

An NFT of Jay-Z's first album has sparked a record label lawsuit

Roc-A-Fella Records (RAF), co-founded by hip-hop mogul Jay-Z, has sued fellow co-founder Damon Dash for allegedly hawking a non-fungible token of Jay-Z's 1996 debut album *Reasonable Doubt*.

The lawsuit claims Dash partnered with platform SuperFarm to auction an NFT of *Reasonable Doubt*, following a well-trodden path of selling art ownership via NFT. It quotes a purported SuperFarm press release calling the sale "one of the most significant NFT auctions to date," since it would transfer "the rights to all future revenue generated by the album from Damon Dash to the auction winner." That's an unusually sweeping promise for an NFT. "Selling the copyright to Jay-Z's *Reasonable Doubt* as an NFT is a groundbreaking landmark – both for the crypto space and the broader music industry," the statement apparently continued.

But Roc-A-Fella's lawyers say this wasn't Dash's product to advertise. Dash owns a minority share in RAF, but the suit says that gives him "no right to sell a company asset" as an NFT or otherwise. SuperFarm canceled the auction at RAF's request, but the label claims Dash is trying to find a substitute venue. RAF wants Dash to hand over any NFTs he's minted based on *Reasonable Doubt*, plus monetary damages. "There is only one *Reasonable Doubt* – the rights to it are irreplaceable," the complaint notes. "The bottom line is simple: Dash can't sell what he doesn't own."

According to *TMZ*, which first reported the lawsuit, Dash has

called the lawsuit inaccurate – saying he’s trying to sell his share in RAF rather than the album itself. “Under the terms of the deal with a potential buyer, the buyer would buy my share of Roc-a-Fella Records and Jay-Z will have exclusive administration rights” to the album, he told *TMZ*. Dash also told the *New York Post’s Page Six* that “I’m not running around to different places trying to auction off *Reasonable Doubt*. I’ve been working with one platform and that’s SuperFarm.” He called the suit a scare tactic intended to make him sell his stake in the company.

The case is unrelated to another recent lawsuit where Jay-Z accused *Reasonable Doubt* cover photographer Jonathan Mannion of exploiting his likeness.

As NFTs have blown up in popularity, related lawsuits are starting to appear in court. This suit seemingly hinges on the nebulous description of Dash’s NFT. You can parse SuperFarm’s alleged product description to fit Dash’s claim, for instance: if you buy this NFT, you’ll get any revenue that *Dash himself* would have earned from the album copyright. But you can also interpret it as a full-fledged sale of the copyright, and the press release’s title promotes an “auction for Jay-Z’s iconic album *Reasonable Doubt*.” In any case, NFTs are supposed to confer a sense of airtight ownership and exclusivity – and auctioning off a partial stake in an iconic album doesn’t have quite the same ring to it.

<https://www.theverge.com/2021/6/21/22543753/jay-z-nft-lawsuit-reasonable-doubt-roc-a-fella-damon-dash>