5/8/24; Kendrick, Drake, and the last great rap beef

[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]

[BILLBOARD]

METRO BOOMIN’S ‘BBL DRIZZY’

SEAN RAMESWRAM (host): Six weeks ago the biggest rappers in the world started fighting. But this weekend it went nuclear.

‘BBL DRIZZY’ POSTS

SEAN: Diss tracks were dropping left and right. We got a music video, a summer jam. A streaming record was broken. There was an international crowdsourced competition just to diss Drake.

METRO BOOMIN’S ‘BBL DRIZZY’ (feat. JAPANESE RAPPER)

CHARLES HOLMES (The Ringer): This is probably the last time we will see a rap beef on this scale, when you think about the big rap beefs, whether it's Tupac and Biggie, Nas, Jay, Drake and Pusha T. People have been waiting over a decade for Drake and Kendrick to stop with the veiled shots, and finally punch each other in the mouth, and that is what we definitely got this weekend.

SEAN: There’s gonna be some salty language. There’s gonna be salacious allegations. Kendrick Lamar Duckworth versus Aubrey Drake Graham, coming up on *Today, Explained.*

[THEME]

*AI DRAKE: This is an artificial intelligence version of Drake / And you are listening to Today, Explained*

SEAN: Sean Rameswaram. Here with Charles Holmes from *The Ringer*. Charles, how did this all get started?

CHARLES: Yeah, so people probably will not know this unless you've been very into rap, but there have been three rappers for the last decade plus, that have been the biggest rappers in the genre and we have dubbed them the ‘Big Three’. That is Drake, Kendrick, J. Cole. And as every rapper these rappers have just been in a tug of war that sometimes is a beef, but sometimes it's just a battle of dominance. Drake is the pop star:

*<MUSIC> DRAKE- ONE DANCE: I need a one dance / Got a Hennesey in my hand*

CHARLES: He is the, the center that basically the music world revolves around and then you have someone like Kendrick.

*<MUSIC> KENDRICK LAMAR’s ‘KING KUNTA’: Where were you when I was walking / Now I’m running game game / Got the whole world talking / King Kunta / Everybody want to cut the legs off him / Kunta / Black man, taking no losses / Oh yeah!*

CHARLES: Kendrick is the heart or he is the soul of hip hop. He's everything that when we think of like, what does hip hop *mean*? The rebellion, that's Kendrick. And I think over the years they've gone back and forth over, like well Drake you use ghost writers and Drake being like, it doesn’t matter I’m way bigger than you Kendrick sit down.  
  
SEAN: <laughs>  
  
CHARLES: And it culminates on a song called ‘First Person Shooter’, where two of the big two, Drake and J. Cole, team up to basically rap about how great they are:

*<MUSIC> DRAKE FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER: Love when they argue the hardest MC Is it K-Dot? Is it Aubrey? Or me? We the big three like we started a league but for right now I feel like Muhammad Ali.*

CHARLES: Kendrick takes offense on this, on a song called ‘Like That’ and essentially says, ‘hey it’s not the big three anymore, it’s big me, also you all guys are bums…’

*<MUSIC> KENDRICK Like that - Future/Metro: Motherfuck the big three // Nigga, it's just big me // Nigga, bum!*

CHARLES: Drake comes back with a song called ‘Push Ups’ and then another song called ‘Taylor Made.’

*<MUSIC> DRAKE: You better drop and give them fittyyyy // Pipsqueak, pipe down // You ain't in no big three // SZA got you wiped down….*

SEAN: And then he hits Kendrick again with the help of some technology on “Taylor Made.”  
  
CHARLES: He's, impersonating or cosplaying as one of Kendrick's, lifelong heroes, Tupac, using AI:

*<MUSIC> AI TUPAC - TAYLOR MADE FREESTYLE: Kendrick, we need ya // the West Coast savior // engraving your name in some hip-hop history // If you deal with this viciously…*

CHARLES: Throughout this whole time, Kendrick is quiet, um, Drake is kind of needling him, it's like, ‘Yo, when you gonna drop, when you gonna drop, when you gonna drop.’

SEAN: And then about a week ago he drops. And he goes after Drake’s entire life on “Euphoria.”

*<MUSIC> KENDRICK - EUPHORIA: I hate the way that you walk, the way that you talk, I hate the way that you dress. I hate the way that you sneak diss, if I catch flight it’s going to be direct…*

CHARLES: And the beef very very quickly gets ugly and that's how you get to this weekend.

SEAN: Things get insane this weekend. Can you just take us through this past weekend?

CHARLES: Yeah. So we had already pretty much gotten the opening salvos from each artist. And at that point, you're just like, ‘Alright, this beef isn't over.’ But we're all kind of waiting to see what the next thing happens. And then Drake comes back with ’Family Matters.’

*<MUSIC> DRAKE- FAMILY MATTERS: You know what I mean? They hired a crisis management team to clean up the fact that you beat on your queen, a picture you painted. It ain’t what it seems / You’re dead…*

CHARLES: And in this song he alleges some very scathing and potentially damaging things about Kendrick that have not been corroborated, reported, fact checked or whatever. He essentially says on that track that ‘You guys think Kendrick is your savior. I'm alleging now that he hired a crisis PR firm to clean up the fact that he assaulted his wife and that one of his very close friends and business partners is actually the father of one of his children.’ So, at that point, people on the internet are like, ‘Okay, this has gotten serious, the button has been pushed,’ and quite literally, I don't even think it had been an hour yet, Kendrick steps on that record and drops ‘Meet the Grams’ immediately.

*<MUSIC> KENDRICK LAMAR- MEET THE GRAHAMS: Grew facial hair because he understood bein' a beard just fit him better// He got sex offenders on ho-VO that he keep on a monthly allowance // A child should never be compromised and he keepin' his child around them// And we gotta raise our daughters knowin' there's predators like him lurkin' Fuck a rap battle*

CHARLES: Kendrick is alleging that Drake is surrounding himself with people in his camp that are accused of very heinous things and basically needling at Drake that he has an alleged propensity to go after young women, and groom them. And as rap beef tends to do, unfortunately, women, baby mothers, family, children are used in very gross ways to satiate the big egos of the two most popular rappers in the world right now. And then once we're like, ‘All right well, they've both done the thing …’  
  
SEAN: <chortles>  
  
CHARLeS: … Kendrick arrives again with another song called ‘Not Like Us.’

<MUSIC> Kendrick- NOT LIKE US: *And Baka got a weird case, why is he around? Certified Lover Boy? Certified pedophiles. Wop, wop, wop, wop, wop, Dot, fuck 'em up Wop, wop, wop, wop, wop, I'ma do my stuff …*

CHARLES: Everybody at that point like these records are fine but I wanted to shake some ass and Kendrick's like you want to know what you can shake some ass to right now? Me calling basically everybody in uh, Drake’s circle ‘certified pedophiles’.

*<MUSIC> You're trying to strike a chord, and it's probably a minorrrrrrrrrr.*

CHARLES: That's a lot, I'm sorry.  
  
SEAN: No. No.  
  
CHARLES: Also, these men are close to 40. <laughs>

SEAN: We should point out here that these two men are both alleging essentially the abuse of women, are any women coming out and saying these men have abused me? Or is it all just them lobbing this sort of gossip, these rumors at each other?

CHARLES: Right now, no one has necessarily come out to corroborate any of this, but what I will say is, the thing that people have to understand about rap beef is rap beef is not about truth that much. Rap beef is about who is the funniest or who will go low and will punch you the hardest. And a lot of the complaints that you will be seeing if you go on Twitter, Instagram, or TikTok, is that, some of this might be true, none of it might be true, but a lot of this is steeped in rumors that, these are music industry rumors, these are rumors that their fellow stan armies have talked about. Like a lot of the groomer accusations, a lot of this is wrapped up in very gossipy headlines about when Drake was, was chatting with a Millie Bobby Brown or a Billie Eilish before they were of age,

*<CLIP> ACCESS HOLLYWOOD HOST 1: You and Drake, that’s awesome!*

*ACCESS HOLLYWOOD HOST 2: What advice does he give you? Like what does he say?*

*MILLIE BOBBY BROWN: Uuuh… about boys, he helps me.*

*ACCESS HOLLYWOOD HOST 2: What!*

*MILLIE BOBBY BROWN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. He’s great, he’s wonderful, I love him.*

*ACCESS HOLLYWOOD HOST 2: What’s his advice with boys?*

*MILLIE BOBBY BROWN: You know, that stays in the text messages! <laughs>*

CHARLES: And both of those stars have come out being like, ‘Nothing inappropriate happened’, but if you are a Kendrick stan or whatever, you're just like, well, hey, we have all of this other, supposed documentation of Drake dating women that are very young, once again, all of this stuff is hearsay, but rap stans don't care.   
  
SEAN: Mmm.  
  
CHARLES: They've never cared, and they never will. One of the big allegations was Kendrick being like, ‘Yo, Drake is hiding another child I am not hiding an 11 year old child, but *actually* I planted the story of having an 11 year old child to trick Kendrick.

*<MUSIC> DRAKE- HEART PART 6: We plotted for a weekend we fed you the information, a daughter that’s 11 years old I bet he takes it.*

SEAN: <chortles>   
  
CHARLES: And for people who are listening to this, who know nothing of this, they're like, ‘Excuse me?! The most popular rappers and artists on the world are arguing about potentially casting a fake illegitimate daughter to trick one rapper into rapping about it?!’ This is like the level of Bravo reality shenanigans that ruined my weekend. <laughs>

SEAN: You're talking about how Drake has been painted in a certain light by Kendrick and how fans are sort of on board and happy to see that. Can you tell us about what that light is? Cause if you go on certain corners of the internet, especially Twitter, it feels like everyone is kind of piling on Drake right now.  
  
CHARLES: Drake has been so dominant for so long. And I think the thing that's kind of undergirding a lot of this thing with Drake is because he's been dominant for so long people want to see the number one guy get punched in the mouth.  
  
SEAN: Mm.  
  
CHARLES: And I also think that Drake has dropped a lot of music, and the quality of it has waned, critically. Consumption wise, he's still the biggest rapper on the planet, and the biggest pop star not named Taylor Swift. So I think just, human nature, you want to see the king get dragged off his throne. And it being somebody like Kendrick who has won a Pulitzer, is of that type of rapper when we talk about Nas or Andre 3000, someone who is marketed as being more of the culture. That's just a storyline that no one can pass up.

SEAN: Right. Cause what you're talking about here is authenticity. And one of Kendrick's primary arguments here seems to be that Drake is just phony.

*<MUSIC> KENDRICK Not Like Us: You run to Atlanta when you need a few dollars. No, you're not a colleague, you're a fucking colonizer.*

CHARLES: Honestly, one of the biggest things that Drake has had to overcome is that Drake is a former child actor from Toronto, who is half Jewish, has a white side of the family, and then has a Black side of the family. And I think it feeds into a lot of tricky narratives about Drake and cultural appropriation because Drake is a chameleon. He got as famous as he was being able to go to places like Atlanta …

*<MUSIC> DRAKE- NOVEMBER 18: I don’t even know what that’s about // Watch your mouth.”*

CHARLES: … or Houston …

*<MUSIC> FUTURE FT. DRAKE - LIFE IS GOOD: From H-Town // I say my name is Dra-z”*

CHARLES: … or Jamaica …

*<MUSIC> POPCAAN FT. DRAKE WE CAA DON: Badman like Skull and me // From Unruly, girl, why pree?*

CHARLES: … or The UK …

*<MUSIC> DRAKE- BEHIND BARZ: You know how the chit chat goes like Rs and Vs and Os I don’t really play no tic tac toe…”*

CHARLES: … and it's just dancehall, grime, whatever. Drake has done it all. He is the globalization of hip hop in a human. But it also Is tricky when you're just like, ‘Okay, what does it mean that a light skinned rapper that looks the way that Drake looks gets to hold that perch?’ It definitely does feed into a lot of who gets to be successful In Hollywood in the music industry? How do they get successful? But I think if you're Drake, you're just like, ‘You guys have seen my father. I am a Black man. How has this beef turned into ‘Drake? You're not Black anymore. You can't say the N-word. We don't want to hear it.’

*<MUSIC> KENDRICK - EUPHORIA: I even hate when you say the word "nigga," but that's just me, I guess // Some shit just cringeworthy, it ain't even gotta be deep, I guess // Still love when you see success / Everything with me is blessed*

*/ Keep makin' me dance, wavin' my hand / And it won't be no threat*

CHARLES: And everybody being like, Yeah, that's funny! Yeah!

SEAN: <laughs>   
  
CHARLES: But once again, rap beefs are not about truth. They're not about nuance. It's about being like, yo mama is so fat and everybody's like… ‘Oooooh, yeah!’ <laughs>

*<MUSIC> KENDRICK EUPHORIA: I'll make sure I double back with you //You was signed to a nigga that's signed to a nigga that said he was signed to that nigga*

*Try cease and desist on the "Like That" record? Ho, what? You ain't like that record*

SEAN: Why this beef between two of rap’s titans might be the last of its kind, when we’re back on *Today, Explained*.

*<MUSIC> KENDRICK - EUPHORIA: "Back To Back", I like that record*

*I'ma get back to that for the record*

*Why would I call around tryna get dirt on niggas?*

*Y'all thinkin' my life is rap?*

*That's ho shit, I got a son to raise, but I can see you don't know nothin' 'bout that*

*Wakin' him up, know nothin' 'bout that*

*Then tell him to pray, know nothin' 'bout that*

[BREAK]

*<CLIP> DRAKE- FAMILY MATTERS "Maybe in this song you shouldn't start by saying..."*

SEAN: *Today, Explained.* Still here with Charles Holmes from *The Ringer*. Charles, I wanna know where this battle fits into the pantheon of beef in hip hop. Can you take us back?

CHARLES: I mean, the, the beef that everyone, this is like a multimillion dollar industry, is Tupac and Biggie, East Coast, West Coast beef.

*<MUSIC> 2PAC ‘HIT ‘EM UP’: 2PAC: West side!*

CHARLES: I think Tupac and Biggie was the point where the industry realized, ‘Oh, no, we're not just selling records. We're selling magazines. This is something that we're reporting on.’ There's documentary after documentary book after book about this because once again there's layers to it. There's personally what Tupac and Biggie were going through but there's also like what the East Coast represents is the mecca of hip hop the birthplace of it, and then the West Coast being like ‘Yo, this is the home of gangster rap we're pushing the genre forward.’

MUSIC OUT   
 “Snatch your ugly ass out the street”

CHARLES: And from that I think a lot of beefs that we've gotten after that whether it has been Jay Z or Nas or Drake and Pusha T or Drake and Meek Mill have kind of gone through those lines of sometimes it's about who's the best lyrical rapper. Sometimes it's about, ‘Well, you're the sellout and I'm the authentic one.’ Sometimes it's like, ‘You're the old street dude. I'm the *new* street dude.’

*<MUSIC> JAY-Z - TAKEOVER Z: You guys don’t want it with Hov' // Ask Nas, he don't want it with Hov' / Nooooo!*

CHARLES: If you look at like Jay and Nas, that's kind of a perfect example of, ‘Does that beef happen if Notorious B.I.G. is still alive?’ Probably not. But with Biggie out of the picture you have a fight for, well, ‘Who *is* the king of New York?’ Jay who is this hyper capitalist and is this pop star and you have Nas who at that point is like, in the same way that Kendrick, Nas fans look at him as this pure, this pure artist. When we think of how we even talk about modern beef across culture, we say ‘ether.’

*<CLIP> NAS - ETHER: Mess with your soul like ether // (Will) Teach you the king you know you // (Not) "God's son" across the belly // (Lose) I prove you lost already*

CHARLES: That's from this beef, that comes from a beef like Jay and Nas so that we don't have time to get to all the politics of that, but that is kind of once again the modern rap beef of hyper capitalist pop star more marketed as the artistic revolutionary.

SEAN: Which probably sets up all the various beefs that Drake has had, because at the center of those beefs is, is always this sense that Drake is an outsider, Drake is a pop singer, Drake is a Canadian, Drake isn't authentic, Drake isn't hard, whatever it might be.

CHARLES: So yeah, I think Drake has had a lot beefs. And he's like, one, I think Drake gets to the point he's at where there's a before and after he gets into a very, very, contentious beef with Meek Mill, a Philadelphia rapper. I was living in Philadelphia at the time, a lot of people did not think that Drake would win because Meek is a street rapper.

*<MUSIC> MEEK MILL 2004 FREESTYLE: Them summer nights can even turn cold/ in the streets of Philly where niggas don’t even get to turn old/ My heart pumping to it turn gold…*

CHARLES: Even at that time, you're still like street rap wasn't the thing, but you're still like Meek Mill is battle tested. He's a battle rapper. He was doing this in the streets. And Drake just outmaneuvers him. And at that time, what Drake realizes is, ‘Yo, the nerds won.’ This is meme culture, internet culture. The internet was behind Drake.

*<MUSIC> DRAKE - BACK TO BACK: You love her, then you gotta give the world to her // Is that a world tour or your girl's tour?// I know that you gotta be a thug for her// This ain't what she meant when she told you to open up more // Yeah …*

CHARLES: Drake's songs become a lot tougher. You have records like, *If You're Reading This, It's Too Late*, or what we get like on songs like ‘Mob Ties’, where Drake is kind of like a faux criminal boss, where he's just like, ‘Well, I beat Meek Mill!’ So then when Pusha T comes a few years later, Pusha T is a street rapper who's from a group called Clipse, one of my favorite rappers of all time, talks about drug dealing a lot. Pusha T's like, ‘You know what? I'm gonna do what no one else has been able to do with Drake.’ I'm gonna use the internet against him:

*<MUSIC> PUSHA T - STORY OF ADIDON: We talkin’ character. Let me keep with the facts. You are hiding a child. Let that boy come home …*

CHARLES: And on the story of Adidon, he tells everybody, Drake is hiding a child. And for the first time, Pusha T does what Drake had been doing for years, which is using the internet, using TMZ and Bossup and all of these things that had become the center of culture to say, ‘Hey, the only way I can beat Drake is at his own game. I can't out rap him. But what I can do is say, now every single time people talk about beef, they're like, remember ‘Story of Adidon’ when we realized that Drake was hiding a child with a former sex worker. That was insane!’

SCORING OUT

CHARLES: That is the new beef that explains Kendrick and Drake now lobbing back insults and revelations that are fueling Twitter and Instagram and TikTok and YouTube videos, this is where we are. <laughs>

SEAN: But even though, Pusha T drops this unimaginable bomb on Drake. He seems to recover, you know, a few months later, he drops this album, *Scorpion*, it's got three huge hits on it and everyone's happy to have their Drake back.

*<MUSIC> DRAKE- NICE FOR WHAT: I keep letting you back in // How can I explain myself?*

SEAN: But this time it feels like Kendrick is once again able to use Drake's best asset against him, the internet. And this time it seems less certain that Drake will recover.

CHARLES: Oh, Drake will recover.   
  
SEAN: <laughs>   
  
CHARLES: Because, because every rapper recovers. Thing that people don't want to admit is that this beef is good for so many parties.  
  
SEAN: Hm!  
  
CHARLES: It is good for Universal Music Group that signs both of these artists, the YouTube reaction video ecosystem, podcasting, websites, you know music writing is not in that great of a place. I guarantee you if you go to the remaining music publications uh that are around their biggest stories from the week were from this beef and the reason I say Drake will be fine is because most rappers after beefs are fine because what rap is selling and what most major label music is selling is gossip. It's selling attention, the attention economy, the internet. So it's like, Drake will be fine, he'll be back in a couple months with an album, it'll stream out the wazoo, Kendrick will stream out the wazoo.   
  
SEAN: <laughs>   
  
CHARLES: Everybody will be fine, because also what we're forgetting, most of Drake's fans probably don't even know that this happened.

SEAN: Wow!

CHARLES: There's a bunch of like, middle aged women in the suburbs who are working out, listening to ‘Hotline Bling’, and they're like, ‘Say what? What do you mean? Who? Kendrick who?’

SEAN: So some people may have missed this beef and what they may have missed though was significant because a lot of things about this particular beef between Kendrick and Drake have been unprecedented. Drake using AI to, to bring, you know, fake Tupac and Snoop verses against Kendrick. The sheer volume of the music has been kind of amazing. Metro Boomin is crowdsourcing Drake disses online. The nature of the allegations, how personal it all is. You argue that this might be the last great rap beef we ever see in your piece for *The Ringer*. How come?

CHARLES: It's hard to make a superstar in any genre right now. I think there's a reason why at the end of the year when you look at the biggest streamers and you see Drake, Kendrick, Taylor Swift, Kanye, all these people, all of those rappers are 10, 15, sometimes 20 years into their career, even the pop stars.   
  
SEAN: Mm.  
  
CHARLES: And that's just because streaming, TikTok, the attention economy, it's just different. When I came of age, I was able to pay attention to Drake and Kendrick and become their fan in a myriad of ways that just a younger audience doesn't anymore, and I would guarantee you if you asked a 10, 11, 12-year-old if they were keeping up with this beef the answer would be no because all of this starts on songs and subliminals that were released a decade ago so I think that there will always be rap beef, rappers will be beefing as long as people are rhyming over beats, but for people to care at this extent, it takes a certain amount of money, prestige. The reason that this is the last great rap beef is, I'll ask you this Sean, can you name me a rapper that has come out in the last 10 to 15 years that your mom would even know in the same way as Drake and Kendrick?

SEAN: <laughs> Oh man, no. And my mom, like, spends a lot of time on Twitter and still no. I don't think so. No.

CHARLES: Maybe, maybe Cardi B, but once again, Cardi B has dropped one album and she's just like, ‘That's cool! I'll give you some features.’ Like it's, it's a different time. <laughs>

SEAN: Right. If this is the last great sort of gasp of, of hip hop beef, do you think we're going out on a good one?

CHARLES: I think that we are going out in the most entertaining way possible. ‘Not Like Us’? That's a bop. Kendrick is about to have two summer hits. But I don't think, or at least me personally, none of these diss tracks live up to what they gave us before, but I also think that that makes sense. I think a lot of rappers tend to make their best work when they are young and hungry, and celebrity is not the main equation. And I think for Kendrick and Drake, they've been famous and dominant for so long, it is impossible for celebrity not to infect the more artistic parts of the work. And let's be clear Drake and Kendrick are among, if not the most important musicians of, like, musicians of just the 21st century in terms of what they've done and how they pushed. In their time on the top Hip Hop became the most consumed genre in the world. A genre that was made in New York by Black and brown people with scraps is now something that is a multi billion dollar industry. That is incredible, but there is a sadness being like, ‘Oh, this is how it ends.’

*<MUSIC> KENDRICK FT. DRAKE - POETIC JUSTICE: Every second, every minute, man I swear that she can get it*

CHARLES: Well, that is, that's the American story, I guess.’

*<MUSIC> KENDRICK FT. DRAKE - POETIC JUSTICE: Say if you a bad put your hands up high, hands up high, hands up high// Tell 'em dim the lights down right now, put me in the mood // I'm talking 'bout dark room, perfume// Go, go…*

CHARLES: Well, that is, that's the American story, I guess.’

SCORING BUMP

SEAN: Charles Holmes. The Ringer dot com. He wrote one titled “Drake and Kendrick Lamar Is the Last Great Rap Beef. Thank God.”

Thank God for Amina Al-Sadi who edited the show today. And for Matthew Collette who fact checked. For David Herman AND Patrick Boyd AND Rob Byers who all ganged up for the mix.

And thank God for Zack Mack. He joined us from across the hall at Vox Media to produce today’s show. He’s got a show with Taylor Lorenz called *Power User*. Their latest episode is about “industry plants.” Put on your industry pants and give it a listen.  
  
Before we go, a reminder that Drake and Kendrick used to be buds. They collaborated and people loved it. News broke yesterday that a security guard got shot outside of Drake’s palace in Toronto. Nobody knows why yet. Could have been this beef, could have been another one.

But let’s please just stick to writing poems about each other, boys. Please.   
  
 POST “Poetic Justice”

[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]