

# Speakeasy with Denene: Freedom

Denene Millner: Welcome to Speakeasy with Denene, a podcast from Georgia Public Broadcasting. I'm your host, Denene Millner. Each episode of Speakeasy focuses on a one-word topic, and we dive into the many ways it affects the African American community. On this episode, the topic is freedom. Just a note, you'll hear some explicit music on today's show that absolutely is not suited for little ears.

[00:00:30]

Denene Millner: On Speakeasy with Denene, I'm introducing you to my two daughters, Lilia and Mari. Now that they're older, my lessons are less mom to daughter instruction, and more woman-to-woman, heart-to-heart discussions. I've been talking to them a lot about freedom, specifically what it means to be a free, Black woman in a society that goes out of its way to tell us what to do and how to be, all while holding its foot on our necks. I want my girls to know that they have the freedom to decide what they wanna do, how to do it, and who they want to give their energy to, and especially that they have the right to color all outside the lines.

[00:01:00]

Denene Millner: This is a lesson I'm just starting to learn myself as a newly single woman, living on my own for the first time in more than two decades. That word is so incredibly important to me that I actually had the word free tattooed on my wrist. It's a constant reminder that my capacity to love, work hard, and have empathy must extend to myself first.

[00:01:30]

Outcast: (singing):  
There's a fine line between love and hate you see  
Came way too late but baby I'm on it

Denene Millner: I have the freedom to do what's right for me, what feels good to me, and to be strong in my insistence that I care for and about myself, in a way that is deeply gratifying, in a way that makes me happy, no matter what anyone else has to say about it.

[00:02:00]

Outcast: (singing)  
Can't worry bout, what a nigga think now see  
That's Liberation and baby I want it

Denene Millner: OutKast had it right in their hit Liberation, which is the centerpiece of my freedom songs playlist.

Outcast: (singing)

Can't worry bout, what another nigga think  
Now that's Liberation and baby I want it

[00:02:30]

Denene Millner: That's the ultimate freedom right there. We're going to break format today and spend our entire episode with one guest. This is someone who uses his voice to elevate the conversation of freedom in a big way.

[00:03:00]

Killer Mike: (singing)  
The end of the Reagan Era, I'm like number twelver  
Old enough to understand the shit'll change forever  
They declared the war on drugs like a war on terror  
But what it really did was let the police terrorize whoever  
But mostly black boys, but they would call us "niggas"  
And lay us on our belly, while they fingers on they triggers

Denene Millner: That's Atlanta based artist, Michael Render, known as Killer Mike. With rapper and producer El-P, Mike is one half of the group, Run The Jewels. The song you're hearing is Reagan, released on Mike's 2012 album, R.A.P. Music, which El-P produced. The R.A.P. in the title stands for Rebellious African People.

[00:03:30  
]

Killer Mike: (singing)  
Involuntary servitude and slavery it prohibits  
That's why they giving drug offenders time in double digits  
Ronald Reagan was an actor, not at all a factor

Denene Millner: Killer Mike has been a vocal defender of the free speech in rap music, which has been challenged in the courts. In 2019, he joined an amicus brief in a case involving Pennsylvania rapper Jamal Knox, who was convicted for threatening police in one of his songs. In 2012, Knox and another rapper wrote a song after the pair had been arrested on gun and drug charges. One of the lyrics is, "Let's kill these cops 'cause they don't do us no good."  
[00:04:00]

Denene Millner: The song identifies the arresting officers by name. Both of the men behind the song were criminally charged and sentenced to prison. Now, Jamal Knox argued they were protected by the First Amendment. A chorus of artists, including Killer Mike, urged the U.S. Supreme Court to take up the case. The High Court declined. Mike says Jamal's rights were violated.

Killer Mike: He used his voice, because a lot of times, you get angry, you just need to go in a room and yell, to protest, and in it, he named a cop. Now, what are the chances  
[00:04:30]

that this boy can really track down a cop and find him, and kill him? But still, he was prosecuted, and- and- and- and in jail, so right now, if you're a famous rapper, if you're Killer Mike, you can make a song like Reagan, and not really much worry about prosecution.

Killer Mike: But if you're a kid just from around the corner and you make a song that the government decides for whatever reason, they don't like, you can be prosecuted. You can be put in jail. And, um, I fear things like hate speech laws. I fear things like politically correct laws, because what they do is give you a prettier cage to be put in.

[00:05:00]

Denene Millner: I spoke with Killer Mike at his Atlanta barber shop called, The Swag Shop. He co-owns it with his wife, Shay. The concept of freedom weighs heavily on Mike, every day.

Killer Mike: You're 55 years into freedom.

Denene Millner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:05:30]

Killer Mike: You are 55 years into the experiment that America promised. That means that, um, freedom is only 11 years older than me. And I do not trust any- any Republic to take care of me better than me.

Denene Millner: No.

Killer Mike: Now you can recognize my human rights, you can recognize my constitutional rights, but you cannot take better care of me than my family.

Denene Millner: Right.

Killer Mike: No one can take better care of me than my grandparents did.

Denene Millner: Right.

Killer Mike: No one can feed me, naturally off the earth like my grandfather did. No one can defend my household like my grandfather did. And if I don't live up to that standard, then I am not the man he raised me to be.

[00:06:00]

Denene Millner: Right. Talk to me about hip hop and how freedom works with the music that you've created-

Killer Mike: Yup.

Denene Millner: ... the sounds that you've created, the words that you say, in- in that music, 'cause I grew up in a era-

Killer Mike: Yeah.

Denene Millner: ... I'm 50.

Killer Mike: Yeah.

Denene Millner: I grew up in a era-

Killer Mike: Oh, man.

Denene Millner: ... where-

Killer Mike: Look here, Black don't crack for real, man.

Denene Millner: (laughs)

Killer Mike: I would have guessed you for 30 something.

Denene Millner: (laughs) I'm 50.

Killer Mike: It's a blessing.

Denene Millner: And I was there, as a journalist, when they were running over, you know, tape cassettes-

Killer Mike: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Denene Millner: ... with bulldozers-

Killer Mike: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. [crosstalk 00:06:24].

Denene Millner: White folks were doing that.

Killer Mike: Tipper Gore shouts out-

Denene Millner: Right. Absolutely.

Killer Mike: ... to C. DeLores Tucker-

Denene Millner: And C. DeLores Tucker-

Killer Mike: Yeah. Um-

Denene Millner: And the NAACP-

[00:06:30]

Killer Mike: Oh, God- [crosstalk 00:06:30].

Denene Millner: ... was out there. Because [crosstalk 00:06:31]-

Killer Mike: ... but I get it wrong, so many times.

Denene Millner: So, talk to me about how- about the growth-

Killer Mike: The same people-

Denene Millner: Because there is growth.

Killer Mike: ... that had- that had heralded themselves as revolutionaries and standing next to Dr King, and standing next to people supporting like, um, the SCLC, were the same people that once in authority became oppressors of freedom of speech, because they didn't like the fact that rappers cursed or talked sexually explicit, or said things that they didn't agree with. Some of these people are just charlatans.

[00:07:00] I didn't- you know, I knew Reverend James Orange, you know, he never spoke of this- you know, talking to me in terms of, sometimes acting on the campaign like, James Orange was such a wonderful man. He didn't like my name, Killer Mike, he called all young Black men leader. He refused to call me Killer. But he never would call for a censorship of me. He never would have said, "This kid shouldn't ha- have this name." I didn't even name myself that. Um ... I saw freedom of speech challenged and defended by Luther Campbell.

Luther Campbell: (singing)  
Don't stop pop that pussy Let me see you doo doo brown

[00:07:30]

Denene Millner: Luther Campbell, aka Uncle Luke, was a controversial rapper and producer, out of Miami. He was known for hits like, I Wanna Rock.

Luther Campbell: (singing)  
I wanna, I wanna, I wanna I wanna rock my man... Heeeeey, we want some puuusssy (Heeeeey, we want some puuusssy) Let me hear you say, "Heeeeey, we want some D.I.C.K"

Denene Millner: As the leader of the rap group 2 Live Crew, Uncle Luke created explicit and sexually charged music that sparked nationwide protest from the likes of Tipper Gore, the wife of former U.S. Vice President, Al Gore, and Black civil rights leaders like C. DeLores Tucker.

[00:08:00]

Luther Campbell: (singing)  
Don't stop (Get It Get It) Don't stop (Get It Get It) Don't stop (Get It Get It) Don't stop (Get It Get It)

Denene Millner: 2 Live Crew was sued over its album, As Nasty As They Wanna Be. Ultimately, the case was overturned by a higher court, and then an obscenity trial followed.  
[00:08:30] Harvard University Professor Dr. Henry Louis Gates represented the group in that case, and all of the group's members were acquitted. Killer Mike says Uncle Luke was a huge inspiration in his quest to defend freedom of speech.

Killer Mike: And I tell people often that Luther Campbell and Larry Flynt have been as important in my life, in terms of understanding and recognizing my constitutional right of free speech, as Martin or Malcolm ever were. Um, I let people know in matters of me and my freedom, I'm not trying to be your leader, I'm not trying to be righteous, or a preacher. I want my freedom because I like smoking marijuana and going to strip clubs with my wife, and I don't want you to have an opinion on that, right?  
[00:09:00]

Killer Mike: You know, Noam Chomsky says that if you do not believe in freedom of speech for those you despise, you do not believe in the concept at all. You know, and so [crosstalk 00:09:17] when people call me, and they go and say, "Mike, the Ku Klux Klan going to march at Stone Mountain, are we going to go protest?" I said, "Well, no. I'm going to have a barbecue. What are you talking about?"

Denene Millner: (laughs)

Killer Mike: I don't like them, I don't agree with what they say, but I live in a country in which they have the right to say it.  
[00:09:30]

Denene Millner: Right.

Killer Mike: You understand what I'm saying?

Denene Millner: Right, right.

Killer Mike: And I defend that right.

Denene Millner: Right.

Killer Mike: For them and myself. Because if they're robbed of their right, then I'm next.

Denene Millner: Killer Mike says he's thinking about the freedoms of current and future generations of artists. His Atlanta roots run deep, and Mike says he grew up in a totally Black city. He was born in Atlanta's Adamsville neighborhood, on the city's west side. His barbershop, where we're meeting, sits in Atlanta's Edgewood neighborhood. You can't miss it.

[00:10:00]

Killer Mike: When my grandparents were my age, this neighborhood um, was one of the most rich and prosperous neighborhoods for African American ownership, and African American business-

Denene Millner: Right.

Killer Mike: ... in the world.

Denene Millner: Right.

Killer Mike: All right? This is the Auburn Edgewood Avenue, this is where the first mayor of Atlanta, 1972-73, Maynard Jackson's grandfather, John Wesley Dobbs, um, people like Alonzo Herndon, Atlanta Life Insurance Company, they ran this district, you know?

Denene Millner: Right.

Killer Mike:  
[00:10:30] Fourth Ward, Black. And then, um, with desegregation, and with integration and the Black dollar leaving this community, um, a lot of us abandoned this community, and with '70s and '80s, what you saw, you saw drug addiction cripple people in this neighborhood, and it kind of get decimated. And then, uh, you find what once was the holy grail of the Black dollar, and the standard of self sustainability, became a place of ill repute, of drug usage, the neighborhood became depressed and what came out of that were the children of the people that once owned these buildings, owned these stores and stuff, kind of flighted out to the suburbs-

Denene Millner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:11:00]  
Killer Mike: ... left it abandoned, and now it has been come up and bought. Some by Blacks, some by whites, some by developers, and it is not what it used to be, but it is still a place where young business people, both Black, white, gay, straight, different nationalities, can come here and actually start.

Denene Millner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Killer Mike: It's a place of opportunity still, and has been for 100 years.

Denene Millner: Right.

Killer Mike: And um, I'm proud to be a part of that tradition. I think my grandfather's spirit is somewhere out there, looking and proud of me. Because this is where he would drive me through and tell me, this is- you know, "This is where we went to the club. This is where we ate. This is ..." So, I'm proud to be here.

[00:11:30]  
Denene Millner: Understanding Mike's appreciation of being free traces back to his grandparents.

Killer Mike: Who raised me?

Denene Millner: Who raised you.

Killer Mike: Oh, man. Betty Cleft and Willie Sherwood gave up the rest of their life. I- I told someone um, I told my grandmother, one time, I said, "This- this isn't- this isn't fair." And she said to me, "Life ain't fair. I'm raising you, damn it. But I love you." (laughs)

Denene Millner: (laughs)

Killer Mike: [00:12:00] My mother ... she decided she wanted to have a child at 15 years old, and she did, so at 16, abortion had been legal a couple of years. She was given the option of having an abortion, she chose to walk around proudly in front of Douglas High School, even though they asked her to leave school, um, so my first year in her belly was spent in the same high school I later graduated from. Same teachers that taught me, in her belly, taught me later. So, my mother and daddy are Denise and Michael, but my parents, my grandfather and grandmother, Willie and Betty, are the people that raised me.

Denene Millner: Okay. Um, you were also influenced by, I read, James Orange and Asa Hilliard.

Killer Mike: Yeah.

Denene Millner: Tell me about them.

[00:12:30]

Killer Mike: Asa Hilliard, by proxy- Asa Hilliard um, is an Egyptologist and was a professor at Clark Atlanta University. Atlanta is unique, in a way, for the last 50 years, my high school is 50 years old, I think. Um, Atlanta after- after ci- passing the civil rights bill, after more Blacks moved into the city, and essentially over from the '50s, through the '70s, gentrified and took the west side, themselves.

Denene Millner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Killer Mike: [00:13:00] The- a number of their schools were renamed for Black educators and emancipators. New schools, and old ones. So, the old South Fulton High School um, is now Jean Childs Young Middle School. Jean Childs Young is the late wife of Andrew Young.

Denene Millner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Killer Mike: Um, Frederick Douglass High School was a new build that was laid by Lester Butts and NW Hill, um, Dr Samuel Hill. The Benjamin E Mays was our rival-

Denene Millner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Killer Mike: ... and of course, Benjamin E. Mays was a high school, but also the former president of Morehouse.

Denene Millner: Right.

Killer Mike: Um, college. So, it was a very unique environment to come up in. In the early '90s, Asa Hilliard, after people like, [inaudible 00:13:25] Diab, Dr Ben, of course, [00:13:30] John H. Clark had done- gone lu- through just hell and high water to prove that actually Egyptian Pharaohs were Black, Kemet was, you know, uh, was a- was a place in Africa, before it was called Egypt, and things of that nature. So, it was important that Black children identify themselves on the face of world history.

Killer Mike: Um, he came up with curriculum that one of my teachers, Mrs. Baraki, taught world history, um, was able to go to, learn from and bring back into the public school system. And that made Egypt go from a paragraph in the world history book, to a- to an- to an entire um, opening and awakening of children's minds. [00:14:00] So, by proxy, Asa Hilliard was a teacher, but direct- directly, Reverend James Orange, at the same time, about that- you know, 1990, or so, um, became my direct mentor.

Killer Mike: Um, I organized um, with the Atlanta Fulton Commission on Children and Youth, with a group called Kids 4 Change, um, members of that board had the foresight enough to know, people like Lucy Vance, Jean Childs Young, um, Judge Bradley Boyd, um, and my direct mentor, Alice Charlton, had the foresight to understand that if you're going to organize on the behalf of someone, that someone should be organizing with you. [00:14:30]

Denene Millner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Killer Mike: So, I was a child member of the board, essentially, and we organized right up there on 100 Edgewood Avenue, um, back when this was a much rougher and different type of area, and we organized on the behalf of kids in Atlanta to get- to make sure that, at that time, Mayor Andrew Young, understood that these are the things that we expect out of Atlanta and Fulton County.

Denene Millner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Killer Mike: And this is how you can improve the county, improve the schools, and the living conditions of children, by letting us to have active participation in local policy. [00:15:00] Um, I went on from that to become an organizer of kids, and James Orange, who was formerly- who wa- well, who was SCLC and formerly directly organized with and under Dr King, taught me how to organize.

Denene Millner: Yeah.

Killer Mike: You know, and-

Denene Millner: Yeah.

Killer Mike: ... to this day, it's his wife is like a mother to me, his children are like sisters and brothers. Um, he, men like Walter Cleveland, people like Alice Johnson, Mr Atwood Johnson, no relation, who taught at Mays, invested in me. A whole village invested in me. You know.

Denene Millner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Killer Mike: I- I'm appreciative to them for that.

Denene Millner: Is that where you learned how to speak freely?

Killer Mike: I- well, I never had-

Denene Millner: From those people-

[00:15:30]

Killer Mike: ... have a problem speaking freely-

Denene Millner: But- but where does that come from? Okay, because look-

Killer Mike: (laughs)

Denene Millner: ... I was raised by two Southerners, right?

Killer Mike: Yeah.

Denene Millner: My mother's from South Carolina-

Killer Mike: Yeah.

Denene Millner: ... and my dad's from Virginia-

Killer Mike: Yeah.

Denene Millner: My Mom believed deeply in children are to be seen, not heard.

Killer Mike: Yeah, yeah. I heard that here-

Denene Millner: That is a very Southern thing. Right?

Killer Mike: Yeah, I heard that theory.

Denene Millner: So ...

Killer Mike: (laughs)

Denene Millner: ... what- what- what- what worked differently in your home, in your Southern home?

Killer Mike: Nothing, I got the shit popped out of me. (laughs)

Denene Millner: (laughs)

[00:16:00]  
Killer Mike: My grandfather, um, I suspect that probably, you know, his father left when he was- I don't think he met his father until he was 19. So he dropped out of school in third grade, to make sure his sisters could be educated, and he worked. But he was a very kind and gentle man, in terms of how he raised us, and that wasn't him. You know, in the world, he was a take no shit guy.

Denene Millner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Killer Mike: But how he raised us, he was open to listen, he'd just say, "Mm-hmm (affirmative)." You know, and, "I think it should be like this, Grandpa." "Mm-hmm (affirmative)." And you know, so he gave me an opportunity. I remember  
[00:16:30] when I first read the Autobiography of Malcolm X, coming in, just shouting, you know, "Black people not ready," and "We need to do this," and "Granddaddy, why you not upset?" And he just, he would look at me, just smile. Like, "Yeah, you know, Black folk ain't ready, son." And you know, I never understood what he said until you know, I pop up and realize, "Oh, to be ready, you have to grow your own food, and you have to- you have to cycle your dollar in your own community, and you have to be willing to defend your community."

Denene Millner: Right.

Killer Mike: That's what ready is.

Denene Millner: Right.

Killer Mike: You know, otherwise, you're just complaining very loudly. So, I got it. But he  
[00:17:00] allowed life to- you know, he just gave me the ... now my grandmother was a little more direct. You know.

Denene Millner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Killer Mike: Her- her thing was, you know, a child, you stay in a child's place. So, we were living in a household in that, my sisters and I, if it was the truth, we could curse. You know, if the day was going like shit, we could say, "The day is going like shit." But I couldn't say a lie in my grandmother's house. That was an abomination, and to say a lie to an adult, or in reference to an adult, got you slapped in the mouth.

Denene Millner: That was- that was grounds for a ass whipping. (laughs)

Killer Mike: [00:17:30] Yeah, exactly. Yeah, exactly, so ... you know, I- my grandmother's a little more authoritarian. And- but you know, her mother pr- you know, was very, very Southern, very by- because I knew my Great Grandmother, as well. You know, so sh- I think that she tried to be a little more lenient with me and my sisters, because her mother had been so firm with her. But you know, you could talk, but it was just that you understood, there's freedom of speech, but there are consequences, too.

Killer Mike: So, yeah. I got hit a lot. (laughs)

Denene Millner: (laughs)

Killer Mike: I got- (laughs) And I expressed myself a lot-

Denene Millner: Right.

Killer Mike: [00:18:00] So, I don't know where- I think my grandparents not limiting me encouraged it, but I think that the courage to say something is just that, even sitting in a classroom at you know, five, six years old, something didn't seem right. I had to question it. You know, and I- in my- I see that same trait in my daughters, in particular, my youngest daughter, Michael. Um, and- and you don't know where it comes from. You just know some spirits don't- don't have the capacity to hold it in, they gotta say it.

Denene Millner: Right.

Killer Mike: And so, I was that kid.

Denene Millner: Each episode that I do on the podcast is based off of one word-

Killer Mike: Freedom.

Denene Millner: ... and the word for this one is freedom, that's why I keep saying it.

Killer Mike: Okay.

Denene Millner: Over and over again. What does freedom mean to you?

Killer Mike: What does freedom mean to me?

[00:18:30]

Denene Millner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Killer Mike: The absence of worrying about what you think about what I'm doing. (laughs)

Denene Millner: Don't you worry about what I'm doing. (laughs)

Killer Mike: Don't worry [crosstalk 00:18:40] that's the- that's one reason, you know, for all people's complaints about this country, I truly- I truly can say that I love this republic for that reason. Because at our core, you know, what the constitutional rights um, honor and enforce in terms of your bigger human rights, is that I am here, I am a free being. So long as I'm not infringing or interrupting, or hurting the lives of others, I should be free.

[00:19:00]

Killer Mike: You know, my grandfather was- was probably a libertarian. My grandmother was you know, loyal to the Democratic Party, was loyal the Civil Rights Movement, and the ideals of people like Dr King, and the SCLC and the NAACP. My grandfather was a man who said, "I have a human right to hunt, fish and grow my own food. Um, I live within a capitalistic system, so I will use that system to the best of my ability to take care of myself as an individual, and my family, and these little grand babies I'm raising, and yeah, that's about it. Stay out of my business."

[00:19:30]

Killer Mike: (laughs) The census came the house, and I remember them asking, wanted to ask five questions, he answered two. He said, "There are three children in this house, two are girls, these are their ages, one's a boy, this is his age. I am the man, this is the wife, and we stay here." They asked something else, he gave short answer and slammed the door. That was it.

Denene Millner: (laughs)

Killer Mike: Because they- to him, you know, they- how you didn't have any business knowing how much was their median income, and that's none of your business. If the census is to count Americans, this is how many Americans is-

Denene Millner: Right.

[00:20:00]

Killer Mike: (laughs) ... in this house. Goodbye.

Denene Millner: And that's all-

Killer Mike: He- you know-

Denene Millner: ... you need to know.

Killer Mike: Yeah. He got- you know, he'd get a fishing license and complain the entire- the fishing license at the time is seven bucks. But he'd complain all the way there. He'd complain all the way to the Kmart to get it, complain all the way back, because you know, I didn't think about it then, because my grandfather was- he was born in 1922. You wasn't getting fishing licenses then. You got hungry and you fished.

Denene Millner: Right.

Killer Mike: You know, so as I've gotten older, I've realized more and more, how valuable freedom is, because I've seen more of it stripped away.

Denene Millner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:20:30]

Killer Mike: And more of it taken away. Many [inaudible 00:20:30], you know, reasons for it that are nefarious, and reasons that are trying to just be nice to everybody. But we're shrinking our freedoms, I think-

Denene Millner: Right.

Killer Mike: ... in these days and times.

Denene Millner: Well, now that we're on the topic, talk to me about your thoughts on gun control. You caught a whole lot of crap for-

Killer Mike: Such is life.

Denene Millner: Right, right. But I'm- you know, I'm not the biggest fan of guns. I'm afraid of a gun.

Killer Mike: Yeah.

Denene Millner: But I was raised in a house with guns.

Killer Mike: Absolutely.

Denene Millner: Right?

Killer Mike: Absolutely.

Denene Millner: My dad just- my dad is a Black man from the South-

Killer Mike: Yeah.

Denene Millner: ... he's 84.

Killer Mike: Yeah.

Denene Millner: You had to have a gun, to protect your family.

[00:21:00]

Killer Mike: Ida B. Wells um, a famous educator, um ...

Denene Millner: Yeah.

Killer Mike: And- and-

Denene Millner: And journalist.

Killer Mike: Absolutely. Famous educator and journalist, said that the Winchester rifle, which was the assault rifle of the day, because it was a rifle that would allow you to shoot multiple shots, should have- should have a place of high honor in every Black household. When civil rights were granted, first time in 1865, the Emancipation Proclamation, which gave Black men the right to vote. Now, this is how progressive our leaders truly are. Fredrick Douglass said that Black men and all women should have the right to vote. He said that in 1865. We caught up about 100 years later.

[00:21:30]

Killer Mike: But at that point, the women's movement, the suffrage movement, the abolitionist movement had been allies, and the moment the Black man got the right to vote, and that white women did not get the right to vote, what you saw was a split of that ally-ship.

Denene Millner: Right.

Killer Mike: Then you saw the birth of the Daughters of the Confederacy, you saw a misshaping of history in the War of Northern Aggression, you saw Confederate monuments get up, because one of the allies got denied something first. Had this country followed the path, and the advice of Frederick Douglass, everyone would have started on that fair leg- um, fair and level ground at that time, and those allies would have grown. Right? And everybody's rights would have been gotten then, instead of 100 years later, because [inaudible 00:22:11] revoked it, six- seven years later.

[00:22:00]

Killer Mike: But there was a voting that took place in South Carolina, then Black men went in and voted on the behalf of the Black community, and surrounded that church, and what made it una- unapproachable by the KKK were Black women and rifles. So, I encourage every Black household in this country, because we've only been free as a people 55 years, sink that in.

[00:22:30]

Denene Millner: Yeah.

Killer Mike: That means your parents was born in apartheid, or something very worse, you know. My grandparents were, and my parents actually were. You've only been free 55 years. There is no other ethnic group in the world- there is no other ethnic group in the world that's 55 years into freedom, that would be willing to say, if given the opportunity to own a firearm freely, "No." They would- they wouldn't. If you asked Aborigines 100 years ago, they wouldn't have done it. If you ask Palestinians now, they won't do it. (laughs)

[00:23:00]

Denene Millner: Oh, no.

Killer Mike: You know what I'm saying? So, for me, and that's not me making any judgements. You know, just saying, that's the guys who just free. (laughs) You know what I mean?

Denene Millner: (laughs) Right.

Killer Mike: That's- that's me saying, I don't think it's in our best interest. And I think it's in the African American's best interest to learn to grow seed, to learn to hunt and kill your own protein, to learn to use firearms and to have- have firearms in your house, and those firearms should be a hunting rifle, which is a bolt action rifle, which is interestingly enough, more powerful than the rifles you- they continue to be scared of, every day. I think you should have a semi-automatic rifle, or what they call the assault weapon, which an assault is an action, not a weapon. I think you should have a shotgun for home defense, easiest gun to point at a door and shoot, if in case you have an intruder. You should have one revolver, because they're easy to teach women and children how to shoot, easy to handle yourself, and you should have a semi-automatic pistol, and in my house, we have about 10.

[00:23:30]

Denene Millner: That's rapper Killer Mike. He says in his house, there's a gun for every room, and damn, he literally owned all the firearms my Daddy owned when I was growing up. Now freedom can mean many things to different people. Before we said goodbye, Mike told me a thing or two about his views on another type of freedom.

Killer Mike: Before you buy the \$100 000 car, find a place that's stable and s- buy a piece of land. Buy a house, buy a piece of land. Put your mama there, put your cousin there, put your baby mama, put someone there to steward that land, because you never know what's going to happen.

[00:24:30]

Denene Millner: Get the rest of our conversation on financial freedom at [SpeakeasywithDenene.com](http://SpeakeasywithDenene.com) Just ahead, we dive into Killer Mike's song catalog. I'm Denene Millner. Our show is a production of Georgia Public Broadcasting.

[00:25:00]

Denene Millner: On this episode of Speakeasy with Denene, we're talking about freedom, with Atlanta-based rapper, Killer Mike. I asked him to revisit a couple of his songs that speak to what it means to be free. The first track on the list is "A Report to the Shareholders/Kill Your Masters." He told us, this song hearkens back to a conversation he had with activist Jane Elliott, about the 2016 Democratic Presidential Primary.

[00:25:30]

[00:26:00]

Killer Mike

(rapping)

Choose the lesser of the evil people, and the devil still gon' win  
It could all be over tomorrow, kill our masters and start again

(Reciting)

But we know we all afraid, so we just simply cry and march again  
At the Dem Conven my heart broke apart when I seen them march mommas  
in As I rap this verse right now, got tears flowing down my chocolate chin

(rapping)

Told the truth and I've been punished for it, must be a masochist 'cause I done it  
again Ooh, Mike said "uterus", they acting like Mike said "You a bitch"

Killer Mike:

I said that because that was a- I spoke at Morehouse, here and Jane Elliott had  
said something to me, and I was like, so I assumed she was- um- for those who  
don't know Jane Elliott's cool, you need to learn. But I remember speaking to  
her, assuming she was- she was going to vote for Hillary Clinton, I was supporting  
Bernie Sanders. She was like, no, she was like, "Having a uterus doesn't qualify  
you to be President." Simply having a uterus, doesn't. And- and when she- and  
what she was saying to me is that, you know, what I had known from Black side,  
just because you Black don't mean you for me. You know, as a politician, because  
I had only seen Black politicians, and I- and I- and I- I- I quoted her in saying that.  
And a Black writer here took that quote out of context and put it out into the  
world, and he knew what he was doing. You know, he apologized later, "I didn't  
know what I was doing," you knew exactly what you were doing. Which is why I  
put a nigga in front of his bitch-

[00:26:30]

Killer Mike:

(rapping)

To every writer who wrote it, misquoted it  
Mike says, "You a bitch, you a bitch, you a bitch"  
Add a "nigga" for that black writer that started that sewer shit  
I maneuver through manure like a slumdog millionaire  
El-P told me, "Fuck them devils, Mike, we gon' be millionaires"

[00:27:00]

Killer Mike:

(laughs) Just, you know, people often times, people sell out, it's because they do  
things for money. But to me, to sell out is when you know it's gratuitously right.  
They did it to Malcolm, and they did it to Martin, they did it to Mecker. They did  
it to Dick Gregory, so it's not like it's something I don't unders- I didn't get. But  
that was learning, for me.

Killer Mike:

(rapping)

Turn around, see El, and I smile  
Hell coming and we got about a mile  
Until it's over I remain hostile

[00:27:30]

Denene Millner: That's Killer Mike, telling us about the backstory of his song, "A Report to the Shareholders/Kill Your Masters." It's from Run the Jewels's RTJ3 album. And now, on to the second, and final song that we'll explore with Killer Mike. It's called God in the Building, and it's from his album, I Pledge Allegiance to the Grind II. The track starts with a beautiful chorus.

(chorus music)

[00:28:00]

Denene Millner: Mike says church is important, but religion on the other hand ...

Killer Mike: I'm not against religion. I'm just not for it.

Denene Millner: Whether or not we follow a religion, many of us turn to something bigger than ourselves to draw strength and balance. For Mike, this song is about his journey living in Atlanta, and trying to get to a better place of being free.

[00:28:30]

Denene Millner: (rapping)  
It's hot like Hell in the south It feel like we in the devil mouth in the south So white boys tripping cause we iced out Cool as a cucumber hopping out A '73 Impala with the brains blowed out

Killer Mike: God in the Building is about me talking myself through a very low and depressing time, and me having to understand that because fame hadn't found me, because financial success hadn't found me, because my life had not gone in the way that I want it to, whether it was through just bad cases of you know, bad luck, you know, or the few shining moments of serendipity that brought me a smile of belief, I needed to encourage myself out of a depression and into a belief. And that's what that song did for me.

[00:29:00]

Killer Mike: (rapping)  
The church ladies weep when they hear your man speak They say they see God in me, but I'm in the streets They ask me why I'm rapping, tell me I'm called to preach I smile, I kiss 'em on they honey brown cheeks I tell 'em God bless 'em and they concern for me But you can never walk on water if you still fear the sea If Jesus came back, Mother, where you think he'd be? Probably in these streets with me Peace

[00:29:30]

Killer Mike: And what I didn't understand when I made I Pledge Allegiance to the Grind Part Two, um, was that a lot of people are there, and a lot of people weren't there then, a lot of people are there all the time. And God in the Building is about you-when you first wake up in the morning, and you first go to the bathroom, you first look in a mirror, there God is. You are the building. God dwells within you.

[00:30:00]

Chorus: (signing)  
God is with me  
God is in me  
God is in me

Killer Mike: [rapping]  
To get to Heaven I will raise Hell

Killer Mike: The power that those church ladies had, in community and congregation, that  
[00:30:30] you have within you, because they've put it in you. It is DNA, intertwined in the  
very thing that you are. The first church is you.

Killer Mike: (rapping)  
Touch my chain, I bang bang bang Leader of the Grind Time Rap Gang mang We  
a squadron of God's marksmen Greek heroes, we the new Titans

Killer Mike: You know, God the spirit, God the physical manifestation of God, the theory that  
[00:31:00] man has argued about for thousands of years, lives within you. And you are  
owed, and do something from that. And you, all you have to do is call it, believe  
it, manifest it, move like it. You're already free. Now move like it. That's it.

Killer Mike: (rapping)  
Angel wings got a nigga flying higher  
I hope my success burn you like hellfire  
I hope seeing me whip cars dressed fresh  
Torments your ass like a man possessed  
Be blessed

Denene Millner: That's the awe-inspiring rapper, activist and trailblazer, Killer Mike. A special  
[00:31:30] thanks goes to the hardworking crew at The Swag Shop for letting us chat with  
him in the middle of a busy workday. For more from our interview, visit our  
website. And we want to hear from you, we talked on this episode about  
freedom. What does that word mean to you? You can reach us at  
SpeakeasywithDenene.com.

(theme music)

Denene Millner: I'm Denene Millner, Sean Powers produces the show, and Keocia Howard is our  
[00:32:00] editor. The theme music is by M Fasal. Speakeasy with Denene is a production of  
Georgia Public Broadcasting. You can subscribe to us for free, at  
GPB.org/podcasts, and anywhere you get your podcasts. And until the next time  
on Speakeasy, be easy.