

# CRITICAL BEATDOWN



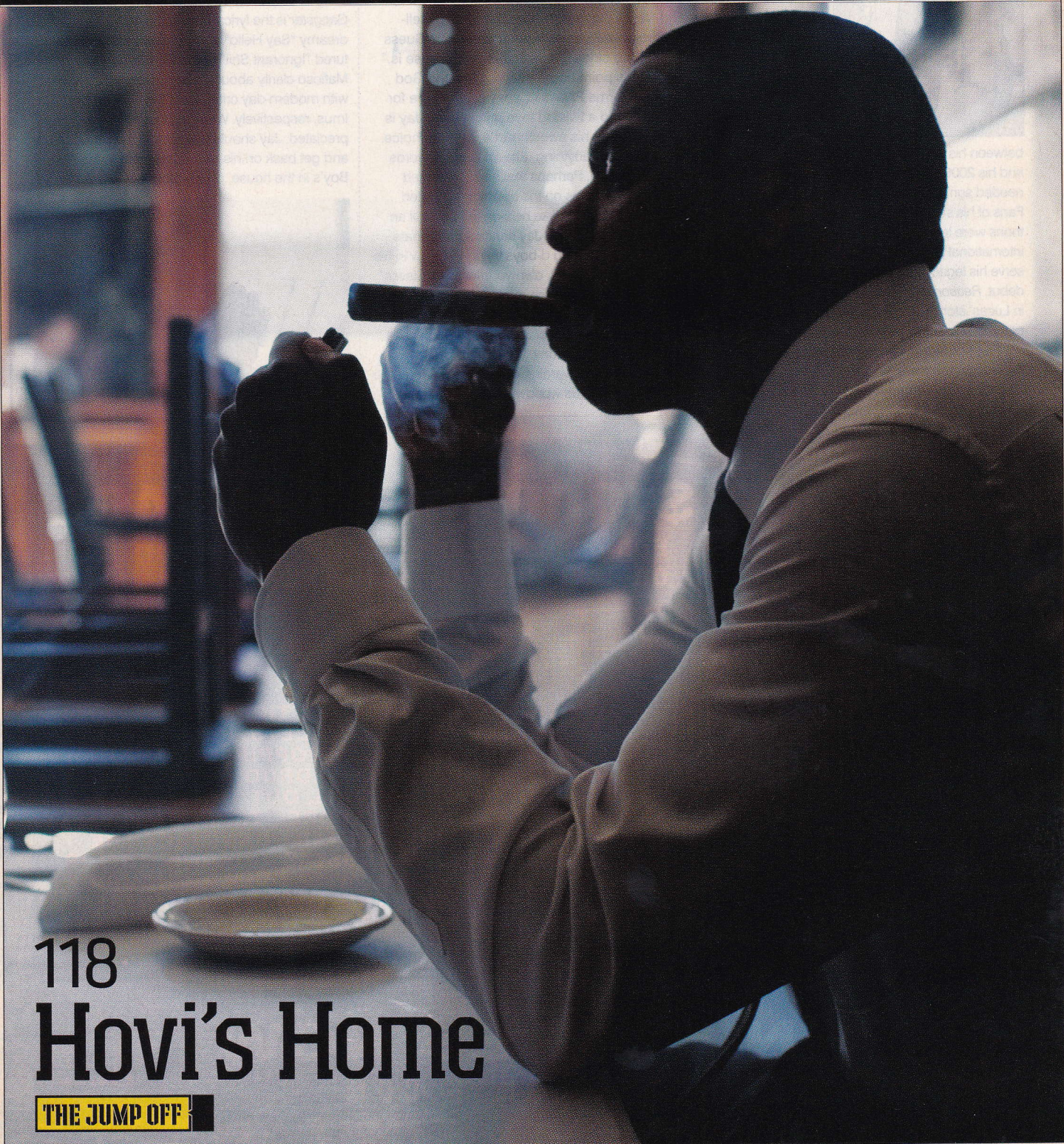
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THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS REVIEWS

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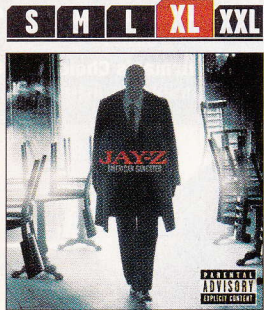
**THE JUMP OFF**

THE JUMP OFF

Jay-Z

American Gangster

ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM



**LOVE:** Inspiration can come from just about anywhere. In the case of Jay-Z, his latest muse is a biopic about the life of Harlem drug lord Frank Lucas. Following the drastic shift in musical direction

between his 2003 swan song, *The Black Album*, and his 2006 comeback disc, *Kingdom Come*, Jay needed something to get himself back on track. Fans of his storied street tales and lyrical marathons were let down by a disconnected batch of international player's anthems. In an effort to preserve his legacy and tap into the vein of his 1996 debut, *Reasonable Doubt*, Hov finds motivation in Lucas' story and cooks up a pot of pure uncut crack music dubbed *American Gangster*.

Rediscovering his hustler's ambition, Jay delves into the many facets of the drug game like an OG passing knowledge down to a new jack.

First, he explains how easily one smart Black boy can get sucked into the seedy underworld of the streets on the stirring "Pray." Then, over the old-school knock of "Blue Magic," he kicks more of that Pyrex talk, before testifying, "Blame Reagan for making me to a monster/Blame Oliver North and Iran-Contra/I ran contraband that they sponsored/Before this rhymin' stuff we was in concert."

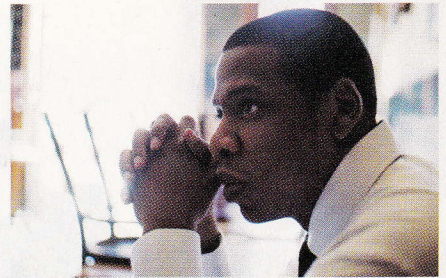
Careful not to glorify the lifestyle, Hov makes a concerted effort to show the pitfalls as well. On the cautionary "Fallin'," which is built over a Dramatics sample flipped by Jermaine Dupri and No ID, Jigga reveals, "The irony of selling drugs is it's sorta like you're usin' it/Guess there's two sides to what substance abuse is." Driving his point home even further, the God MC transforms Pharrell's sexy synth score for "I Know" into a twisted love affair where Jay is personified as his sweetheart's drug of choice.

More than anything, Shawn Carter's words here are critical. Perhaps that's why he opted to bypass a chorus on the appropriately titled "No Hook." Rhymin' like he's on the brink of an emotional breakdown, Jay sends a passionate kite to all the aspiring d-boys trying to follow in his footsteps: "Own boss, own your/Masters/Slaves/The mentality I carry with me to this very day/Fuck rich, let's get wealthy/Who else gon' feed we?"

**HATE:** Too bad most of Jay's co-d's don't have as compelling testimony. While word of the two Carters' finally converging on one track should be cause for rap nerds worldwide to simultaneously

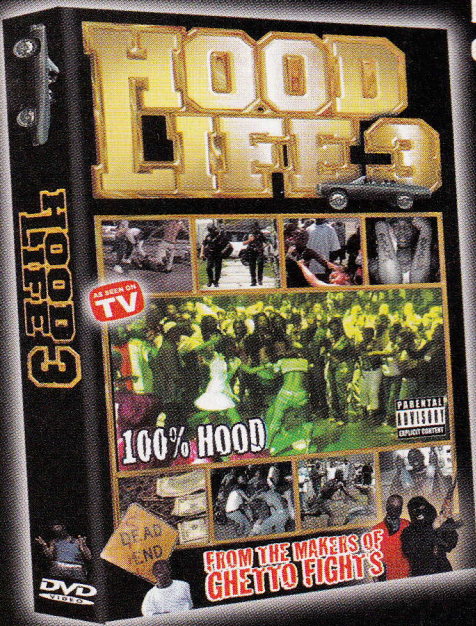
soil themselves, the resulting "Hello Brooklyn 2.0" is a lyrically limp endeavor by Lil Wayne. Not only does Weezy not bring his A game, the fact that a potential BK anthem features a New Orleans rapper who resides in Miami raises even more questions. Unfortunately, the same thing happens to Nas, as he plays the anchor on the rigid organ-fueled frenzy "Success." That's not to say God's Son's verse completely sucks, it's just, after two monstrous murdergrams from Jigga, Nasir's monotone delivery pales in comparison.

The only other structural offense on *American Gangster* is the lyrical time traveling. Both the dreamy "Say Hello" and the Beanie Sigel-featured "Ignorant Shit" begin with Jigga spittin' with Mafioso clarity about his dark past, only to end with modern-day critiques of Rev. Al and Don Imus, respectively. While the insight is greatly appreciated, Jay should just stick to the script, re-up and get back on his shift. 'Cause when the Roc Boy's in the house, oh my God. —ANSLAM SAMUEL



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