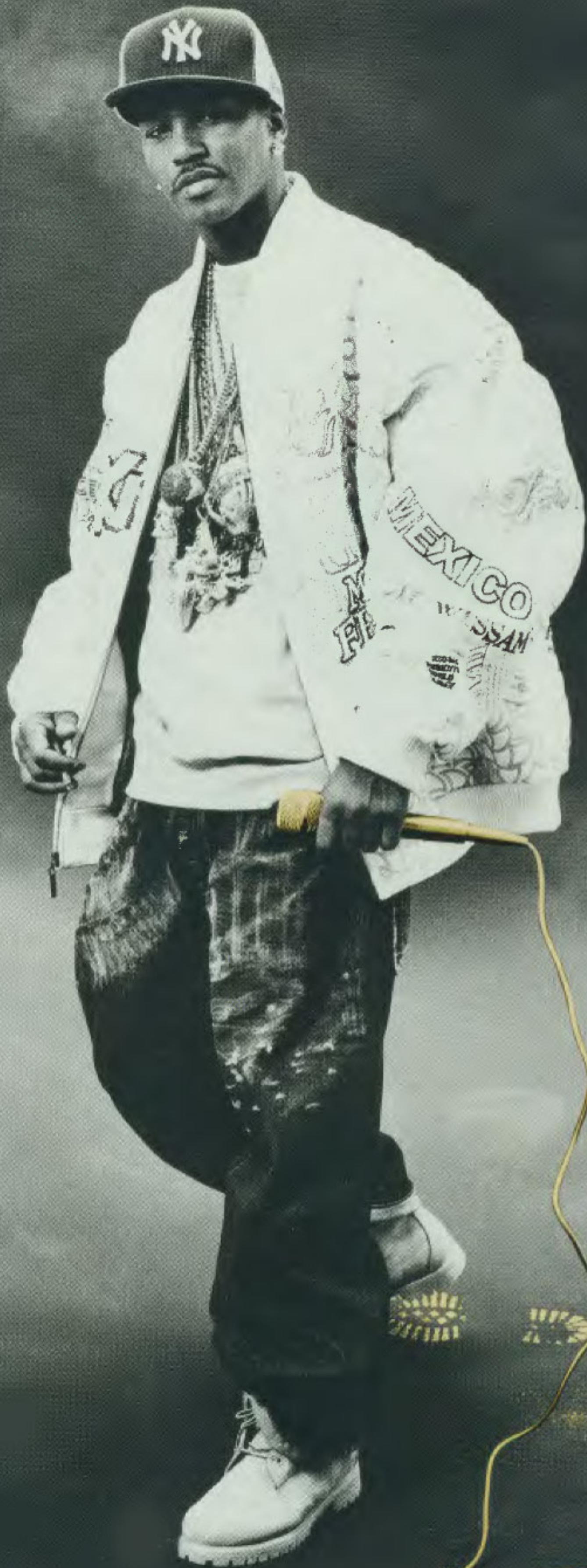


MONEY ON MY MIND

Words **Bonsu Thompson** >> Images **Phil Knott**

The shooting? It's nothing. Hardly put a swivel in his swagger. Harlem Lord **CAM'RON** is still as cocksure as a rooster on coke.

Pesky police? Pshaw. Industry tension? Whatever. With luxury cars, heavyweight jewelry and a squad to match, the rap Pink Panther is ready to make his Dipset the only movement that matters.





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aturday, October 22, 2005. Washington, D.C.'s Shaw neighborhood is packed with party people celebrating Howard University's illustrious Homecoming weekend. A couple hours past midnight, at the intersection of New York and New Jersey Avenues, Harlem rap star Cam'ron Giles reclines behind the wheel of his royal blue 2006 Lamborghini, his childhood friend Huddy Combs riding shotgun. Behind them, Cam's pink Range Rover, full of his boys. Two cars behind the Range, the Diplomats van, manned by Cam's security chief, T-Rell, and crew. To his right, Cam notices a bandanna-masked fan forming Roc-A-Fella's famous diamond sign with his hands. He pays little mind—the streets are crowded, and D.C. dudes always wear bandannas around their mouths. But then the fan puts his hands down, raises a gun and moves toward the car. *Bang! Bang! Bang!* Shots hit the windshield and then Cam's arms. He steps on the gas, the engine roars, but to no avail. Lamborghinis automatically shift into neutral when idle for more than a few seconds. Combs pushes the restart button and the two take off to the right, followed by the Range. The shooter jumps into the passenger's seat of a burgundy Ford Expedition that peels off to the left. The security van follows the shooter, as does a marked police car that was right behind the Range at the light.

While Cam steers against traffic the half-mile to Howard University Hospital, the Expedition crashes a few blocks away on U Street, where the shooter and the driver escape on foot. Twelve hours later, Cam is released from the hospital, both arms bandaged, and wearing over \$200,000 in jewelry. He tells reporters his assailants were "real sloppy," and hops on a plane back to New York, where he heads straight from the airport to the studio to write about his night.

A month-and-a-half later, the verses have hit the street, on the "Get Em Daddy (Remix)" from the latest Diplomats mixtape, *The Title Stays in Harlem*. "See it do react," Cam rhymes. "Hud six threw me back/A few they clapped/But I ate those, them shits are Scooby snacks..."

Meanwhile, D.C. police are frustrated. They found a cell phone and shell casings in the crashed Expedition, and a .45-caliber pistol in an alley nearby. As loquacious as he is on the mic, though, Cam's lips are sealed when it comes to cops. Unable to get him on the phone since he came home, capital officials are threatening a subpoena. They've enlisted NYPD help, too, raising the issue of the five years probation sentence Cam received in 2002 for weapons charges. A couple badges stopped by Cam's place the other day. It wasn't a friendly visit.

Still, on December 8, inside of a well-hidden Park Ave. editing studio, 29-year-old Cam'ron seems anything but cowed. He's here to put the final touches on his self-produced, straight-to-DVD movie, *Killa Season*, which will accompany the April release of an album, his fifth, of the same name. It's been almost a year since the flamboyant MC—and CEO of Diplomat Records, leader of the East Coast force Dipset—left Roc-A-Fella/Def Jam in the wake of the Dame Dash–Jay-Z split. Now, after setting up shop for a while at indie warehouse Koch Entertainment, he's sitting pretty with a new two-album deal with Warner Bros. subsidiary Asylum Records. The figures have been reported to be in the \$2.5 million range. Cam says twice that.

Indeed, the numbers keep getting bigger in Dipset World. Cam's 2002 album, *Come Home With Me*, is the only Diplomats effort ever to go platinum. Twenty-three-year-old Juelz Santana, though, debuted in *Billboard's* pop Top 10 just in time for the holiday shopping season, and Cam's right-hand man, Jim Jones, is similarly rising in status. Jones took an executive position at Warner Bros. last year, and also launched a Diplomats offshoot, Byrdgang Records. A line of furs (yes, furs) has been added to the crew's entrepreneurial portfolio—joining the thriving mixtape series and the liquor brand, Sizzurp. Jones' third official solo album is due this year, too, along with first shots from newer Diplomats Hell Rell and J.R. Writer.

Dipset are as New York street as it gets. But this year, Cam's aiming to take Harlem's hood heroes nationwide.

investigation. NYPD came to your place recently right? What was that about?

I went to D.C. I usually get permission [from my parole officer], but I ran out there because Juelz's shit was coming out and I had to promote. I get shot and the D.C. police calling me up. I'm not answering my phone, and they're like, I violated. They come to my house at 8 in the morning... They handcuffed me, took me in with my shit fucked up. But I'm the victim. I just went down there to take care of business, I get shot, now I'm violated? But at the end of the day, the D.C. police be calling me. But why are you calling me? First of all, the car crashed. You have the car, you have the fingerprints, you have the cell phone, and you got the gun—they found the gun in the bushes—and you have a police witness.

So what are the police saying about the shooter or his getaway driver?

They talking about the nigga who car it was, he forgot who he lent the car to that night. [If that was New York], he would be in jail until he remembered. Now D.C. police want to speak to me, and the New York cops are violating me, talking about, "Cam don't wanna cooperate." Cooperate about *what!*? I didn't see nobody. Second of all, you seen everything, you were between me and my whole entourage. You were in the center, and you cut off my squad from catching the nigga.

After you left the hospital, you came back to New York and went straight to the studio. Did you feel any fear, like, *Somebody just tried to take my life?*

I was more mad that niggas tried to even disrespect me. And I'm mad that we don't know

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Let's start with the shooting. It seemed like a failed carjacking at first. But the talk has shifted toward a setup. Who do you think was behind it?

Honestly, I don't make speculation. When I got an answer I'll tell you, but I'm not gonna guess on this, that and a third. But before I do, I got to do research. If somebody set me up, we gonna get to the bottom of it.

D.C. cops have expressed frustration with your unwillingness to cooperate with their

who did it, and the cops are acting stupid. So now I got to conduct my own investigation. But music has always been a good therapy for me. If I can go out and say whatever—as long as I'm not speculating and putting myself and my friends in any danger—then I don't give a fuck... I move like somebody is trying to kill me anyway. There's never a time when you'll catch me slippin'. I don't really move around if I'm not right. If I'm at the party, I'm at the party right. I was right that day, we

SET DESIGNER: AMIR EBRAHIMI; STYLIST: BIG SMILEY; BARBER: CHRIZO; PREVIOUS SPREAD: HAT BY NEW ERA, SHIRT ARTIST'S OWN, JACKET BY L. WISSAM, JEANS BY RED MONKEY; BOOTS BY TIMBERLAND; OPPOSITE PAGE: FUR JACKET BY AVIANNE & CO. JEWELRY BY AVIANNE & CO.

were just off on our way. They caught Ronald Reagan slippin'. You can catch anybody slippin'. Niggas ain't scared, niggas is upset and want to know what's going on.

Okay, let's talk business now. You recently signed with a new record label. What attracted you to Asylum over Koch?

Right now with Koch, I'm not totally happy. We're selling more records, and they're acting funny with the money... We sold 800,000 records on Koch. Jim Jones' new album is at

240,000, Diplomats 220,000, Jim Jones' last album 210,000. Duke Da God, our A&R, is at 110,000 SoundScan, you know what I'm saying? Where's the money? You can't make me happy with a million here and 2 million there. Nobody over there except for—shout-out to Suge and peace to 'Pac. They're the only ones selling records. We're the only ones that's alive who are selling records over there. [Warner Bros.] offer more money than Koch. They pay every 30 days, and they promote

harder. So Asylum is basically an incubator that Warner set up to put Koch out of business. **You left Def Jam after the Roc-A-Fella split. But Juelz stayed. So Diplomats is still in business with Def Jam. Does that put you in an awkward position?**

I mean, basically, and I want to give a lot of props to Juelz because Juelz said, "Cam, no matter what you want to do, I'm doing it. But I want to stay at Def Jam." You know we don't really communicate with Jay-Z. So I had a meeting with LA Reid. He said he loves us. He let me go off the strength because I didn't feel comfortable with the Jay-Z situation. And [I told him] if we worked this out, it would have to be a joint venture at Def Jam. And he was like, "Set the deal up, it's done." So when Juelz recoups, we get 50 percent of the back end. And LA Reid really did a great job over there. He even got Mariah Carey back to where she's at. Coming from Atlanta, he sells more records than the people in New York. I left, and I'm still happy I left. But to be able to still do business with LA is a great situation.

You and Jay never had a good relationship, even when you were on his label. And when he got the presidency, you immediately bounced. What started this tension?

At the end of the day... This is what happened. When I first got [to Roc-A-Fella], I spoke to Jay, and he didn't give me that vibe back. I asked him a few times to do a joint. He kept [brushing me off]. Then "Oh Boy" came out, and it was rockin'. One day me and Juelz were leaving the studio and Jay was coming in and said, "I did a little something for you." He did an "Oh Boy" remix. [Roc-A-Fella engineer Young] Guru played it, and we were like, "It was wack. That ain't hot." We told Dame and Biggs, and it was like this big meeting, like, "Who's going to tell him it ain't hot?" I'm like, "You gotta be honest with niggas. It ain't hot." So I took him off, and then rumors started circulating, why we never did anything together.

Did you and Jay ever talk about the rumors?

One day in the studio he was like, "People be talking, but everything is cool between us." I'm like, "I'm cool, I don't listen to rumors." So he's like, "Cool." Just Blaze had just made "New York City," and we did the song that same night, in 30 minutes. I saw him again, and I was like, "Yo, niggas is feeling the song, might do a video for it if you want to." He gave



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THE F#&KIN' MOVEMENT IS SO IN THE STREETS THAT IT MAKES PEOPLE LIKE US EVEN MORE. WE MAKE MORE MONEY SELLING HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS THAN A NIGGA SELLING 3, 4 MILLION.

me the same [silent treatment]. But the real problems began when Jay went away and Dame was talking about making me president. When Jay came back, he had an attitude. He said to Beans something to the effect that he didn't feel comfortable with what Dame was trying to do. I think it all stems from that president thing... But there's a lot of little stuff that happened that it could've been. I could sit here and nitpick a million things.

What did you think about Nas joining Jay onstage in October?

Them niggas just don't got anything else to do. I don't really have too much to comment on that whole thing. They both almost 40 [Ed., Jay-Z is 36 and Nas is 32]. Seriously, can a 15-, 16-year-old relate to a Nas-Jay-Z move? Do they really give a fuck? So if a 15-, 16-year-old don't give a fuck, neither do I.

People are saying New York rap as a whole has fallen off. Can the Diplomats bring the city's prominence back?

Oh yeah, definitely. We the last hope right now. Unless Jay come out, and he's like 40. If it ain't us, then it's going to take somebody else a long time to build up all the shit we got. And we not letting niggas just come do that...

What about G-Unit? They keep getting bigger. With 50 signing everybody like he's been doing, how do you compete?

I got respect for G-Unit, and I have respect for 50 as a businessman. But I don't really look at them as competition. I look at them as somebody who already did it and crossed over, but I don't see them as competition on no level. No disrespect—the sales are the sales—but as far as swagger, style, lyrics, jewelry, streets, it's us. I could never say nothing about 50. He dissed a lot of niggas, but he's



never said our name, so I don't have no problem with him.

Course, your old partner Ma\$e is over there now. What's the price tag on a "Horse & Carriage" reunion?

Nothing. I'll never speak to Ma\$e again, for the simple fact that Ma\$e met me in Miami six months ago, tryna do an album. He supposedly had a million dollars from Dr. Dre...

From Dr. Dre?

This is what he's telling me in Miami. I swear to God, I got the picture. He's holding up a fist, with a "Back Like Cooked Crack" shirt on, with the *Purple Haze* CD, signing it. And there's a song dissin' him on that CD! So I can't fuck with him after that shit... You church, then meet me, then you back sayin' "niggas" and "bitches"? This dude's a fraud. Now he's on G-Unit and think if he say something about us, we can't say nothing about him. We don't care who you're down with.

Once you say our name, we're gonna get you. Me personally, I'm chillin'. The young boys are ready.

So you're really feeling like this year is your year?

It's Dipset season from '06 to like about '010, minimum. We might get to '017, 'cause there's no way to lose. It's only growing. Juelz is the first one gettin' *106 & Park* play with "The Whistle Song." We don't get *106* or *Rap City* or *TRL* five days a week. But the fuckin' movement is so in the streets that it makes people like us even more. We make more money selling hundreds of thousands than a nigga selling 3, 4 million. So when that multi shit come... It's silly now. We got Dipset furs on, over \$1.8 million in jewelry. Our swagger and paper is so amazing that the multi is gonna be some other shit. It's only but so much time people can sit in the dark and act like they don't see what's going on. ♦