

## Bieber vs Ford: Canada's favorite bad boys

Pop star Justin Bieber is giving Toronto Mayor Rob Ford a brief respite as Canada's favorite bad boy and butt of all jokes. Ford has admitted smoking crack while in a drunken stupor and is being sued for supposedly orchestrating the jailhouse beating of his sister's ex-boyfriend. The 19-year-old teen idol is facing the equivalent of a misdemeanor assault charge. "It's a change from the Rob Ford show," said 14-year-old Jon Bullock, who braved glacial temperatures to catch a glimpse of the star as he turned himself in at a Toronto police station Wednesday evening to face charges over an altercation with a limousine driver in late December.

The incident, which comes on the heels of Bieber's Miami arrest while apparently drag racing and driving under the influence of alcohol, marijuana and prescription drugs, is the latest to sully the image of the singer who has been drawing more attention for his brushes with the law than for his music. For now at least, Bieber has eclipsed Ford as fodder for late-night comedy talk-shows on both sides of the border.

"He had to fly to Toronto to turn himself in. Boy, this kid is really on a crime spree. He's become a menace to society. I liked him better when he was just a menace to music," said TV comedian Jimmy Kimmel. "By the way, when you have Justin Bieber and Rob Ford together in the same place it's like Gotham City got attacked by the Joker and the Penguin at once." Others feel a comparison with Laurel and Hardy more appropriate. On Wednesday, former Globe and Mail reporter Steve Ladurantaye tweeted an image of Bieber and Ford decked out to resemble the classic comedy duo. "Seems as good a time as ever to look at this picture again," Ladurantaye, who now works for Twitter Canada, said in the tweet.

Even some members of the Toronto city council - all too familiar with Mayor Ford's foibles - were compelled to weigh-in on the battle of the country's bad boys. "Both Justin Bieber and Mayor Ford need to get their lives together," said Toronto City Councilor Joe Mihevc on Thursday on the sidelines of a council meeting.

### Damaged pride

Amidst all the hullabaloo, it's perhaps not surprising the Toronto mayor has rushed to Bieber's defense. "He's a young guy. I wish I was as successful as he was. He's 19 years old. Think about when you were 19," Ford opined during one of his regular call-in appearances on a Washington DC radio show called The Sports Junkies.

Beyond the jokes, however, there's a sense of

embarrassment, damaged pride and the feeling that Bieber and Ford are behaving in a way that's just not Canadian. "Canada has always been considered this polite place. People like Sarah McLachlan and Shania Twain have fulfilled that stereotype as seemingly nice, friendly people who don't get into a lot of trouble," said Joshua Ostroff, the Huffington Post Canada's pop culture columnist and senior editor. Ostroff said the Canadian rapper Drake got it right when he joked a couple of weeks ago on Saturday Night Live that Toronto is the kind of place where rappers are nice and the mayor smokes crack.

### Side-effects of Bieber scuffles

"It was a great joke because it's absolutely true. Drake is the kind of rapper you expect Canada to produce and Bieber is acting counter to our stereotypes," Ostroff said. But Ostroff worries that lumping Ford and Bieber together threatens to trivialize the mayor's actions. "The people Ford has been associated with have been accused of murder. Bieber has been an idiot like many 19-year-old boys. He egged a house. He maybe drag raced after having a beer, they are all dumb things and he deserves to be pilloried for it but comparatively, he's not an adult, he's not the mayor of North America's fourth largest city and he's not actually hanging out with gangsters and the mayor of Toronto is," he said.

A side-effect of Bieber's scuffles with the law has been to remind Americans that the teen idol is not a US citizen. Advocacy groups, acutely aware of how less famous immigrants are treated upon arrest in the United States, have started an online petition with over 100,000 signatures demanding that the Obama administration "deport Justin Bieber and revoke his green card." They point out that were Bieber an American citizen, a conviction for driving under the influence or assault would be enough to get him deemed inadmissible to Canada. Errol Nazareth, a pop culture commentator for the Canadian Broadcast Corporation, says he thinks deportation is a bit much and that the whole comparison is probably being blown out of proportion. "It's really just an imperfect storm of two people who seem to be up to no good at the same time. It's really just more of a circus than a statement on our reputation," Nazareth said. "Bieber is trying to project this bad boy image. They (Bieber and Ford) are both projecting weird images and it's not surprising they become the butt of jokes. They're easy targets." — AP



In this file photo, Justin Bieber performs at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas. — AP

## Bieber, latest child star battling (very public) fall

Justin Bieber is the latest in a long line of troubled former child stars to veer off the rails—the question now is, can those around him save the teen from a complete train wreck. And if so, how? A spell in rehab? A tough-love crackdown by his management or family? It remains to be seen if the latest brushes with the law will prove a wake-up call for the 19-year-old Canadian heartthrob. "If I were his manager, my temptation would be to just send Justin to his room for three months," Robert Thompson, a professor of pop culture at Syracuse University, told AFP.

"The problem is there's 400 paparazzi outside his room taking pictures, not to mention he's tweeting from his room. If he tweets from the police station, he's gonna tweet from anywhere." For those who follow Bieber's antics closely, his arrest in Miami Beach and assault charges in Toronto—within the space of less than a week—are hardly surprising.

Tabloid media have for months chronicled his repeated run-ins with police and neighbors in and around the plush mansion where he lives in Calabasas, northwest of Los Angeles. The singer has also found himself trouble with authorities in Australia and Brazil for spraying graffiti. In Brazil, Bieber was photographed emerging under a blanket from a notorious Rio brothel.

But unlike similar America hell-raisers, the Canadian could in theory be booted out of the United States, where he has made his career. On Thursday a public petition on the White House website passed 200,000 signatures, twice the threshold to merit an official response. "We would like to see the dangerous, reckless, destructive, and drug abusing Justin Bieber deported," it said.

"He is not only threatening the safety of our people but he is also a terrible influence on our nation's youth." That came after he was charged on January 23 with driving under the influence after police caught him allegedly drag racing in Miami Beach, Florida. Then on Wednesday he was charged with assaulting a limousine driver in Canada, after turning himself in at a Toronto police station with a crowd of female fans screaming their support. Bieber is following in the footsteps of the likes of Lindsay Lohan, Britney Spears, "Home Alone" star Macaulay Culkin, Demi Lovato and more recently "High School Musical" heartthrob Zac Efron. Michael Jackson was another child star who patently struggled to make the transition to the grown-up world.

Bieber—a global star who has over 49 million Twitter followers—seemed to compare himself to Jackson last week, in an Instagram posted after he was charged in Miami. The post showed Bieber in a dark hoodie, waving outside jail, alongside an image of Jackson a decade ago when the King of Pop was fighting child molestation charges.

"What more can they say," read the caption. Media reports said Bieber's father Jeremy—who split from the star's mother when he was just a baby—was involved in the alleged drag racing. Canada's Globe and Mail newspaper said Bieber's troubles can "be read as an indictment of modern permissive parenting; a cautionary tale about a fatherless upbringing in a single-mom home."

But, like many non-American entertainers, Bieber—who Forbes magazine says made \$58 million in 2013 — lives and works in United States under a so-called O-1 visa. Thompson said the deportation risk is therefore minimal. "It's amusing, but I cannot possibly imagine he could ever be deported... boy, we've plenty of our own home grown types that are worse influences than Justin is," he said.

But he added that, while young celebrities have always gone off the rails, social media means that every mis-step is played out under an unrelenting public spotlight. "Hollywood stars back in the golden age of Hollywood, they were getting into trouble all over the place. The studios were normally able to squelch it, they knew reporters, had little deals here and there. "That's impossible now. These stories are going to get out," he said.

Celebrity news site TMZ reported Bieber wants to move out of his gated community—where Jackson's family also lives—to an area where there are no "rules and regulations and nosy neighbors." Whatever happens, the story will inevitably run and run. "You couldn't write a better drama. There is innocence. There is pathos. There is suspense. There is tragedy," said the Globe and Mail. "The only thing missing is how it will end." — AFP



Toronto Mayor Rob Ford speaks from the council floor in Toronto in this photo. — AP