

Historical context of control by big sean essay example

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“ Control” is a song by rap artist Big Sean, which is the stage name of rapper Sean Michael Anderson. The song lyrically develops a story of us versus them in terms of black Americans living in Detroit, the city where Big Sean grew up. The song showcases a common practice in hip hop music today—other artists collaborating with each other on their music. The song features Kendrick Lamar and Jay Electronica. The song is important of new rap music from a cultural standpoint in how it portrays the new scene, belongs to the old tradition, and paints the picture of what it is like to be a musician at a certain time and place, in this case Detroit, Michigan. In this the song provides the historical context of the city. Detroit as a city, is currently without much “ control” as the recent news of its bankruptcy shows. But “ Control”, a song coming from Detroit, is about controlling your own personal destiny.

Much of hip-hop music is created from sampling another artist’s work. In this case “ Control” was created by sampling Jay-Z’s 1997 track “ Were I’m From” and also the 1974 song “ El Pueblo Unido Jamás Será Vencido” by Sergio Ortega. It also features Terrace Martin’s song “ Git Bizy” as an interpolation. The 1974 Steven Ortega song is important also because of its theme, which is reflective of the themes explored in the song. “ El Pueblo Unido Jamás Será Vencido” translated into English means “ A United People Will Never Be Conquered.” Invincibility is a theme that runs concurrent throughout “ Control.”

The first verse begins with lines that out of context come across as vain self-praise. Big Sean raps, “ Boy I’m ‘ bout my business on business, I drink liquor on liquor / I had women on women, yeah that’s bunk bed bitches.” Big Sean

establishes himself as having led a full life despite only being born in 1988. He raps, " I've done lived more than an eighty year old man still kickin'." Similar lines continue in the first verse and then the theme starts to develop midway through it when Big Sean raps, " They told me I never boy, never say never." The song is about overcoming both self-doubt and the discouragement. When he says he " finally found a girl" it implies that there was a period when he wanted to have a significant other but for whatever reason was unable.

" Making it" is a common theme in rap. In order to get big, many rappers had to undergo hardship, discouragement, low pay, and fight to establish themselves. Because that is how the industry works it is not surprising that this theme is often explored in their music. When he raps that he got " paid then reversed debts" it implies that he is finally making it. Later he talks about being able to buy a house for his family with the money that he has made from rapping.

This song has the concurrent theme of confidence in the face of discouragement. When he raps " I know that the world was for the taking" he is saying that he always had an innate certainty that he would get to where he wanted to do. This confidence is common as a theme in new rap likely because it is this mentality, which is a prerequisite for making it.

Very important for understanding this song is the place and time where it occurs. Detroit has recently been in the news due to its having to declare bankruptcy. The future of Detroit is uncertain, but the people there are resistant to giving up. It is a city of tough people who are trying to forge a life in a city with rampant unemployment rates, housing problems (excess

problems) and corruption within the government. Big Sean raps, “ They say Detroit ain’t got a chance, we ain’t even got a mayor.”

Just as Big Sean raps about being an outcast in the community of rappers, Detroit is an outcast city in the state of Michigan, not really fitting in with the rest of the state and with a set of problems unique to the city. When Big Sean Raps “ Detroit versus everybody” he is touching on a theme that US today discusses in an article where they define the relationship between Michigan and Detroit as “ A troubled relationship” (Maynard, 1).

In the filing of the city’s bankruptcy, the governor stayed staunch in his refusal to bail out the city. He said that he did not want to reward mismanagement, and on his website he posted that “ Keep in mind that we didn’t create the crisis. Sixty years of decline created this crisis” (Maynard, 1).

NPR was a bit more optimistic in their coverage of the issue asking the question “ Can Detroit Be Saved?” The article focused on insecurity with residents, who are unsure of what is going to become of their city, their lives, and for many government workers, their pensions (Hulett, 1).

This song certainly comments on this issue and the time and place that it is occurring. The attitude it takes is one of “ F--- everybody else, I do not need them to make it.” In a city with so much uncertainty on so many fronts, and also a city of violent crime, this self-reliance is perhaps necessary in order to ensure one’s survival and to make it through the day in and day out life of what the rest of the country sees as a failed city.

The predictions of Detroit are not all dire. The BBC points out in an article on the topic that despite many decades of decline and mismanagement that

there are signs of life and new companies coming and establishing themselves in the city (Dymond, 1). This song is also part of the success story of Detroit. After-all, it does show that the city has artists that are producing creative content that are making it to the national stage. “Control” made it to two different billboard charts in 2013. The first the US Bubbling Under Hot 100 Singles, where it made it to the eleven spot and the second being the US Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs where it rose to the forty-three spot. Of the many stories that will be remembered in the future as history that is happening today, “Control” will be seen as something successful that the city is producing, and will add to the city’s varied musical history. The city, will always be remembered as the birthplace of techno music, and the music composition continues to be one of the backbones of the city. “Control” as a title for a song also is one of the themes depicted in it and one seen as a mantra in Detroit. How do you control things when it seems everything is out of control in the world around you? You do it by controlling your own thoughts and destiny. “Control” is about just that—control. Part of that is being able to decide one’s destiny. Big Sean raps “I’m just the new version of old me / Forever hot headed but never got cold feet.” Big Sean has certainly found his groove in life and has taken “control” of his own destiny. He graduated from high school with good grades despite being raised by a single mom in the west side of Detroit. He was able to get a big break at a relatively young age when he released his first official mix-tape and has only been rising and becoming more mainstream since then. “Control” is the culmination of his career at this point. He is also showing his ability to network with other rappers to collaborate with them on his tracks.

More than this song being about the personal history of the rapper Big Sean, it is also part of the history of Detroit, a storied city with a rich past and currently difficult situation. It belongs also to the long tradition of hip-hop. In its sampling of other tracks, and also puts a new spin on the old tradition. The song is certainly the biggest song that Big Sean has come out with to date, and as he is young, it is not likely to be his last as he continues to be one of the positive aspects of the city of Detroit, which is undergoing difficult transitional period.

Works Cited:

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