

Rapper Macklemore dropped from festival lineup for “anti-American” opposition to Gaza genocide

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Last week, the organizers of the Neon City Festival dropped American rapper Macklemore from the event’s concert lineup. Macklemore was among the five headliners of the festival, which is scheduled to take place November 22-24 in Las Vegas. It is unclear whether or by whom he will be replaced.

In a display of cowardice and dishonesty, the festival organizers cited “unforeseen circumstances” to explain their decision. The real reason was the organizers’ objection to the blunt, profane condemnation of the US government that Macklemore had voiced three days earlier at the Palestine Will Live Forever festival in Seattle.

During that event, Macklemore performed his new song *Hind’s Hall 2*. Like its predecessor, the song forcefully protests the genocide that Israel is perpetrating against the Palestinians. In it, Macklemore explicitly decries the White House’s complicity in this historic crime. Giving voice to the justified anger of millions worldwide, the rapper hurled an expletive at “America” during his performance, and the crowd responded with cheers.

The Palestine Will Live Forever festival was a benefit for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA). With consummate cruelty, the US government cut off its funding for this agency earlier this year. This is the government to which the organizers of the Neon City Festival would have musicians pledge their loyalty.

Hind’s Hall 2 includes refreshingly direct and pointed commentary. One couplet seems to foreshadow Macklemore’s recent outburst: “PC [i.e., politically correct] for a minute, I was trying to be a bridge. / But there’ll never be freedom by pleading with Zionists.”

The rapper explicitly names Israel’s abettors, warning,

“We know who you serve at the White House.” He also speaks directly to the Democratic candidate in the upcoming presidential election. “Hey, Kamala, I don’t know if you’re listening, / But stop sending money and weapons, or you ain’t winning Michigan. / We uncommitted, and hell no, we ain’t switching positions.”

On the day after the organizers abruptly removed him from the Neon City Festival bill, Macklemore addressed the incident in a long Instagram post. The forthright, principled and courageous statement deserves to be quoted at length.

“My thoughts and feelings are not always expressed perfectly or politely,” the rapper wrote. “Sometimes I slip up and get caught in the moment.” He cited his expletive at the Seattle concert as one such example but insisted that his aim is “to bring people together and never to create more division....”

“I wish I had been in a better place with my grief and anger. But the truth is I’m not OK. I haven’t been,” Macklemore continued. “The last 11.5 months of watching genocide unfold in front of us has been excruciating on a spiritual, emotional and human level. I have been in utter disbelief with how our government is showing up at this moment in history. I don’t think I’m alone.”

The rapper drew a connection between the US government’s support for genocide in the Middle East and its domestic attacks on the working class. “I am outraged by the fact that we lack money for healthcare, affordable housing and education in America, yet we send billions to Israel to commit internationally recognized war crimes,” he wrote.

Macklemore directly criticized the Democratic Party for its hypocrisy and warmongering. “I watch Democrats sign bills to ban semiautomatic assault rifles after another

horrific school shooting takes place, then turn around and use the same ink to send those same weapons off to Israel to kill the children of Palestine,” he wrote.

The rapper described having been moved by the antigenocide protests that have drawn millions into the streets around the world. “I have been in awe and inspired by those in the Jewish community that have courageously shown up in solidarity, marching with posters at protests stating, ‘Not in our name,’ and ‘Never again means never again for everyone.’”

Macklemore added that he has been inspired by “our young people, who have been willing to risk their degrees by participating in college encampments to demand a ceasefire.” The fall semester has brought new restrictions on free speech and assembly on university campuses. Many students are also facing politically motivated criminal prosecution for having exercised their First Amendment rights. At Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, international student and graduate instructor Momodou Taal faces imminent deportation for having participated in protests against the genocide.

Referring to his expletive during the Seattle concert, Macklemore explained that his anger is not directed toward the mass of Americans. “It is directed at the politicians who have put profit over people....”

Macklemore also placed himself within a historical tradition, writing that his actions are “rooted in the legacy of protests and resistance of past generations” such as the civil rights movement, the opposition to the US war in Vietnam and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. He concluded his statement by reaffirming his “pursuit of peace, love, equality and liberation for all.”

The rapper’s most recent outspoken defense of the Palestinians and opposition to the genocide brought much foul abuse down on his head, including from pro-Zionist ignoramus and talk show host Bill Maher.

Macklemore’s positions are rare in his genre. Apart from him and Puerto Rican rapper Residente, few hip-hop artists have denounced the atrocities being perpetrated by Israel, the US and other imperialist powers.

Chuck D, for example, the founder of the explicitly political group Public Enemy, which came to prominence in the late 1980s, has remained silent about the genocide. Worse, the rapper agreed during the summer to represent the US State Department as a “global music ambassador.” US Secretary of State, the unspeakable Antony Blinken, up to his neck in blood, is described by the media as Chuck D’s “friend.” In June, that is, eight months into the mass killing in Gaza presided over by Blinken and the

White House, the rapper shamefully showed up at an event at the State Department, hosted by the war criminal.

Blinken: Good afternoon, everyone. So we’re seriously increasing the cool factor here at the State Department this afternoon. (Laughter.) ... To all of you here, welcome. I especially want to thank our U.S. Global Music Ambassadors here with us today. ... Chuck D ... (Applause.)

The global music ambassador initiative is modeled on the Central Intelligence Agency’s Cold War program that used the arts to foment regime change and promote the interests of US “democratic” imperialism.

Though appalling, Chuck D’s transition from rapping “Fight the Power” to supporting the state has an underlying logic. The rapper has long espoused racist politics and black nationalism. From this position, it is a short distance to joining the US government in promoting and defending the Zionist state. Moreover, Chuck D has long described Lyor Cohen, a music industry honcho, as his “mentor.” Cohen’s Israeli father, Elisha, was a member of the Harel Brigade, which murdered thousands of Palestinians and expelled hundreds of thousands more from their homes during the 1948 *Nakba*.

Macklemore’s latest song about the genocide and his principled Instagram statement express the attitudes of millions worldwide. His defense of human dignity and opposition to unjust authority provide an example that other artists would do well to emulate.



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