

UNCHAINED MELODIES



BENDING THE BARS TRACK 11 & 12: “Mo’ Money” & “A Message from a King”

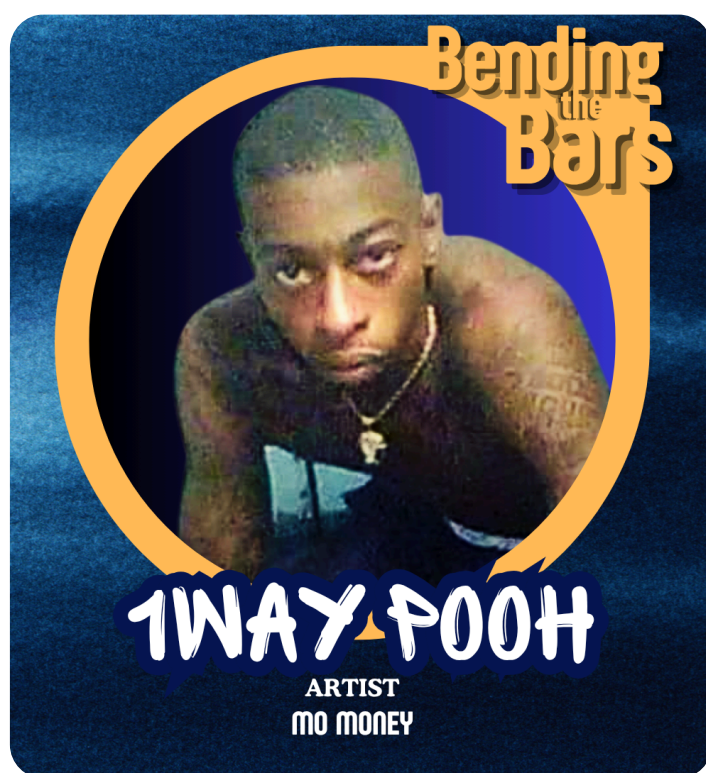
ABOUT THIS GUIDE

- We will look at two songs from the album Bending the Bars
- First, we will explore the artists of the songs and the song lyrics
- Then, we will take a moment to understand the songs' meanings
- Finally, we will take a moment to pause and reflect on the songs

MEET THE ARTIST

1WAY POOH

When he was just 5 or 6 years old, 1Way Pooh would tag along to the studio with his brother Skeeru, a Pensacola rapper. There, he started writing his first lyrics, and by age eleven he was producing original music with a friend who had a studio. Although he drifted away from music in his teens, 1Way Pooh returned to hip hop once he was incarcerated, and he has refined his style and technique behind bars. An autodidact who reads everything he can get his hands on, 1Way Pooh describes himself as a people person, eager to connect, collaborate, and share his talent with others. Rapping inside “brings joy to my life,” he says. “When I let other people hear my music and they say, ‘Oh I like the sound of this,’ it inspires me even more to go even harder.”



THE SONG

MO’ MONEY

Mo money got me trippin nobody can see my vision
I got the dirt up on my feet, nobody want to see me winning
Mo money got me trippin nobody can see my vision
God I need your help cuz my people aint winning

Keep it real don't play I put your body in my safe
I talked to Phil last night and he said big bro just do your thing
Mo' money what we gain a lot of friends don't stay the same
They put the blame on me like I killed Eddie Cain
I'm smokin all this weed so I can feel like a star

Why I'm drinking all this liquor and not sitting at the bar?
Mo' money got me trippin and my dawg he out to get me
My momma told me keep your head up for my children
The love that I had all my soldiers standing strong
Tell the ops they tryina kill me, God tell them leave me alone
My AR got a name but my bullets who to blame
F*** the police f*** the ops
That's the only way I change
I'm addicted to my hustle nah I'll never leave the game.
And I cry so many nights cuz my people ain't the same
And I cry so many nights cuz my people ain't the same
And I cry so many nights cuz my people ain't the same

Mo money got me trippin nobody can see my vision
I got the dirt up on my feet, nobody want to see me winning
Mo money got me trippin nobody can see my vision
God I need your help cuz my people aint winning

God I'm on my knees why it get so hard to breathe
I told him wish me well if y'all can understand what I mean
Free Lil Chris and free LaDave my circle ain't been the same
I feel like a wet rag been hangin in the rain
Why the desert is so damn dry I just wanna learn how to fly
Pensacola be my city PforK you know we with it
Put his a** out in the lake and have him swimming with the fishes
How you talk about your money and you don't respect none of yo bitches
Mo' money drive me crazy, lotta my dawgs don't have patience
If you go to the county jail they gon make you lazy
You don't take care of your kids but you talkin bout the gravy
You better open up your eyes and take your pistol off of safety

WHAT'S THE SONG ABOUT?

When he first started writing MO' MONEY, 1Way Pooh was trying to describe how making money had become less and less important to him during his time in prison. "It sounded good," he says, but it wasn't quite finished. Overnight, as he tells it, he "went to talking to God" and rewrote the hook in the morning inspired by this spiritual experience. "Other people might not be able to see my vision," he notes, emphasizing that his music is an opportunity to share his perspective with the world. For 1Way Pooh, a crucial element of this "vision" is his commitment to the worth of incarcerated people, who he describes in the track as "my people." Like his musical role models, Tupac Shakur and Mo3, 1Way Pooh is driven to use hip hop to describe, analyze, and transform the conditions faced by incarcerated people.

MEET THE ARTIST

SMOKE1090

Born in Alabama and serving a sentence in Florida, Smoke1090 is part of the 10% of prisoners in state prisons who are incarcerated for violations of probation. In this case, Smoke1090's sentence was enhanced by a case from twenty years ago, when he was just a teenager. "I feel like that was wrong," he says, reflecting on the fact that more than half of his life has passed since that time. "I can't escape from what happened 20 years ago." Smoke1090 started writing and rapping relatively recently, inspired by his two sons who got him into music production when they got out of prison. Performing under the names Peezy Montana and Osama bin Laden, Smoke1090's sons are part of a local Pensacola hip-hop group called Money Hunters, and their father hopes to one day be able to make music together as a family. His dreams also include writing a book with his sons about what it has been like to be a Black family fractured by the criminal punishment system. "I consider myself the last street poet," says Smoke1090. "I draw my inspiration from real-life situations; this is my truth."



THE SONG

A MESSAGE FROM A KING

Ay, you ever been thinking, and your mind just snap
When you look at your skin and know you're a target cuz your color black
When you're overqualified for a job but they play the race card to hold you back
Or you running faster than everybody and you steady gettin lapped
When you wake up in the projects and you feelin' trapped
You ain't never see your hood on a white folks' map
It's that slow burn when your emotions are hard to discern
Feelings so deep and strong that you immediately concerned
American history is taught 365 out the year
But Black history has been given 28 days out the whole year
And if we get lucky every 4 years it's a leap
Give us an extra day...damn that's deep
And now we got Governor DeSantis teaching out of fear
That's the type of s*** that make a Black man shed a tear
They say our skin's too dark and our hair ain't right
But we kings and queens, let me bring you to the light
To my beautiful Black queens you a beautiful sight
Ain't no need to be running around getting augmentations
Turning your beautiful God given body to a mutation
BPM breast lifts, 360 lipo, nippin and tuckin and securing the way life like it's a typo
It's mental not physical you gotta believe
You gotta know it to yourself you're a beautiful queen
To my Black kings hold your head up high
And keep it that way till the day that you die
Whether you free or on lock and the officer's on the block

Don't lose focus watching girls twerk on TikTok
They use social media to digress your mind
I mean think about it, just look at the time
3 hours on the books, 4 hours on the grind, 2 hours on TikTok
C'mon bro let's do the math, that's 9 hours out your whole day
And out of the whole 9 you ain't even being paid
You a slave!
Gotta be a provider to your fam
Protect them as a man
Always be the wolf, never be the lamb
Now I ain't saying you can't have no feelings
Cuz that's the stereotype the Black man be gettin
You can't be sad, a man can't cry
Oh ain't no mental health, that's just pride
We have to learn to remove these stipulations from our mind
For the sanity of our Black men to survive
Always remember don't trust Uncle Sam
Cuz he the same one took us from our land
Raped our women, tortured our men
Brainwashed our children, ...in demand
Acting like it came from the Bible
But we couldn't read but we could still have ****
At the mercy of the translator/tribe leader but he was unreliable
We had our own religion and it was straight tribal
Our young generation has lost its pride
They have fallen into ** generation believing this society's lies
Just like I did once upon a time
That was me, the *****
Jackin' for the quick flip
***** if you want the latest drip

Cuz what society don't tell you, when you get caught in that s***
No apartment in your name, s***** looks from your fam, job application denied
You a felon now

Nobody cares if you're tryna do that right thing to survive

Black Lives Matter is the movement, and every movement got room for improvement
Black Lives Matter only march when a White man or an officer done killed a Black
brother or a sister

If Black lives really mattered why are we steady killing each other
Blacks killing Blacks at an all time high
And you know what that's called
That's genocide

It's being committed by us, not the other guy
In the last four years I done lost eight friends
And each one lost their life to eight other Black men
As a People we got enough obstacles to face
Jumping hurdles for jobs, check the box for benefits
Trying to keep our kids from behind walls and barbed wire
So the next time you thinkin, think about this
We either stand together as a race or we cease to exist

WHAT'S THE SONG ABOUT?

For Smoke1090, the only worthwhile music is music “that makes a point, makes a name, tells something, tells a story. It’s gotta be about a cause.” Titled after the artist’s government name, “King,” A MESSAGE FROM A KING captures the kaleidoscope of experiences that shape his day-to-day reality inside the Florida Department of Corrections. Criticizing the prison system, Smoke1090 demands better for himself and his people than being “warehoused.” Speaking out for incarcerated people, Smoke1090 sees racial justice and the criminal punishment system as intertwined issues. “Once we get in that courtroom, black lives don’t matter,” he says. “The system’s set up that way.” Writing to express his feelings and his concerns, Smoke1090 wants other people to listen and respond to the track with their own messages for the world.

TAKE A MOMENT TO REFLECT

1. In “Mo’ Money,” 1Way Pooh talks about money, loyalty, and pain. What message do you think he is sending about how money can change people or relationships?
2. In “A Message from a King,” Smoke1090 speaks directly to Black men and women about self-worth, pride, and survival. What part of his message stands out to you the most?
3. Think about your own life. If you made a song about what matters to you, what would you want people to learn from it?

