

Opinion

How those who love hip-hop should respond to the Sean 'Diddy' Combs verdicts

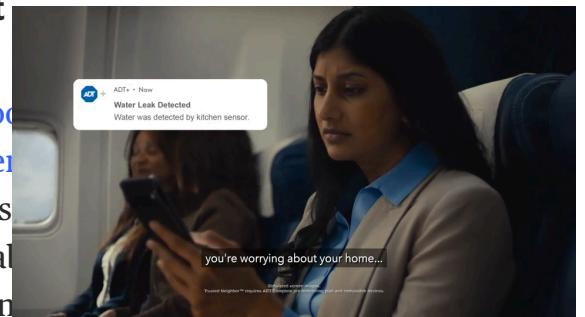
Combs' trial should prompt those of us who love hip-hop to call out and condemn its sometimes casual attitudes about the humiliation and abuse of women.



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By Donney Rose, poet, advocacy journalist and teaching artist

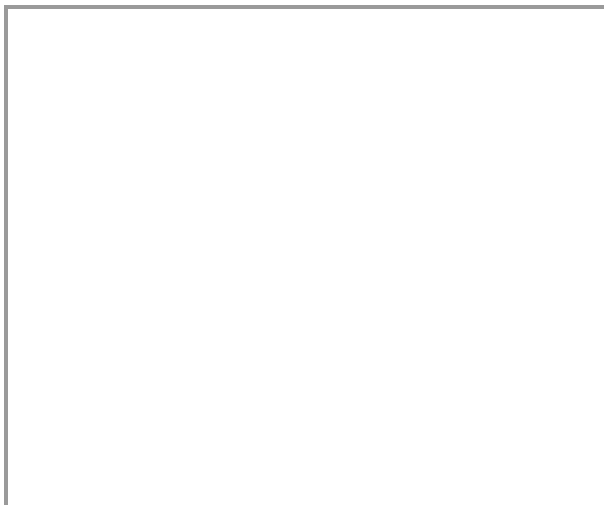
Hollywood, and not the hip-hop community, was the #MeToo in its pursuit of justice for survivors of sexual assault in the entertainment industry. From the movement's onset, I remember the whispered questions about how the hip-hop community's reckoning. It was inevitable that the hip-hop community grew up on would face a deeper interrogation, given that some of its executives were committing acts of sexual violence, and there were rampant allegations of its executives used under the guise of helping make would-be artists' dreams come true.



Combs' defense team argued that the people who testified against him were willing participants in consensual sex acts.

Almost four years after a federal jury in Brooklyn [convicted hip-hop adjacent R&B superstar, R. Kelly of nine counts](#) in a sex-trafficking case, on Wednesday a federal jury in Manhattan found Sean “Diddy” Combs, one of the biggest music executives and producers in modern hip-hop, guilty of [two counts of transportation to engage in prostitution](#); he was acquitted of one count of racketeering and two counts of sex trafficking.

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During his seven-week trial, a string of witnesses, including [a former personal assistant](#) and [a woman who was both his girlfriend and an artist on his label](#), told the jury that Combs subjected them to sexual assault and violence. The former girlfriend, [Casandra “Cassie” Ventura](#), testified that she was coerced to participate in so-called freak-offs: marathon sex sessions with male sex workers as Combs watched.

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Sean 'Diddy' Combs' ex-employee gives emotional testimony at sex trafficking trial

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For well over 30 years, Combs has been one of the most ubiquitous fixtures in the industry. He's responsible for some of the biggest careers in hip-hop and R&B, and, as a hip-hop entrepreneur, he ventured into film, television, clothing, liquor, as well as philanthropy and political advocacy. His larger-than-life persona has drawn the ire of hip-hop purists who point to his self-aggrandizing, materialistic image as the downturn of the culture, but others consider him the blueprint for hustlers from humble beginnings.

The mixed verdict is likely to reignite arguments about the historical mistreatment Black men have gotten in the criminal justice system; but we ought to be having a conversation about the physical and sexual violence that so many women continue to face from men, both in their personal relationships and in the workforce. After all, if we know nothing else regarding this case, we know that Ventura was much younger and relatively powerless compared to a man who was exponentially wealthier and held the keys to her future, her.

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We saw that with our own eyes when CNN released [footage of him viciously assaulting Ventura in a hotel hallway in 2016](#). Combs acknowledged that the footage, which Cassie said showed him thwarting her attempt to escape a “freak off,” captured him at “rock bottom.” When that tape became public, he said, “But I make no excuses. My behavior on that video is inexcusable. I take full responsibility for my actions in that video.”

[Though there had been plenty of reports](#) characterizing Combs as having an [explosive temper that sometimes resulted in criminal charges or settlements](#), until that tape came out, he was still generally known as the life of any party, whether on stage dancing alongside one of his artists or hosting guests at one of his lavish mansions. There seemed to have been a shift in public opinion, though, when that tape captured him violently attacking a woman.

Why Sean 'Diddy' Combs should remain the pariah he now is

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The objectification and abuse of women has been a deep stain. Misogyny is reflected in some of hip-hop's biggest personalities. [Kelly's](#), is a watershed moment that should prompt those of us who condemn its sometimes casual attitudes about the humiliation of women.

During Combs' trial, it wasn't hard to find commentary on so many who believed that Combs should never have been charged with rape. They recycled some of the same arguments they made in defense of R. Kelly and Bill Cosby when they

were accused of victimizing women. When a wealthy and influential Black man is charged with sex crimes, some believe he is automatically the victim of an elaborate scheme by the legal system and other outside forces to *ruin his legacy* and lock him away indefinitely.

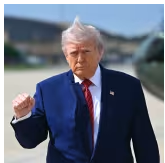
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Even if you believe that Combs was overcharged – [the three acquittals](#) indicate that jurors don't believe the government made its case on the racketeering and sex trafficking charges – you should be able to do so without arguing that the prosecution's plot was a nefarious one to bring a strong Black man down.

The objectification and abuse of women has been a deep stain on hip-hop culture.

Those who reflexively defend *privileged* Black men accused of crimes often rationalize their support by citing the names of less privileged Black men who were wrongly convicted. But we should be able to acknowledge that some Black men have been arguing that every prosecution of a powerful Black man is su:

Again, [we saw Combs abusing Cassie on that hotel surveillance](#) was released, [he'd claimed that all the allegations Cassie had](#) we saw on that tape was a powerful and wealthy Black man v whom he had almost full control.

A jury didn't find him guilty of racketeering or sex trafficking, but [hip-hop culture *should* consider him guilty enough](#) that he never has a prominent role in the industry again. Patriarchy has had a hold on hip-hop for far too long, and far too many have ignored the sound of its victims wailing in the background. If hip-hop is for the people, then that means hip-hop must be for the people, including the women, who have suffered far too long at the hands of powerful men.

Donney Rose

Baton Rouge, Louisiana, native Donney Rose is a New Orleans-based poet, advocacy journalist and teaching artist. He is a past [Kennedy Center Citizen Artist Fellow](#) and a recipient of the 2022 Maryland State Arts Council Independent Artist Award for Literary Arts, among countless other noteworthy accomplishments in arts and community organizing.
