

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

My Hunger For Money Left Me Starving

Rose Rteimeh · Wednesday, April 6th, 2016

Everyone wants to make it to the top, but what about the people who are already there? Did they put aside their morals to make it and regret it when their champagne no longer tastes new? Society has shaped its people to crave a lavish lifestyle as well as idolizing money, and to get it at all costs. This can range from compromising morals through illegal actions to get money or forgetting where they came from.



The song “Money Trees” by Kendrick Lamar featuring Jay Rock, which is on his album *Good Kid, M.A.A.D City*, was released in 2012. This song expresses Kendrick’s struggles with money. Is being rich worth all the bad memories that haunt him? This song is the anthem of every person who has escaped poverty but lives with the guilt of what it has turned them into. Kendrick Lamar expresses his remorse towards the neverending cycle of the effect of being money hungry has on breeding criminals in impoverished communities through, repetition, juxtaposition, symbolism, and the genre of the song.

Kendrick Lamar’s lyrics in this song contain repetition that captures his strong message of reaffirming the idea in the listener’s mind that money can be the reason why one changes. The effects money has on people and their actions are prominent throughout this song. Kendrick Lamar emphasizes the power money has on people through the lyrics:

A dollar might just fuck your main bitch that’s just how I feel, now
A dollar might, say fuck them niggas that you came with that’s just how I feel, now
A dollar might, just make that lane switch that’s just how I feel, now
A dollar might, turn to a million and we all rich that’s just how I feel, now

In these lines, Kendrick uses repetition through the lyric, “a dollar might.” This repetition emphasizes the message that motivation such as making money can alter the way one acts. In these lines he expresses that “a dollar might” make your lover leave you if they find someone who’s richer. “A dollar might” make him leave all your friends behind just to pursue his dreams of making money, which is what he did. “A dollar might” make him forget who he is because he’s blinded by money which is what happened to him. “A dollar might” turn into a dream that makes millions of dollars that can allow him and everyone who has escaped poverty to live comfortably. Although he feels guilty about it now, he had a voice in his head telling him it’s what he had to do

to get to where he is right now. This voice in his head can be depicted as his twisted motivation. He presents this voice through repetition of “No way” in the bridge. In the bridge his motivation is displayed in the lines:

Be the last one out to get this dough? No Way
Hit the brakes, when they on patrol? No Way

These lines contain questions that he’s asking himself in a sarcastic way. He knows he doesn’t want to be the last one to make it out of the hood and abide by the laws even when police officers are present. However, he’s asking himself these questions to see if his conscious will hold him back. His conscious replies with, “no way”.

[embedvideo id=”fcFBnOH061A” website=”youtube”]

“Money Trees” features Jay Rock in the third verse, where he talks about where he wants to be which is at the top and rich like Kendrick, but is trapped in his impoverished reality. Jay Rock expresses his struggle between wanting to stop the hustle, but can’t because he wants to live a lavish lifestyle. He depicts his struggle of wanting to stop immoral acts but is still money hungry through juxtaposition in the lines:

In the streets with a heater under my dungarees
Dreams of me getting shaded under a money tree.

In these lines, he discusses how the “heater” under his pants is a gun as he’s sitting down imagining how his life would be when he’s rich. Jay Rock juxtaposes heat and coolness in this verse. “The heater” which is the gun, represents how heat is generally associated with discomfort. The discomfort from the heat is his guilt of living a life full of crime just to make money. The coolness he wants to feel is being “shaded” under all the money he’s going to have. The coolness is associated with being at ease, Jay Rock is willing to do anything to escape the heat of illegal actions and reach a shaded area of comforting affluence.

Kendrick Lamar uses symbolism to depict the battle between good and evil. Throughout the song, he makes money and evil appear synonymous. However, he presents a new thought that suggests achieving salvation is also evil, because he will never achieve it. In the hook he says,

It go Halle Berry or hallelujah
Pick your poison, tell me what you’re doing.

These lyrics symbolize worldly pleasures and salvation as painful luxuries. Halle Berry is a famous actress, who is often times identified as a sex symbol. The people Kendrick was surrounded with growing up taught him that he will only get a “Halle Berry” if he is rich. This built a perspective in his mind that one can only achieve worldly pleasures at its highest peaks such as sex only if they have money. Her beauty and success as an actress makes her the perfect person to be used as an example of a worldly pleasure. “Hallelujah” symbolizes redemption that Kendrick longs for. However, he describes both of these as “poison”, because no matter what he chooses, it will still hurt him. He chose his “Halle Berry” by deciding to chase money which made him feel guilty about all the bad things he did to reach that point. That guilt led to his, “hallelujah” and it made

him realize that he can't repent for something he will still pursue; choosing money over anything. He found himself unhappy in either situation. He worked his whole life to be surrounded by worldly pleasures such as unlimited Halle Berrys and money because he treated them as his Hallelujah. Once he received all those things he realized that he is nowhere near the real Hallelujah; happiness.

Besides using lyrics to get his powerful message across, he also does this with the genre of the song. The genre of the song is West Coast hip hop which is a subgenre of hip hop. This subgenre encloses artists that originate from the West Coast region of the United States. Kendrick was raised in the West Coast region of Compton, California. Kendrick Lamar combines the conscious tradition of West Coast hip hop from the 1990s from artists like Freestyle Fellowship, Jurassic 5, the Pharcyde and Dilated Peoples with the West Coast hip hop that started in Compton. Compton is notoriously known for the famous rap group N.W.A, whose music genre was gangsta rap.

Although Kendrick is not a "gangsta rapper," he is from Compton and that alone is enough to give him street cred. He uses his street cred to direct listeners from gangsta rap, to listen to his conscious rapping. Through his infusion of conscious rapping and gangsta rapping, he has appealed to listeners through ethos. He is someone of credibility to give them advice on their situation since he has lived through it. Kendrick is delivering this song to all his fans but especially those are living in cities where this genre emerged from. This historical context gives the song a powerful impact that is credible to the people it can be targeted towards. What better way to talk about escaping poverty to chase money than from someone who was in a community that is known for reproducing many others with the same story?

The song "Money Trees" is powerful in a way that it explains a real social issue, the hunger for an affluent life and doing anything to obtain it. Kendrick Lamar explains his struggle coping with the guilt of leaving those who want to be him and are going through what he did, behind. The song encapsulates how the thing he wanted so bad which was money can be the reason why you doesn't feel happy anymore. "Money Trees" was a way of him warning those who are money hungry to stay away, he wants to break this cycle.

Rose Rteimeh is this week's feature on "[Tomorrow's Voices Today](#)", the new series curated by poet and educator Mike Sonksen.

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