these policies. We are in the same fucked up position that we were before... maybe less or maybe more, only time will tell. He (Joe Biden) did what he had to do to get in there and after that he kept it pushing.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been several people who have spoken out on social media about being mistreated by doctors, nurses, and other hospital staff when visiting the hospital. Also, it is often said that our people don't like hospitals based on our history. As someone who has been in a similar predicament after being shot, what are your thoughts on the matter? Also, break down the story for those who aren't familiar.

I healed myself. I left the hospital and went home, applied pressure, cleaned the blood from around the wound and I thugged it out, you know? It was kind of like the movie shit when you see people heal their own wound....that is exactly what happened. Even when I took the bullet out years later, I didn't go to the hospital. I did it on my own.

How are you keeping safe and staying productive during COVID-19 when there are so many people being affected by it, especially when in large groups?

I was affected at the beginning so after that I kind of weeded the rest of it out. I have been out so much, I believe my anti-



bodies have built up to the point that they walk right across it.

At its core, where do your activism and philanthropy stem from? Can you remember the earliest moment in your life when you decided that would be one of your life's missions?

Well no, I never said that I was a philanthropist. I just always give to people in general but I've been like that since I was young. It is so crazy because I see the same in my sons. My

son does it too. I have to get on him sometimes because he will get something and share it with everybody. Sometimes I be like, “Bruh, I just got that shit for you” and he be done gave it away. It has just always been there.

With that being said, tell us about your joint project with Mysonne, “If You're Scared Stay Inside”. What can people expect who haven't heard it?

Truth! The realities, the truth and something that is needed for the culture at the present time. The good thing is that we can really rap. The message is historical because we were recording while we were in Louisville.

Which record is your favorite?

All of them! That is determined by my mood. Whatever my mood is.

I'm going to throw a few names out there. Say whatever comes to mind.

- A. Baby Truth* - Boss. Management.
- B. Nipsey Hussle* - My Brother.
- C. Lyric Chanel* - Niece. My Heart.
- D. Lil Noop* - One of the homies.

Lastly, how would you like to be remembered when this is all said and done?

As one of the realist ones left and that everything that I do is for the legacy of my kids.

Follow Trae Tha Truth on Instagram @traeabn.





PHOTOS
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MYSONNE

INTEGRITY

Words + Interview By Tyrone Davis

Mysonne is a Hip-Hop artist, actor, activist and entrepreneur who has been around for quite some time, rapping with and against high profile artists in the music business as early as 1997. Getting a second chance after a stint in prison, the Bronx native and I discussed his activism work with Tamika Mallory, Linda Sarsour and Until Freedom, Breonna Taylor, black empowerment, social media and more.

Mysonne recently released a joint project with fellow rapper and entrepreneur, Trae tha Truth titled, "If You're Scared Stay Inside" and in my opinion, this project is very reflective of the times we are currently living in, which is one of the foundations of Hip Hop.

Don't sleep. This man has something to say. Take heed.

Tell us about working with Tamika Mallory and Linda Sarsour and being a co-founder of Until Freedom. Also, explain your mission.

First of all, thanks for having me. I'm blessed and highly favored. *Until Freedom*...Linda Sarsour (Sar-Sore), a lot of people pronounce her name wrong, Tamika Mallory and also Attorney Angelo Pinto are the other co-founders of the organization, *Until Freedom*. Working, learning with/from and coming to the table and combining all of our skill sets and passions has been nothing short of amazing. It is like a super team consisting of people who are on the same page that are able to learn from each other. Tamika and Linda have been in this field of work for over 20+ years, Angelo for over a decade.

It is very rare that you find people that you actually work with that you like and enjoy to the point that you don't even feel like you're working. We are more family than co-workers and I think that's where we connect. All four of us come from different organizations, which we loved and we all came together in a gathering of justice for Harry Belafonte's organization. We worked with him and then we created an organization within that organization called *The Justice League*, which we all worked in and did similar work. Then Tamika and Linda, along with the Director of the gathering, the co-founder of *The Justice League*, Carmen Perez, went on to be 3 of the 4 marchers in the Women's March, which is the biggest single day protest in history. So from there, we just decided that we wanted to do something different. We wanted our work to encompass this culture. We're standing on the shoulders of our elders like Harry Belafonte and movement spaces that have already been defined.

It is kind of hard to redefine those spaces so we decided to come together and form under something that was Hip-Hop and relatable because this is where we come from. We wanted something that didn't make our youth feel left out. I remember first coming into this movement and not feeling like I fit in. I felt like I was from the street/a different community so I wanted people like myself to feel like they had a space within this movement. That was one of the ideologies behind creating and forming *Until Freedom*.

What are each of your roles within the organization?

Tamika and Linda are long time organizers and they've been organizing in the community for years. Tamika has served as the Executive Director of NAN, working with Al Sharpton, in which she did that for over 14 years so that's her expertise. She has a skill set of organizing and just understanding how to utilize her voice that is unmatched by anyone that I've seen, especially in this generation. She is our generation's spokesperson. With all of those that came before her, she carries that essence in her in which she has the ability to speak and to transfer messages to where it resonates with everyone and she has the ability to think and organize. She is truly our leader.

Linda has the same capabilities. She has worked in Palestine and she'll tell you that she is unapologetically Palestinian from Brooklyn, that she's been organizing in her space for Muslims and Palestinians and that she has crossed those borders to include all the work that she does with black people. Her motto is that when black people get free, everybody will get free. So we all touch different demographics.

Angelo Pinto is an attorney and one of the most brilliant individuals that I know. He keeps us abreast of the legal aspects and policies. My thing is, I have a large platform, I am a visionary, I am in-tune with culture and I understand so many different demographics in this culture from the young marginalized black kids. They say those who are directly impacted must be the solution. Let's focus on our youth and our communities, bringing them to understand that they have a voice in this movement and that they don't have to be ashamed of their background and also getting them to grow and evolve into this space because it is the time for us now to unite. So, we all serve differently and when we come together it is impactful.

How did you as a collective decide that obtaining justice for Breonna Taylor was the battle to fight when there are so many injustices happening to us on a regular basis?

We were dealing with the pandemic. I think most of us were all quarantined in our homes and Tamika got a call from Ben Crump who then told her about what happened to Breonna Taylor. He was like this young lady was killed in her home by the police officers and nobody is talking about it. She called me and was like, "Hey, look what is going on". I looked and I'm like "Yo, this is crazy". She was an essential worker and we wanted to give her a celebration on Memorial Day. We reached out to the family and the grassroots organizations that were already working on Breonna's case and organized a celebration in the complex in which she lost her life and then set up press conferences to bring awareness to what had happened to her.

At that point, along with Kenya Walker and the family of Breonna Taylor, we decided that this is something we'd take on because what I said was, "If we can't get justice for a black woman who was killed in her home then we can't get justice for anyone". Right after Kentucky, it was Minneapolis because the day after was when George Floyd was killed. The outrage was there and that is when Tamika's speech went viral. We said that were going to take the attention from this viral speech and bring it back to Breonna Taylor because still, nobody is talking about what happened to Breonna Taylor. So, we had to strategize. What happened to George Floyd was a tragedy but it was on camera, people had paid attention and the world was reacting. We utilized that same energy to take it from there to Breonna Taylor and we have been 10 toes down in it.

Explain the adjustments you had to make to relocate to Louisville, KY and the strategy you all had going into it.

There were a lot of strategies and most of us have families. I have a wife and children and I had to sit down with my wife and explain how important this was and how this sacrifice was definitely needed. It was hard, you know? I have a 9-year-old and a 7-year-old son. To leave and come back a month later or coming home 2 days out of the week and staying out 5 was a lot. We had to really make changes but we were dedicated. We understood the effects of us not being on the ground in Louisville and being able to help the grassroots organizers that had so much passion but not the infrastructure. They had the passion and they were doing the work but we had to bring notoriety to make sure people were paying attention.

We did things for months. We did things daily. We did civil disobedience and we were locked up at least 2 times. We did marches. We did rallies. We did protests. We helped with legislation. We built up the grassroots matters. We did trainings for organizing. We did everything we could to make sure the world understood that it was very much necessary. It wasn't something that we had a choice on. Just last week we were in Kentucky for 3 days. We constantly go back to build the infrastructure with the grassroots organizations. We've done everything we can and we still continue to fight.

Define "Good Trouble".
Good Trouble...it was the saying in St. Louis. Good Trouble is when you get into trouble for a righteous cause. When we decided that we were going to get into good trouble and we were going to go out and risk being arrested we were being arrested for a cause that we knew was bigger than us. We knew that when you get into trouble and you are on the right side of justice, that's good trouble.

How did you link up with Trae tha Truth and why the decision to create music together during a time like this?

Trae tha Truth has always been a brother that I respected and admired through the industry. We had met several times and had mutual acquaintances who would always say, "You guys need to link up", "Y'all are the same type of people", "I know y'all are going to click", but we would always be moving. So, we'd see each other and show each other love but during the George Floyd fiasco, we met in Minneapolis and we bonded from that minute on. I think that was the first time that we were in a capacity that wasn't about music but about our real passion and our purpose and we connected.

I think we decided in Kentucky while Trae was out there with us (the whole time). He was out there on the ground and



relocated to Kentucky with us. While we were constantly out there working, we realized that the moment that we were in would be something that would be historical. We didn't do it to make history but for us, we saw the way that we could document that reflects what it is that we're thinking, who we are and to utilize our passion. We combined our passion with our purpose and said decided to put this music together. In 2 days, we had written 14 songs and decided that it was something that we wanted to release for the people.

Over the years, we've either seen or heard about several of our brothers and sisters being murdered by the police. What do you think was different about George Floyd's death that set the whole nation off?

I think it was a combination of things. The pandemic...People just being in their homes and having nothing else to do were looking at the news. People who would normally just go about their regular day but now were already dealing with a level of trauma as they sat in their homes were seeing what was impossible to ignore. I think that pushed it to the next level. At some point, righteousness will prevail. I believe that wholeheartedly. As consciousness grows and we start to understand the times we are living in and the things that are going on around us, people's natural core values or righteousness is starting to be overwhelmed with negativity. So, I think that all of those things combined created the momentum for George Floyd.

Have you seen Nate Parker's, "American Skin"? If so, do you think his character, Lincoln Jefferson was justified in his actions? Why or why not?

I saw it. The reality of the situation is that he really didn't do anything but want to show the police what we go through everyday. He put them on trial and he let them see how we feel and what we are going through. He wanted them to understand a black man and a black boy's everyday in this world. I definitely feel like it is something that people should look at. It is a time for reflection. Personally, if I had to be the juror at his trial, I would have let him go on.

For those not familiar, who is Dontie Mitchell?

Dontie Mitchell a.k.a. Enfalmie is a man that has been incarcerated since he was 17. He was sentenced to 35-70 years in prison for armed robbery...not one injury. He walked into a McDonald's with a loaded gun, shot in the ceiling and he tried to make an escape. He was apprehended and is now on his 24th year of his 35-70 year sentence. This man was never given the opportunity to actually be a man in society. At 17, you make some mistakes. We are not saying that he shouldn't be held accountable for what he did but I think 24 years is way too long for something that did not involve anyone being harmed. No life was taken. There wasn't a scratch put on anybody.

When you put a 17 year-old-boy in jail for 35-70 years, you basically have taken his life...for one act. He didn't have any prior record. He was a kid. It is inhumane, unfortunate and should be illegal to charge these young boys and give them these types of sentences for that low level of crime they have committed. We are fighting daily and I'm working with people to try to fight to get his sentence modified and actually get him released.

In the 1996 film, "Independence Day", the solution to being able to break through the spaceships' force fields and defeat the alien invasion was to first destroy the mothership's operating system. I always use that analogy when discussing white supremacy because it seems the general public either doesn't understand that concept or they prefer to only

discuss the current conditions of black people vs. how we actually got here. What is your take?

I agree! I agree that white supremacy is the base in pretty much everything that goes on in our culture. If you put any race or culture of people in the conditions that you put black people in, you'll have the same exact results. It is not the people, it is the conditions they are in. If you go to communities of color where people are well-off and well to do, there is no crime. There is nobody shooting to harm. Poverty is violence. That is just the reality of what it is. When you put people in poverty and you don't give them any level to receive positive outcomes and put them in communities where they only see that drugs, entertainment and sports are the only ways they've ever seen somebody be successful, what else do you expect?

So, white supremacy is the base of all of that. We have redlining, which stopped black people who had money to be able to purchase homes to be able to have generational wealth and purchase property. They pretty much fixed the game to where we would never be able to be involved in the game. So, everything that you look at that is going on in the poor black communities is a result of white supremacy.

People always say that they believe black people should do all that they can to change their conditions. It is a joke to me when people say "Pick yourself up by your bootstraps" to a man who doesn't even have boots. How the hell is he going to pull his straps up? The sad reality is that we have black people that feed into that mindset. I tell people all the time that I'm successful by my own definition. I know a lot of people around me who are not so to believe that I'm the rule and not the exception is a false narrative. To believe that everybody can do what I do is a false narrative.

Sure, anything is possible when you look at the reality that people are living in. It is like telling every basketball player that they can be LeBron James. That is not really accurate because LeBron James is a once in a lifetime talent. To compare oneself to those people who have had the skill sets, luck and/or all the things to line up to make them successful, it is not fair, especially in black communities. Our white counterparts are 100 times more successful than I am and it is not because he/she has more skill sets than I have but because he/she has more opportunities. They are in close proximity to success. There are mediocre white people who are way more successful than brilliant black people. So, give us those same opportunities and I promise you, we would be able to compete on every level.

With that being said, a few years back, you made a response verse to Joyner Lucas' "I'm Not Racist" record. What was your mindset behind the response?

Shout out to Joyner Lucas, a young brother I believe is a woke Hip-Hop artist. His creativity is beyond measure and when I first heard the record, I wish that I had done it. I said it too. My mentality behind remixing was I felt that the point of view in which he spoke from a young black man's perspective was not one that represented me as a black man. I'm not saying that it didn't represent the black man but it didn't represent the mindset that I have as a black man, you know? I listened to the white man explain why he was racist or bias against the black man and he had all the points that every white person says. When I listen to the black plight, it seemed like he was trying to beg the white man to understand his plight like, "You did this to us...". I don't have to beg them to understand. So, my perspective was coming from somebody who had been wronged, enslaved, and a victim of white supremacy. I wanted it to be an equal playing ground. The song wasn't equal.



I noticed that you engage with people on Instagram a lot and most often it results in a back and forth of some kind, especially concerning political and/or social issues. At any point does that get exhausting?

Everybody has a different purpose, you know? I won't say it gets exhausting...it is understanding. That is what we do. As a person who has a platform, my job is to utilize that platform to inform or be informed. If I just have a platform and I don't utilize it to speak out against things that I don't agree with or to represent things that I do agree with, then my platform is existing for nothing. So a lot of times, they'll be point of views that I don't agree with that I feel are detrimental to the mind state or development of our people and at that point, I don't mind using my platform to speak out against it or opening a back-n-forth. It is that important for me. I have three sons that I am raising. So, understand that when we have these people that have platforms, these kids are paying attention to them.

If anyone is spewing a narrative that goes against my moral competence or is discordance to my common sense and I know that my kids may take on that mentality, I have to say something and engage them. If they prove me wrong, I don't have a problem being wrong. If I am wrong, I am wrong but I have to stand on the side of righteousness. I have to make sure that these kids get an opportunity to do it the right way. I was misled by some people who didn't even know they were misleading me. I don't think they intentionally mislead me because they were misled themselves. So with me, it stops. I have no problem engaging with anyone over something I believe in.

Social media has a way of pulling people in, to a point where a lot of us feel the need to voice our opinions on everything that comes across our screens. At the same time, those who are public figures like yourself have to stay in the mix to some degree to continue their mission. With everything that is going on in the world, how do you decide which issue is worth the time and effort?

It depends on how I feel. There are so many different issues and a lot of them, I don't even comment on even though I probably want to. Some things aren't as detrimental. For someone like myself who is raising sons, having and maintaining a level of integrity, accountability, respect and honor are things that I really preach wholeheartedly because that is the way I live my life. So, when I see anybody glorifying the opposite of that or showing no honor or respect because they are gaining some monetary value, I vehemently deny or defy that. I will not sit back and allow that to be a narrative that is passed on. A lot of people don't want to insult or offend the wrong person but if my reality offends someone, that is on them. That has nothing to do with me. Everyone has their own platform. They've got their pages and I have got mine. I am going to utilize mine to say things that coexist and co-align with my moral compass, every time.

In recent years, I've seen quite a few of our people on social media making disparaging remarks about a lot of our historical figures. I'm not sure if that is for attention or not but you never know these days. What say you?

Everybody has an opinion, and you can't really say what everyone's opinion is. If you watch them enough, then you're able to see what their motive is. The "clout chasing" is at an all time high. People will do anything, and you gotta be able to weave in and out those people who do that oppose to those who actually have an opinion that might not favor the majority about someone that everyone loves. That is just a part of life. Nobody is going to think the same way at all times. Everybody is entitled to their own opinion. A lot of people think that people disagreeing is disrespect and that is where things start to get blurry. You have people who speak their opinions as it is fact. That is irresponsible. There are always going to be situations and everybody's motives are different. We need discernment. We need the ability to look and listen and be able to take away the stuff we need and throw away the stuff we don't because everyday somebody's saying something, you just gotta know what to listen to.

You were very outspoken against Donald Trump along with a big portion of the country. In your opinion, are we better off as a people now that Joe Biden has replaced him? How do you see these next four years going?

I don't think America is designed to make us better off or to make us successful. It was never built on that premise. When I looked at Donald Trump, I understood what he was. He was a dictator, pretty much running the white house as a one man show. For someone that was elected to run a country, he was supposed to listen to the pulse of the people and represent what the people wanted but his whole sole interest was himself and those like him. He was a white supremacist on January 6th. The insurrection proves that point. He pretty much was creating a racial imbalance in this country that was going to make a race war inevitable. He empowered racists. He talked down about every other race except white people and made people who were normally silent become vocal.

There were reactions in the streets with blacks and whites on the daily. The level of unprofessionalism that man possessed was dangerous to this country in so many different ways. Other countries didn't even respect us. At the point we got to Biden, we didn't have any other choice but to elect a president that is an ally. I just felt that based on Biden's administration and the people he had in close proximity to him, that we had a better chance of fighting with Biden.

Through this last month of change, you see that there are a lot of things that we don't agree with nor like. Some things are OK and some are not. So, our fight is never going to stop. I just think that we have a lot less with someone like Biden in opposed to Trump because Trump was almost in a mode like Hitler was. To not recognize that is dangerous. He still completely controls a party and is about to run again so we are living in a dangerous time where our previous president is an egotistical sociopath. We had a sociopath as a president.

I would not sit here and tell you that Biden is perfect and that he is the best person, I am just saying that there is no way that he wasn't better than Trump. In order to get the things that we actually need, in the interim, we need to be building our own. We elected Biden for the next four years. While he is trying to

figure out what we are going to do and we are trying to figure out what he is going to do, we should be building our own coalitions and our own voting base for the next election and every election thereafter. We have seen our power. By the next election, we should have four viable candidates that we are putting everything behind.

In what way did prison save your life?

Prison saved my life! I had a similar situation to Bobby Shmurda. I ended up doing 7 years in prison, right at the peak of my career. Unfortunately, we didn't have social media and songs didn't go viral. I was just on records that was about to get hot and I end up going to prison and doing 7 years. I had so many people around me at that time. Some of my friends have life in prison and some of them really didn't mean good for me but they were around because I was the next best thing coming out. Within those 7 years, I was like, "Wow! I could have been dead or doing life like some of my friends are". I don't believe God makes mistakes. Nothing is accidental or coincidental. I definitely believe that everything that happened to me was God's plan.

What sparked your interest in criminal justice early on?

Being falsely accused and incarcerated, sitting in the cell with young boys that were 17-18 years old with 40-50 year sentences, the school to prison pipeline, etc. I was watching how these young boys were coming to jail uneducated, going home a couple of years later and then coming right back with 20-30 years. I was understanding how the system is designed to keep us going in and out. As I sat in there and I broke the ideology of the prison system, I said to myself that when I went home, I had to do something different. When I came home, that was one of the main things that I wanted to do. I wanted to talk about the justice system, prison reform and prison transformation.

I grew up an Army brat so the majority of my friends are from all over the world. However, just about all of the people who have been close to me over the years from NYC have been from the Bronx for some reason. It is also where I have spent the most time when visiting NYC. Being from there, what about the Bronx makes it what it is and how is it different from any other borough?

The Bronx is different. It has its own energy. There is an energy in the Bronx that is like no other borough. I love all the other boroughs. I love Harlem and I love Brooklyn. In the Bronx though, there is a distinct level of ruggedness mixed with the style of the Bronx. You got Brooklyn, which is more rugged than everybody, Harlem is more flashy and the Bronx is like the combination of both of them.

We have taken the traits of Brooklyn and Harlem and it became our signature. You will see some Bronx dudes hanging in Harlem or Brooklyn and sometimes you won't know where they are from because they will have that edge that represents all of them. So, the Bronx is just a unique place. I think it is because it is a melting pot of so many different ideologies and ethnic groups that it is just....I can't even explain. It is different.



How do you feel about the direction Hip-Hop/Rap has gone over the years, especially in reference to lyricism?

I think everything is based on time. Everything goes in a different direction. I think if you search for lyricism, you can find it in Hip-Hop but now, everything is about entertainment and no longer about skill level for the most part. It is more about who can entertain more, who can be as catchy as possible and who can have people gravitate to them. We are just in a different period but there are lyricists around. That is one thing about YouTube. You don't need radio or anything else to actually find dope artists.

Speaking of change, some years ago it wasn't cool to be a married rapper but now people are calling these marriages "goals". How supportive has your wife been throughout your endeavors and how do you keep the balance?

I tell people this all the time. Marriage is hard, especially when you are an artist and you travel a lot. My wife is very supportive. She wants to see me successful. Sometimes, it gets rough and we go through our rough patches but she has been there from the beginning, when I was just trying to figure it out and when I was just fresh home from prison. I had just met her and I was just grinding. We are kicking it.

Aside from music and activism, you've also published a book titled, "I Know My Rights: Bill of Rights". Break that down.

I Know My Rights: Bill of Rights is about the first 10 Amendments of the Constitution. It was a book I wrote along with my partner. Being young and black from marginalized communities of color, we did not know our rights. Officers have pulled us over, searched us and put us in the back of cars. I've been violated so much and when I thought about it, I decided I wanted to be able to empower these young people to let them know what can and cannot happen to them. It gives them a level of power. We used to run from the police even when we did nothing wrong because they would just harass us and we didn't know that they couldn't. So, I wanted to help these young people to understand that.

Tell us something about yourself that most don't know.

I am funny. Most people think that I am serious all the time but I joke all the time and I am a comedian. I love to laugh. There is a very light side to me. I think prison gave me this stoic situation because you had to be serious to survive but I definitely have a very humorous side.

Lastly, do you still get buckets or is it a wrap for that?

Yeah, this right knee here... The way this right knee is set up, it is kind of hard to get these buckets. But, when I go out there after about 20-30 minutes....Man, I start feeling that lil knee. I be like, "Yeah, OK. Let me sit down".

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