

Nipsey Hussle and Why it Doesn't Matter

by Justin Madu

March 31st, 2019 33-year-old Nipsey Hussle, born Ermias Asghedom, was shot dead. Hussle unfortunately joins a long-standing tradition of hip-hop artists falling victim to gun violence. Hussle is survived by two children, and a long-time girlfriend. However, although the Grammy-nominated-rapper-turned-businessman has been publicly mourned by numerous notable figures including Rhianna, Drake, and LeBron James, I pose a question: “another dead rapper, why does it matter?”.

The short answer is: it doesn't.

It is extremely unfortunate when the fatal shooting of a young, community-minded, father of two becomes an insignificant symptom of a much greater issue. Hussle is simply the latest addition to an, unfortunately growing, roster of rappers who have died to gun violence. While the shooting of 20-year-old XXXTentacion (Born Jaseh Onfroy) dominated headlines in June 2018, the week following his death saw the fatal shootings of two of his contemporaries, Jimmy Wopo (Born Travon Smart) and Toronto-based “Smoke Dawg” (Born Jahvante Smart). However, even when shifting focus from Hussle's death to the larger music scene, the scale of the issue at the core of these deaths remains out of focus. Simply put, the narrative of a rag-to-riches hip-hop star being murdered exists in public consciousness, with Tupac Shakur and Christopher Wallace (known by his stage name The Notorious B.I.G.) being the most notable examples. However, despite the familiarity of Hussle's story, the famous faces involved in hip-hop murders are merely obliquely related to the larger issue of gun violence.

California, with a population of 39 million reported 3,184 gun violence deaths in 2016 (Aguilera). America reported that, in the following year, its 327 million inhabitants experienced 40,000 deaths due to gun violence (Mervosh). Canada's 36 million inhabitants reported only 266 gun-related homicides in 2017 (Beattie, et al.). However, although simple to disregard gun violence as an American problem, Prince George reported 4 homicides in 2017 (Pawliw). These stats can be simplified, as each year:

- Someone living in Prince George has a 1 in 18,000 chance of being killed
- Someone living in California has a 1 in 12,000 chance of being shot and killed
- Someone living in Canada has a 1 in 135,000 chance of being shot and killed
- Someone living in America has a 1 in 8,000 chance

of being shot and killed

In this way, violent crime and gun violence remains an issue for Prince George residents.

The initial reports of Hussle's death heavily emphasised his past gang ties. However, initial reports failed to mention his scheduled meeting with the chief of the Los Angeles Police Department that was meant to occur on the day of his death, regarding a public discussion on ending gang violence (Carpenter). Furthermore, claims that Hussle was merely a victim of gang violence is disappointing. This disappointment stems from the fact that gang violence

largely exists as a buzzphrase meant to minimize murder. This minimization occurs in two major ways, firstly, it simplifies the circumstances of the violent crime and secondly, it reduces the victim's claim to victimhood through the implication that the victim was somehow responsible for their own attack. The victims of violent crime should be allowed to remain victims, with full responsibility being placed on violent offenders regardless of circumstances.

Currently, Hussle's final Grammy-nominated album Victory Lap currently occupies iTunes top-selling album slot, and he has now surpassed 57 million streams (Associated Press). However, if his music sales are ignored, Hussle's death becomes entirely significant, much like the 40,000 Americans lost last year to gun violence, and much like the four individuals lost locally. In this way, throughout media-perpetuated narratives of violence against rappers, it becomes critically important not to lose sight of larger initiatives to eliminate gang-violence, reduce violent crime, and regulate guns properly. This focus is so important, as without the larger focus “another dead rapper” simply does not matter.

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