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| 00:00:00 | Music       | Transition | Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.   |
| 00:00:01 | Promo       | Promo      | <b>Speaker:</b> <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and is distributed by NPR.   |
| 00:00:13 | Jesse Thorn | Host       | <p><i>[Music fades out.]</i></p> <p>It's <i>Bullseye</i>. I'm Jesse Thorn. On December 18<sup>th</sup> of last year, the rapper Drakeo the Ruler was murdered. It happened backstage at a festival in Los Angeles, his hometown. A group of dozens of people—maybe as many as 75 or 100—ambushed Drakeo. One of those people slit his throat. Drakeo was a young, rising rapper. Critics respected him. Rap fans streamed his music millions of times. He was a Los Angeles gangsta rapper whose music didn't sound like what you'd think of when you hear Los Angeles gangsta rap. It's subdued and anxious—less about the barbeque with your pals, more about looking over your shoulder, double checking on the footsteps behind you.</p> <p>Music writer Jeff Weiss first covered Drakeo the Ruler about five years ago. He met him at the LA Men's Central Jail, downtown, where Drakeo was being held on a gun charge. Weiss and Drakeo forged a close relationship over the years. Under Weiss's byline, Drakeo appeared in <i>LA Weekly</i>, <i>The LA Times</i>, <i>The Ringer</i>, and more. Weiss was also with Drakeo when the rapper was murdered. Drakeo is exactly the kind of guest I'd love to have on my show: a funny, fascinating MC with a compelling story and a healthy appreciation for the work of one of my favorite rappers, Suga Free. In fact, we tried to book him. We hadn't ever made it happen. And it won't happen now.</p> <p>The people who murdered Drakeo are still at large. So, I invited Weiss to our studio in Los Angeles to talk with me about Drakeo's music, what that music meant to the broader hip-hop community, and about Drakeo's life and death.</p> <p><i>[Music fades in.]</i></p> <p>As a warning, there is some discussion about violence and crime. So, if that is a sensitive subject for you, we wanted to let you know. Anyway. With all that out of the way, here's my conversation with Jeff Weiss about Drakeo the Ruler.</p> |
| 00:02:23 | Music       | Transition | Thoughtful piano music with a steady beat.  |
| 00:02:28 | Jesse       | Host       | Jeff Weiss, thanks for coming on <i>Bullseye</i> . It's nice to have you on the show.   |
| 00:02:31 | Jeff Weiss  | Guest      | Thank you so much for having me.  |
| 00:02:32 | Jesse       | Host       | Before we talk about the circumstances of his life, let's talk for a minute about Drakeo's music. What was distinctive about him as a rapper?   |
| 00:02:40 | Jeff        | Guest      | So, Drakeo invented a style of music that he coined himself, called nervous music, which he described as driving around Southcentral in \$100,000 car while people are trying to kill you. It's anxiety-riddled. It's sort of—the way I described it is when Snoop came along, he kind of liberated the west coast from kind of the strictures of the east coast, having to kind of <i>[inaudible]</i> 'cause you have an album, like NWA, and you can still hear like <i>Straight Outta Compton's</i> east coast influence. Snoop comes along, kind of is this   |

rupture from the past. Drakeo did the same thing, I would say, to the west coast but to itself.

So, Drakeo comes in, all of the sudden the khakis, the palm trees—you know, driving around in an old Chevy, that's out the window. It has already been going out, and then you had ratchet music that comes in, which was the most popular music right before Drakeo comes in. Again, goes out of a—he made it so—it almost—the kind of flexing that's kind of more endemic in like southern music: you know, riding around in like really expensive clothes, really expensive car. You know. Drakeo would always just—you know, have like a ton of braggadocio about getting the biggest guns. But then also, it was a lot deeper than that. 'Cause you know, it's not—it wasn't just about his boasting. He had this really esoteric sense of humor. Like, almost was like DOOM. Or like the rappers most likely to be like “zoinks” or like “jeepers creepers” or some kind of weird, 1940s cartoon slang.

*[Music fades in.]*

Like, on one of his last albums, he had a song called “Pow Right in the Kisser”. Like, from *The Honeymooners*. Which—and like I'd asked—whenever I would talk to him, I'd be like, “How do you know that?”

00:04:14 Music Music And he'd be like, “I don't know, I just know it.”  
“Pow Right in the Kisser” from the album *The Truth Hurts* by Drakeo the Ruler.

*I'ma shoot the K until the cops come  
(Pow, right in the kisser)  
We did him like that 'cause he's a spot burner  
(Pow, right in the kisser)  
Pull up with the stick, with the drum  
Who wanna romp with me?  
(Pow, right in the kisser)  
Stupid shells dumping out the chop, it's a hundiidy  
(Pow, right in the kisser)  
I'ma pull it out the Louis bag...*

*[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]*

00:04:35 Jeff Guest He also created his own slang. So, the extended clip on a semi-automatic rifle, he would call it like a Pippy Longstocking or like a Shanaynay from the character from *Martin*. Uh, you know, flu flamming. I'll never forget when he told me what flu flamming—how he came up with it. Basically—so, if you don't know, flu flamming was Drakeo slang for breaking and entering, robbing houses, kind of ransacking a house. And I was like, “How did you come up with flu flamming?” And he was like—basically, he was in jail, and he was talking to some guy who was talking about how his—you know, he'd run through houses. And he'd be like, “Flu! Flam! Flu, flam!” And he'd be—that was the sound of the drawers kind of being pulled out and slammed back in. And so, Drakeo came up with flu flamming to describe that.

So, it really was kind of a thing also—his cadences were very different. He almost was like scraping kind of counterclockwise against the beat. So, it really was a—almost a total revolution in sound, which has been subsequently copied by rappers all over the west coast and all over the country.

00:05:32 Jesse Host One of the things that is most distinctive to my ear about Drakeo is not even the—you know, kind of clever wordplay and making up words and neologisms, that kind of thing. It's just the aesthetic of his flow. Like, just the way his voice relates to the beat. And you know, there have long been—there's a long history of rappers who are talking as much as they're rapping. But what's interesting to me about Drakeo is it has that feeling. It feels like he's talking as much he's rapping. But there's actually a pretty intricate relationship. Like, he never kind of falls out of the pocket. You know what I mean? Like, he never—he never loses track.

00:06:16 Jeff Guest When I first heard him—I remember asking the first time I met him, I was like, "Have you ever listened to Suga Free?" Because he doesn't rap like Suga Free, but it almost was the same thing, where it's like you know where the beat is and you're keeping it in the back of your mind the whole time, but you're kind of disregarding it. You'll meet up at the right place.

00:06:29 Jesse Host Suga Free is a rapper from Pomona, California—here in southern California—who's, you know, a generation before. He sort of came out in the mid-'90s.

00:06:38 Jeff Guest Yeah. Kind of the southern California answer to E-40 in a lot of ways.

00:06:42 Jesse Host "I keep my nails done. I speak well. I'm watching my cholesterol, lit by a body of water, and I enjoy drinking alcohol," is one that I think about a lot. *[Chuckles.]*

00:06:49 Jeff Guest Yeah. Yeah. Just immaculate in linen suits and permed hair. Yeah, no, and Drakeo—well, the thing that's also interesting about his flow too, is obviously mumble rap was used I think wrongly as a pejorative against a lot of rappers in the south, like Young Thug or the Migos. But Drakeo was actually doing mumble rap in a good way, I think. You know. Sometimes he was slurring. You know, he drank a lot of lean, and so sometimes it would get a little—his voice would sound muddy, though, which was kind of cool—right?—'cause he's rapping about—you know, he called himself Mr. Mosely, which was his slang for lean and he'd always be talking about he was mud-walking through Neiman Marcus.

But I think one of the things that I loved about it was *[chuckling]*—he almost had such like disdain for like the listener. Like, it was like, "Oh, you're so—you're lucky to be listening to this." And you know—and we're like obviously deep into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It's so rare when you hear someone that like—it's almost like when like Athena pops out of Zeus's stomach or one of that—I'm probably mangling that mythological comparison. But it was just like one of those things that popped out fully formed, which you don't really see anymore.

00:07:54 Jesse Host So, you mentioned ratchet music, which was sort of the predominant kind of hip-hop mode in LA when Drakeo was first getting started.

*[Jeff confirms.]*

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| 00:08:10 | Jeff  | Guest | <p>What does that mean and what is different about what Drakeo was doing?<br/>So, ratchet was basically just kind of house party function music.</p> <p><i>[Music fades in.]</i></p>   |
| 00:08:16 | Music | Music | <p>Like, Tyga's "Rack City".<br/>"Rack City" from the album <i>Careless World: Rise of the Last King</i> by Tyga.</p> <p><i>All the girls love me, you know what it is</i></p> <p><i>Rack city chick, rack, rack city chick</i><br/><i>Rack city chick, rack, rack city chick</i><br/><i>Rack city chick, rack, rack city chick</i></p> <p><i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i></p>  |
| 00:08:26 | Jeff  | Guest | <p>I think it's the archetypal ratchet song. It was mostly produced by DJ Mustard, who actually was the producer that first kind of put Drakeo onto a larger audience. So, there is that kind of crossover there. Joe Moses was a rapper. He had a song called "Do It For the Ratchets". You know, just really kind of upbeat, kind of almost—I think of it almost as florescent in my head, in terms of like a color scheme. But lighthearted. Obviously there was kind of a menacing undertone, but it was mostly just kind of—you know, just music to just drink and smoke weed to and kind of have a good time with at a party.</p>  |
| 00:08:59 | Jesse | Host  | <p>And DJ Mustard, who was the—you know—producer and impresario behind a lot of ratchet music, made a remix of a song that Drakeo had out that was sort of—you know, getting a little bit of underground attention. What was it that Mustard saw in there? Or heard in there?</p>  |
| 00:09:20 | Jeff  | Guest | <p>So, the song was called "Mr. Get Dough". And Drakeo grew up in just really a period where west coast rap was basically pretty moribund. You know. You had the Game and that was about it and there were not really any nationally recognizable LA artists from the Game basically up until YG and Nipsey Hussle, more or less. I mean, I'm sure I'm forgetting somebody, but that was basically it. And Drakeo is kind of honing his style and then his brother—who's also a really gifted rapper in his own right, Ralfy the Plug, kind of tells Drakeo, "Oh, you should start rapping over kind of these beats, kind of take these ratchet, these party beats and kind of—you know, make them a little slower, sinister." Almost like—it reminded me of almost like a west coast analog of what Mobb Deep did, which is kind of this dark, ominous kind of music.</p> <p>And Drakeo's music I think really fits really well into the LA sunshine noir like dialectic that's always dominated discussion of the city. But Drakeo basically is kind of doing these YouTube and Soundcloud freestyles. And "Mr. Get Dough", he kind of hits upon a style. It's a beat that sounds like DJ Mustard could've produced it but it—there is, I mean, if you're really digging deep, there is almost—it's almost the moment where like there is this rupture between ratchet music to become what Drakeo calls nervous music. And the name of his first mixtape was actually called <i>Nervous Music</i>. And Drakeo had a</p> |

song with his late friend, Ketchy the Great, who died last year in kind of murky circumstances. A really great rapper in his own right.

And Drakeo does the song, and it was actually through YG's brother, who had some acquaintance with Drakeo. And it he passed it on to DJ Mustard, and then DJ Mustard did basically—I'm using an air quote in the booth, but he remixed it. It's the same beat, but he basically put on this rapper named RJ, who was his—one of his artists at the time, and another rapper named Joyce, who is kind of more an undistinguished rapper.

00:11:08 Music Music

"Mr. Get Dough" from the album *I Am Mr. Mosely* by Drakeo the Ruler.

*So, yes I had to bring the box*

*Stanleys out, you know they had to bring the cops  
We go on high-speed chases, couldn't get me if I'm God  
But I'm not, pops on my knots  
Mr. Get Guap, that's Mr. Get Dough, AKA Mr. Mos  
Walking out the house with the stove  
Lingo bingo, call me Mr. Get Dough*

*Mr. Get Dough, Mr. Get Dough  
Mr. Get Dough, Mr. Get Dough  
Mr. Get Dough, Mr. Get Dough*

*[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]*

00:11:31 Jeff Guest

And they shoot a video with it. And it's from this video where Drakeo kind of like ascends to this regional stardom and that kind of just kind of anoints him. And if you watch it, from the first bars—now and I'm going back to like you hear it and you're like, "Oh, this is just something completely different. He's a star." And he immediately kind of develops a fanbase, basically south of the 10 freeway, in Los Angeles.

00:11:58 Jesse Host  
00:12:00 Jeff Guest

What was the first Drakeo song that you heard?

The first Drakeo song that I heard. *[Sighs.]* Probably was "Mr. Get Dough", honestly. It was interesting, because when you listen to Drakeo, I think a lot of people—now it's maybe they're—it's been kind of filtered more into the bloodstream of the sound of the west coast music. But at first, it was—when I heard it, I was like, "Yeah, this is cool, but I don't know if—" It wasn't like a matter of not getting it, but I didn't quite understand how much I would love it. But the song that really—where I was like, "I actually think this is maybe the best rapper alive right now," was the "Impatient Freestyle" which—he's rapping over Jeremih's "Impatient". Jeremih being a really amazing R&B singer from Chicago.

*[Music fades in.]*

00:12:48 Music Music

But the beat—I don't know if they did anything to the beat, but it sounds slower, and again, just darker.

"Impatient Freestyle" from the album *So Cold I Do Em* by Drakeo the Ruler.

*I'm ill, though, what's the deal, though?*

*Want to rep the Stinc Team, well, hop out and kill something  
Rollie on my wrist came from long nights of hard thugging  
The acronym is F&N, I ain't really with that bar tussling  
Forget the studio, I'm really in the yard thugging  
Pull up on Naomi, fifty in the, in the yard clutching  
We all got Givenchy in my pocket  
It's 'bout fifty talking 'bout they robbed me  
Bro, you know, silly*

*In the field, rap ain't paying no bills*

*[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]*

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| 00:13:09 | Jeff  | Guest      | This is the song that really makes Drakeo a star. It also dovetails with him basically going to jail right afterwards. And he's rapping in a parking lot with his eyes closed, holding a semi-automatic. And it's just like this breathless like two-and-a-half-minute freestyle over this beat. And he's one of those artists—right?—where it's like—the best artists are often like—it's hard to kind of describe what makes it so good. I've been thinking about why the "Impatient Freestyle" is so good, 'cause I was thinking about writing something about it. It's really difficult to describe it. But it's like one of those things that—what makes music good? And you're like I don't quite know. It's the pacing. It's the vocal tone. It's the slang, the nonchalance, the bravado. It is everything. And that was sort of the song that really kind of breaks Drakeo up along the west coast. |
| 00:13:58 | Jesse | Host       | We've got more to get into with Jeff Weiss after a quick break. We'll be back in a minute. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and NPR.   |
| 00:14:08 | Music | Transition | Relaxed synth with a steady beat.  |
| 00:14:12 | Jesse | Host       | Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with the writer Jeff Weiss. He's covered music for <i>The Los Angeles Times</i> , <i>Pitchfork</i> , <i>The Washington Post</i> , and many more. He wrote extensively about the late rapper, Drakeo the Ruler. Drakeo was stabbed to death last year while backstage at the Once Upon a Time in LA Festival, in Los Angeles. Jeff was with him. Let's get back into my conversation about Drakeo's life and work with Jeff Weiss.   |
|          |       |            | Let's talk a little bit about the circumstances of Drakeo's life. When you first got involved in writing about Drakeo—and you've probably written about him more than anyone else—he was involved in a very complicated court case and criminal investigation that ended up sending him to jail. What were the circumstances that sent him to court and eventually to jail?  |
| 00:15:07 | Jeff  | Guest      | Yeah. So, in the summer of 2016, Drakeo is basically becoming the biggest rapper in Los Angeles. And Drakeo was a really, really kind, caring, generous person. A really loyal, good friend. But like he was either your best friend or your worst enemy. And he was really obsessed with authenticity. He was obsessed with honesty. And if he felt that someone didn't like comport to these standards—that very few people, to be fair, can live up to—then he would kind of be dismissive of them. And you know, he kept a small circle. And basically, there were these—you know, a bunch of people that he'd collaborated kind of—it went sour, starting with Mustard.   |

You know, according—again, this what—just what Drakeo told me. He tried to sign him. Drakeo felt it was an unfair offer. And then Mustard was like—basically like, “If you don’t sign to me, I’m not gonna keep working with you.” Which, you know, is a pretty common thing. And you know, it made sense. You know. Not Mustard’s fault, but I don’t think it ended that well. So, basically Drakeo starts to make a lot of enemies. He—it should be stressed that Drakeo did not gangbang, which is a complete anomaly for a street rapper from Los Angeles. Drakeo was rapping about the things that a lot of Los Angeles gangsta rappers have historically rapped about, which are—you know, in the words of Warren Zevon, “Lawyers, guns, and money.”

And this originality kind of rubs people the wrong way, too. Because, you know, Drakeo was kind of doing things effortlessly, in a way. He’s not this studious, Kendrick Lamar rapper like in the cypher trying to be the greatest rapper of all time. He just is getting money and rapping about burglary and all these different things but in a way that no one had seen. So, he becomes a target, ‘cause he’s not in a gang. And you know, he grew up—  
[Interrupting.] Let’s clarify what that means.

00:16:46 Jesse Host

[Jeff agrees.]

Because I think that is a really big deal about where he’s positioned in the—you know, the landscape of Los Angeles. So, a lot of rappers—almost all rappers [chuckles] in Los Angeles—have gang affiliations based on—

00:17:05 Jeff Guest

The popular ones. Yeah. The radio—most of the radio ones. Yeah. And it’s based on—

00:17:08 Jesse Host

Based on where they grew up.

00:17:09 Jeff Guest

It’s based on where they grew up, or sometimes it’s where your grandmother grew up or your grandmother’s house was. Or sometimes it’s family. Sometimes a rapper will be—he’ll claim a different hood, ‘cause—you know, he’d go over to his cousin’s house and that was where he’d hang out, at the park and like—you know. I describe it as like—in the article I wrote for *LA Magazine*, it’s sort of like the Balkans. It’s really difficult to understand like there are so many gangs in LA that the average person doesn’t know—that I certainly don’t know. And there are these like Hatfield vs. Mccoy feuds that have been going on for now generations.

And—so, basically, Drakeo grew up in several different parts of Southcentral LA. There were two really—32<sup>nd</sup> into Naomi, which is a territory historical controlled by the Rolling 30s gang. And then there’s a neighborhood called The Hundreds, which is technically called Westmont. It’s an unincorporated part of LA county. When Drakeo was growing up, it had the highest murder rate in LA county, and it also had the highest unemployment rate. There was a part of it—a little quarter that they called Murder Alley. And he’s growing up there. And it’s like a territory where there’s Latino gangs and then there’s also the Hoover criminals, which were a former Crip sect that split off like in the early 2000s and then became their own thing. And they can go to war with other Crips or Bloods. And they historically did not like the Rolling Hundreds set, which Drakeo had a lot of friends in.

So, he doesn't join the Crips, which would've been the natural—but he's friends with them. And, uh—but he—at first, you know, he was friends with a lot of Bloods. And he's friends with a lot of Bloods from Inglewood. And so, he really is working with all these people. He's not trying to be—he's not on some super gangbang [censored], at all. Not trying to necessarily start feuds with anybody. And that was my read on him. He never struck me as the kind of person that would start a feud, but he certainly wasn't the kind of person that would walk away from one.

00:18:50 Jesse Host  
00:18:52 Jeff Guest

He's also not a joiner.  
No. No. He was very much like the Groucho Marx, like I'd never belong to any club that would have me type thing.

00:18:57 Jesse Host  
00:19:00 Jeff Guest

So, what were the accusations against him?  
Well, at first they didn't slap the murder charges on him; they raided his house, and they found these guns. So, they locked him up for nine months. He got out of jail. You know, I interviewed him for *The LA Times*, this big frontpage story. Before the story comes out, he gets arrested. Basically, the metropolitan division, who are—of the LAPD, they're known as the air quote "elite" division—also were known for basically an effective stop and frisk by stopping young Black and brown males on the streets of LA. So, they basically were following Drakeo. Well, Drakeo believed they were following him. And he goes to a smoke shop. He's trying to buy a pack of cigarettes. The cops are outside about to—you know. He throws his weapon. They basically find a gun on him. They send him back to jail.

When he goes to jail, they wait until my article comes out and then they slap murder charges on him, for everything from first degree murder, shooting from a motor vehicle, gang conspiracy laws, attempted murder 'cause two other people were shot and healed. I think there was like 12 charges in all. And all of the members of his rap crew are incarcerated, and they put wired informants in their cells, trying to get them to figure out—you know—who was the shooter. And it ends up basically one of—the juvenile who's like a loose hanger-on in Drakeo's entourage tells this jailhouse snitch that he shot at the guy who ended up dying.

And one of Drakeo's childhood friends—like, you know, he'd been friends with him since he was ten years old—and who's also rapping along with him in his rap crew, basically in the course of these [inaudible] interviews, they found out—allegedly—who the shooters were. And then like the cops start trying to figure out, "Oh, okay. Well, how can we get Drakeo for it?" Because he didn't shoot. And then it becomes this really like tangled, labyrinthine thing where they try to get him on conspiracy, but they basically concoct this story which they end up using at trial that Drakeo had been beefing with a rapper named RJ—where, if you're still following, he was on the "Mr. Get Dough" song. He was Mustard's protégé.

They were saying that because Drakeo had a beef with him, they had gone to this party where RJ was not on the flier for the party—he never said he was gonna be at the party and actually admitted he wasn't gonna be at the party in later interviews—to kill RJ. But since RJ wasn't there, Drakeo was then somehow responsible for



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| 00:21:25 | Jesse | Host  | all violence committed that night. And yeah. That was their theory, which doesn't really make very much sense. And, uh. Yeah.   |
| 00:21:40 | Jeff  | Guest | I mean, there are a couple of sort of significant symbolic things in this case. One is that the prosecution, and to a certain extent the police, are trying to use his music as a weapon against him. |
| 00:21:44 | Jesse | Host  | Yeah. And his videos. Yeah. They would—they would constantly show his videos.   |
|          |       |       | The other is that he is essentially being prosecuted for crimes that were allegedly committed by somebody he knew.  |

*[Jeff confirms.]*

And you know, there is a long history in—especially in New York and California—of laws that try and extend the criminal responsibility for a crime from the person who committed the crime to people who are affiliated with them in some way. And usually, they use the word “gang”, but that word is a word that can be very broadly interpreted.

*[Jeff agrees.]*

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| 00:22:25 | Jeff  | Guest | And it's obviously very loaded, as well.   |
| 00:22:29 | Jesse | Host  | Yeah, they would use DMs where they'd be like “gang”, which is like slang. You know? Like people just say say—like—  |
| 00:22:30 | Jeff  | Guest | Like “my buddies”.   |
|          |       |       | Yeah, like TikTok kids will saying ganging up. Like, it's not at this point—or like “slide”. They would—that was one of the words that they would try to kind of criminalize. You know, there would be all these DMs, 'cause they were able to hack into Drakeo and his friend's DMs. And they'd be like, “You have to come and slide for me.” And you're like yeah, well, slide can mean shoot to kill somebody. It also can me like come slide to the party or like just you have to be there. It—obviously language is rich. I mean, you look up a word in the dictionary, there's usually not one definition. There's usually four. And—but after Drakeo gets acquitted of all these charges, there are two charges that hang. One is 10-2 in his favor, shooting from a motor vehicle. And then there's a charge called 182.5. California penal code 182.5. |

And this law—it's a gang conspiracy law that holds that if you're in this gang, which they're saying was his rap group, anything that anyone does for the benefit of the gang, they can charge the other gang members. So, they were holding that—because Drakeo is promoting the stink team, which was his crew, in his music, therefore he's responsible for a murder that would occur from one of the other stink team members. It's like—I describe it as like, it's like *The Secret*. Like you wish that it can be and then it is. And basically, this one was a 7-5 in Drakeo's favor. So, then they refiled most of these cases. Meanwhile, Drakeo's in solitary confinement. They put him in this canine team, and they forced him to cop a deal, basically, to the shooting from a motor vehicle charge. So, he did have to—you know—plead guilty to it, which he was infuriated about.

But he—you know, when faced with the possibility of, okay, you're gonna have to face a second trial and you're gonna have to spend

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|          |       |       | all this money for a second trial. And you know, I think he would've won, but it's never a guarantee. I mean, it could've ended poorly for him, and he took this deal and was freed the day after George Gascón won the election, which was no coincidence.   |
| 00:24:19 | Jesse | Host  | So, when Drakeo got out, he was a star—at least in Los Angeles. You had had a relationship with him that was based on like you talking to him on the phone from jail as a journalist writing about his case. And the two of you ended up becoming friends. You know, you've been a hip-hop journalist for a long time and—you know, this isn't quite as incongruous a pairing as people might imagine it is, from—you know, hearing you talking on the show right now. But it is a little bit of incongruous pairing. So, were you surprised that this guy that, you know, you had known as a musician and as a subject actually started being a part of your life as a—you know, as a buddy?   |
| 00:25:08 | Jeff  | Guest | For sure. I mean, he was really quirky. You know? He was like very—just an idiosyncratic guy. You know? He was—he named himself after Draco the Tyrant from ancient Athens. You know? He was—I would go off on—   |
| 00:25:24 | Jesse | Host  | The source of the word draconian.   |
| 00:25:25 | Jeff  | Guest | The source—totally! Yeah! Who was killed. And he thought it was the funniest thing that he was killed to death by hats and robes thrown on him in a sign of—display of praise. Thought that was the funniest thing. One of the great tragedies of his loss—I mean there's a lot of great tragedies of his loss, but I really think that he was only just kind of becoming—to come into his own, as a person. Like, and like he was I think really starting to kind of become more comfortable about like sharing these different sides of his personality that he really had—you know, 'cause he had to grow up in this kind of tough environment to survive and kind of make himself. You know, he forged this identity for himself. |

But he really also had this like sensitive, artistic side that I think—you know, he was a real artist. You know? And that was the other thing, too. It's like he might have been rapping about, "Oh, I'm doing it for the money," and this, and like maybe he didn't start rapping necessarily on some like pretentious, "I'm gonna be an artist," thing. But he really, deep down, was obsessed with his artist—you know, he'd send me like—he'd send me texts all the time. Like, "What do you think of this song?" You know? "What about this version and this version?" He was really meticulous about it and the thought really deeply about it. And he wasn't quite always the most talkative person, but he would always listen. And sometimes, you know, I'd be like going off on a rant about his case and he would just file it away and then like the next day, I would see it in his own—refracted in his own way on his Twitter feed.

And people would be like, "Are you writing Drakeo's Twitter feed?" And I'm like no. *[Chuckling.]* He just is like—he memorizes everything. You know? He was really obsessed with his case. He would read all of these things about his case. You know. I'd send him a lot of books. He was constantly writing. You know. Really like a lot of people go to jail I think, and like they—historically, that kind of inspiration dries up.

*[Music fades in.]*

|          |       |       |   |
|----------|-------|-------|---|
| 00:27:06 | Music | Music | <p>But he was full of life. I mean, he would always call me and be like, “Listen to what I just recorded.” And he’d like just—or wrote—and he would just like start freestyling over the phone.</p> <p>“GTA VI” from the album <i>Thank You for Using GTL</i> by Drakeo the Ruler.</p> <p><i>'Stead you hit him and his friends<br/>Then post it all on Instagram<br/>You think this Grand Theft Auto, huh?<br/>You off ten different pills<br/>Then crying 'bout, why I'm up in jail?<br/>'Cause this ain't Grand Theft Auto, foe<br/>And now you crying 'cause he told<br/>Your killer went out like a—<br/>Yeah, this ain't Grand Theft Auto, huh?<br/>You think this Grand Theft Auto, huh?<br/>You think this Grand Theft Auto, huh?</i></p> <p><i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i></p> |
| 00:27:32 | Jeff  | Guest | <p>And he really loved that, I think, idea of creation. And I definitely—you know, we had talked about—you know—doing like a TV show and a documentary. And we’d shot some stuff beforehand—before he passed. And he was a really like just a very creative person.</p>   |
| 00:27:46 | Jesse | Host  | <p>Let’s talk about the circumstances of his death. And you know, anything that you’re not comfortable talking about, feel free to just say.</p> <p><i>[Jeff affirms.]</i></p>  |
| 00:28:19 | Jeff  | Guest | <p>You know. You’re here because you’re probably the critic who’s written the most about Drakeo, but also because he was your friend, and he was killed. He was killed backstage at a show. This was a huge festival that was—you know, billed as having been put together by Snoop Dogg, that featured—you know, everybody from Al Green to Snoop Dogg.</p>  |
| 00:28:22 | Jesse | Host  | <p>Oh, it’s the—it’s probably the best lineup that anyone has ever booked, ever. The Isley Brothers—yeah.</p>   |
| 00:28:25 | Jeff  | Guest | <p>I couldn’t—when I saw it, I couldn’t believe it was real. It was like—It’s like a—it was like a fantasy fever dream of like everyone you ever heard on the radio in California. Like, you know. Everything from like Baby Bash or like—you know, all the young street rappers were there, The Isley Brothers, Al Green, George Clinton and Funkadelic were playing. I mean—50 Cent. You know. You name it.</p> <p><i>[Chuckles.]</i> It was an insane lineup.</p>  |
| 00:28:44 | Jesse | Host  | <p>So... what was it like backstage? What was the place and—you know, what was the scene? What was going on back there?</p>   |
| 00:28:54 | Jeff  | Guest | <p>So, I’d been there—this was about like four or five, right? So, I was going back and forth between the backstage and seeing shows. Honestly? Up until the incident happened, it was like—you know, I was talking to random, you know, DJs back there, a couple of musicians. It was really like a laidback, calm vibe. Not that crowded. It was crowded outside, but it wasn’t that crowded in the artist’s area at the VIP. And Drakeo did not wanna show up because, like you know, there had been this—these threats of violence that were</p>  |

like hanging over his head. And the thing about this festival was—I mean, yeah. I mean, the security was very lax.

Which, you know, I didn't think anything. I mean, like sometimes security can be like really crazy and—you know, you're like, "What's wrong with it?" But I had been told by other people that it was pretty easy to get into the backstage artist's area, even without a band. I had one. And then basically, Drakeo was supposed to go on at 8:30. He shows up at like 8:30, on the dime. Right? So, I'm with like his friend, Jug, a couple people, and you know, just having a good time. You know? Like just laughing and like someone's like, "Oh, Drakeo." So, we go to meet Drakeo and his brother Ralfy and a few of their other friends. And it should be noted that, from what I was told later, they were allowed a very limited guest list. There were only like I think 15 people that they said were allowed.

And so, Drakeo was allowed this very small group. They allegedly stripped his bodyguard of weapons. And we go to meet them, and you know, it's just—it's—*[sighs]* it's like a massive parking lot. It's being held like in the shadows of the coliseum. It's the Bank of California Stadium, Exposition Park. And the parking lot is sort of—there was just tons of cars, basically. They'd let cars—the artists would come in off of Martin Luther King Blvd., they'd pull into this huge parking lot. And—'cause obviously, they weren't gonna walk through the crowd. And Drakeo had come in in this like—I mean, \$300,000 Rolls-Royce Dawn. And you know, basically what happens is, from the side, someone yells something and Drakeo and his brother, and they go to have a fight.

00:30:59 Jesse Host  
00:31:03 Jeff Guest

And this is just—I mean, this is—how many people are around? I mean, like probably *[sighs]*—it's like hard to describe right. 'Cause you have like—you have like I'd say about 100 yards north, Al Green is performing or just about to go off. So, it's like—singing like, you know.

00:31:16 Jesse Host  
00:31:17 Jeff Guest

"Let's Stay Together" or something.  
"Let's Stay Together", right. And then you have this massive parking lot on one side, and then you have like the artist compound on the other side, where DJ Quik is holding court. You know? It's really like—it like almost might as well have been like a barbeque. It's night. It's about 8:30 at night, as I mentioned. So, it's dark, but it's—you know—bright kind of sodium lights. And you would think there'd be security there to stop this. I mean—and I think that's what everyone figured. I thought it was honestly gonna become a shootout, because Drakeo was known for carrying weapons. And like, you know, he—

But Drakeo also wasn't about to not—you know, if someone challenged him, he wasn't gonna run away from a challenge. And I think this is also one of the pernicious trends of what social media has done to people, because everyone's filming now. And like the fight goes on for five or six minutes. I thought it was gonna basically be a shootout, so I didn't wanna get hit in the crossfire. So, I was watching it kind of from like a—like almost like a raised bluff kind of area, just like 10, 15 feet away from it. And the fight basically looks like it ends, which—I was like, okay. And I see someone—Drakeo I think was limping. And somebody, you know—I see someone kind of wrapping him and I thought it was a bodyguard. And then like

100 people, mostly wearing red, mostly wearing ski masks, start charging, screaming, “whoop”, and from there—I mean, it was...

I said it was an assassination in the article. And—because that’s what it felt like. They knew—they were there for one person. No one else got stabbed. You know? No one—I mean, there were minor bruises and wounds from some of the other people that got attacked, but it was like almost like a prison-style hit. You know, where they had separate Drakeo and—you know, one of his friends described it—that’s what several people described it as, that were there. And security was nowhere to be found, again. And this is going on for like—I mean, this whole thing, start to finish—I mean, it had to be 10 minutes like start to finish, at least. It could’ve been 50. And the whole thing—I mean, it’s difficult to talk about, ‘cause you know, it’s infuriating ‘cause it was so preventable.

And you know, obviously his family is suing. And his brother is now suing. And you know, it was a—this was a Live Nation festival with co-promoters. I mean, you know. To allow this to happen, it’s just unconscionable.

00:33:35 Jesse Host

We’ll finish up with Jeff Weiss after a short break. Stay with us. It’s *Bullseye*, from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

00:33:44 Promo Clip

*[The murmur of a crowd.]*

**Announcer:** *[Canned, as though over an antique speaker.]*

Maximum Fun is a network by and for cool, popular people! But did you know it also has an offering designed to appeal to nerds?!

**Speaker:** A show for nerds? On Maximum Fun?! The devil, you say!

**Announcer:** It’s true! It’s called *The Greatest Generation* and they review episodes of a television program for nerds, called *Star Trek*. They’ve reviewed *TNG*, *DS9*, and are now reviewing *Voyager*.

**Speaker:** Heeey! *Star Trek*! My daughter enjoys that program!

**Announcer:** Well, if she enjoys that and she enjoys humor of the flatulent variety, might I recommend she subscribe to *The Greatest Generation*?

**Speaker:** Hey, are you calling my kid a nerd? Why, I oughta—

**Announcer:** Welp! Gotta go! *[Hurried footsteps.]* Become a friend of DeSoto by subscribing to *The Greatest Generation* on [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) todaaay!

00:34:34 Music Transition

Thumpy rock music.

00:34:38 Jesse Host

It’s *Bullseye*. I’m Jesse Thorn. I’m talking with writer Jeff Weiss about the life and death of the rapper Drakeo the Ruler.

When I read your description of what happened, I didn’t know the details until I read it. And it’s one thing to imagine someone smuggling a weapon backstage at a show where they know someone that they want to kill will be. Nobody has weapon’s ‘cause they’re backstage at a show. They’re hanging out, whatever. The

security asked them to leave their guns at the door, whatever. And somebody gets killed.

It's another thing to imagine literally dozens—50 to 100 people—wearing gang colors, you know, to say prison-style—I mean, it is—like, it's a number of people so huge that it's terrifying to think that that could—

00:35:37 Jeff Guest

And I should also add, like you know, I obviously was not as—I mean, I was close, but I wasn't like—you know, in the melee. But I was watching it from a clear view. And actually, I spoke to someone recently at Drakeo's funeral who I didn't even know he was there. And he was like, "Yeah, you described it exactly how it happened." And I was really glad about that, because—you know, you don't know how like your perception gets really skewed. But what I was told that the people in the melee were also big. You know? It wasn't like they—it wasn't like, "Oh, it was a random altercation." And that's how it was being reported was, "Oh, an altercation got out of hand backstage, and a rapper died. And I'm really sorry." Here's *People Magazine* quoting my LA Times story from four years ago, 'cause they just didn't—you know?

And like it—that wasn't the case. It was really—it went a lot deeper and it still—it'll—for the rest of my life, I think it'll always baffle me how security could've been that lax. It—*[sighs]* it just is—it's mind-blowing. But it doesn't—you know, it doesn't bring anyone back. I mean, these lawsuits, I mean, don't bring back the dead. They can't bring back Drakeo, who was just like a startlingly brilliant talent. It just seems like, in rap, it's like hard. It's like just a constant level of like heartbreak.

00:36:57 Jesse Host

Something—I don't know if you saw it, but something that made me feel really sad and angry in the days after—in the days after Drakeo's killing was a tweet that Snoop Dogg sent. Snoop Dogg had been the name behind this festival. And he had gone from the festival straight to a football game, where he appeared during the halftime show.

And he tweeted like—Snoop Dogg said, "I'm saddened by the events that took place last night at the Once Upon a Time in LA festival. My condolences go out to the family and loved ones of Drakeo the Ruler. I'm not with anything negative, and as one of many performers, I was there to spread positive vibes only to my city of LA. Last night, I was in my dressing room when I was informed about the incident and chose to immediately leave the festival grounds. My prayers go out to everyone affected by tragedy. Please take care, love one another, and stay safe. I'm praying for peace in hip-hop."

And when I read that, I just thought... *[sighs]* look. Snoop Dogg has lawyers. They're telling him what he can and can't say. But I just thought, gosh. I wish that instead of making it clear he wasn't there and that there were a lot of people there and he had left, he could have said, "This is something special about the art that this guy made."

00:38:35 Jeff Guest

Yeah. And like, actually, Snoop—yeah, I had a friend of mine who interviewed him, and he was talking about Drakeo. And Snoop like—what I was told was like a real fan. 'Cause Snoop is—I mean,

Snoop is the biggest like rap nerd in the world. But it just—when you see like something like that, it's hard not to think about that. It's hard not to think about—everyone just moves on. It's like, you know, you see it now where it's like our brains aren't built for like this kind of world where it's like, okay, there's war in Ukraine and like—then the next thing, it's like someone's posting some like funny meme or are like, "Oh, I'm promoting this record that I'm putting out."

And like that's just all it is. It's just like how can we—you know—monetize this thing. And like it—you like—and there was no—like, there hasn't been like great journalism that like—even the Drakeo case is a perfect example of it, where it's like I remember when he first went to jail. Like, no one really cared. No one wanted to pay me to journalism on like a rapper that they didn't hear about. When Drakeo got out—you know, we filmed like stuff for a documentary. And like, we'd talked about doing a documentary the whole time. We talked about doing a podcast. I mean, it was like really like we always were like, "Okay, we're gonna do this together." Because like, you know. And—you know, we did our like little cursory, general talks with people. And most people were like, "Well, I don't know what the story is."

*[Chuckling.]* Well, the story is like this like—this heroic underdog that beat like a system that ensnares like hundreds of thousands of Black and brown men and—you know, and everyone, really. Like, I mean, there's plenty of people that are wrongly incarcerated of—you know, for weed crimes! You know? Like, there's like I think 40,000 people still like serving time for weed, in America. Some figure like that. And no one cared. And then, of course, you know—then he—when he's gone, it's like it becomes—and that's just all. I understand that's like a natural, human element, but yeah. I think the thing that me and Drakeo sought out was like the sort of flawed idealism, not necessarily the sense that you could change anything. Like—but I think like he, in his own art, was really committed to kind of being as honest as he could and as like original as he could and like just—

It's why he didn't wanna sign with a major label. You know? It's why he didn't wanna—he didn't wanna do dance songs or whatever. I mean, nothing against people with dance songs, that just wasn't him and he was never gonna be a part of the machine. Not to say that I'm like—will or won't, but he just was dedicated to kind of like keeping like his own personal truth. You know? There's—the truth is obviously subjective, but everyone has their own personal truth. And I think in the case of Drakeo, it was always really like pure. Jeff, you know, when I was a kid, I was—or a young teenager, I guess—I was present for a murder. I didn't see it. It happened behind me. And I didn't know the person who was killed. You know. It was probably, I don't know, 150 feet from me or something like that. And having had that experience, which was basically hearing some gunshots in a subway station, being on the ground for a little while, and then—you know—the next day seeing some blood on the stairs, is something that I—is like still part of my life. You know? And that's now, 25+ years later.

00:41:09    Jesse    Host

|          |       |            |   |
|----------|-------|------------|---|
| 00:42:00 | Jeff  | Guest      | <p>And, um... I don't know. I guess I'm just asking if you're okay? Or—you know?</p> <p>Yeah. I mean—yeah, I like—when it happened, I was pretty <i>[censored]</i> up for a few. I mean, it was bad. Like—you know, it's interesting. I was saying this to my friend that day, actually—the friend that witnessed the murder with me, where I was saying that trauma is such like—it's become such an overused thing in the lexicon of modern—you know. And then like that happened and I was like, "Okay, that was trauma." You know? And like I'm not saying that to kind of reduce anyone's experiences. I think trauma comes a lot of ways and I would never kind of cast dispersions on anyone that interpreted it their own way.</p> <p>But yeah, it was—it was bad for a while, you know. Like, I couldn't like get the—I mean, I'll never get the image out of my head, that's for sure. You know, him like lying on the ground like bleeding to death. That'll never go away. And quite honestly? Maybe this sounds perverse, but I don't really want it to. I wanna remember that, because I think—you know, that is important. Like, I want to be able to tell this story. Or, you know, the truth about a story, however it comes out. With him gone, it was really bad for about a month, month and a half. And I'm not saying it's good now, but the funeral the other day did offer—I don't really believe in closure like that, nor do I really believe in catharsis like that, or silver linings like that. Maybe a little bit.</p> <p>But it made me redouble my desire to keep on telling what happened, 'cause it'll always like haunt me that this kind of thing could happen to somebody like that special.</p> |
| 00:43:31 | Jesse | Host       | <p>Well, Jeff, I appreciate you taking this time. I know it wasn't necessarily an easy or pleasant thing to talk about. So, thanks for taking the time and coming in to talk to me.</p>   |
| 00:43:40 | Jeff  | Guest      | <p>Oh yeah, thanks for having me do it. You know. I'm glad I could tell it. I have a lot of respect and admiration for what you do, and I thought you'd be the perfect person to talk to about it.</p>  |
| 00:43:52 | Jesse | Host       | <p>Jeff Weiss. The murder of Drakeo the Ruler remains unsolved three months later. The LAPD has not shared any suspects or arrests.</p>   |
| 00:44:14 | Music | Transition | <p>Relaxed, brassy music with a steady beat.</p>  |
| 00:44:20 | Jesse | Host       | <p>That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i>. <i>Bullseye</i> is created from the homes me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Here at my house, we held a welcome party for my daughter's flip phone. She's been asking for a flip phone for a long time. We finally got one. Apparently, the phone company delivers them to your house now? Uh, so they can sell you stuff. And uh, my daughter sat on the porch with a sign. It was really something else.</p> <p>The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio, Valerie Moffat, and Richard Robey. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is called "Huddle Formation". It's by the group The</p>  |



Go! Team. Thanks to The Go! Team and thanks to Memphis Industries Records for sharing it with us.

*Bullseye* is also on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. You can find us there and follow us. We share all our interviews in those places as well as at [NPR.org](http://NPR.org). And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

00:45:35    Promo            Promo

**Speaker:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

*[Music fades out.]*