

# Mon



## TO COMMEMORATE THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MUSIC EMPIRE'S HISTORY WITH A SELECT

(Compiled by Rob Markman and Bonsu Thompson Photography Jonathan Mannion)

**"It's Yours"** was the perfect introduction. A message to ghetto youth: No more will you be restricted to mom and pop's record collection—this song's *for you*. T La Rock and Jazzy Jay's 1984 record was Def Jam's very first single. It set the stage for hip-hop's first heart-throb (LL Cool J) and hip-hop's first *Billboard* Top 200 No. 1 album (Beastie Boys' *Licensed to Ill*), beginning the label's legacy as a superstar factory. Without Def Jam's 25-year history, neither hip-hop nor its surrounding globe would be the same.

# ment



## DEF JAM RECORDINGS, XXL IS RELIVING GROUP OF ARTISTS WHO HELPED WRITE IT.

XXL salutes the silver anniversary of the house that Rick and Russell built. An empire that helped create and cultivate some of hip-hop's most star-studded and significant contributors. To document a music monument and showcase the most esteemed gratitude, what better conduit than through the authors' stories. Here, a handpicked group of Def Jam artists signed over the past quarter of a century come together and share their most treasured label tales.

Enjoy the jewels along memory lane. After all, they're yours. —B.T.



# Scarface

## [ On getting LL Cool J on the phone with his mama ]

My most memorable moment is when I signed my contract for my solo album and LL Cool J came to my signing party at the Time hotel. That was the coolest shit for me, 'cause that's [the first rapper] I saw back in '89 at the New Music Seminar. He didn't know who I was... I was probably, like, 18 years old, on the phone with my mom, like, "Mama, I'm in New York." Then LL come by, and I'm like, "Cool J, what's up, man? Talk to my mama." That was the first time I came to the city. I was such a fuckin' fan of Cool J... For him to be there the first time I came here, and for him to be there when I signed... Man, it was a dream of mine to have that turntable on my album [cover]. Then I signed my deal with Def Jam, and he came through to my party like it wasn't shit, like he was glad to see a nigga. Every time I see him I let him know how much I appreciate him. Every time I see him I say, "Man, I know you don't remember this shit, but you talked to my mama back in 1989."



## Sticky Fingaz of Onyx

### [On collaborating with Biohazard]

[Nowadays] hip-hop is all happy and dancy with people wearing skinny jeans. Back in the day, in the era when there was Salt-N-Pepa and Kid 'N Play, we came and brought the hood—the angry, angst music and changed the whole rap game. Lyor was like, "Do that, that 'Throw Ya Gunz' that 'Bichasniguz' that 'Slam.' Lyor was a genius because he was like, "Do a 'Slam' remix with Biohazard." We was so hood. We was like, "We don't wanna do no rock-'n'-roll shit. Fuck that. We gonna keep it hood." He convinced us, and that made us go from 1.5 million to two million. When we first came out, Def Jam was in the hole. We was one of the first hardcore groups to go double platinum. This was 1993. We basically saved Def Jam.

### Sonee Seeza of Onyx [ On Onyx winning Soul Train's Best Rap Album Award in 1994 ]

[My favorite moment is when] we won the Soul Train Music Award for the year of [1994]. We young cats from the hood, from Brooklyn, from Southside Queens, and just to be brought out onstage by Gladys Knight, Patti LaBelle and Johnny Gill, and they talking about Onyx. We beat out [Dr. Dre's] *The Chronic* album and various other artists. That right there was a crowning moment for me. Not to mention, backstage I got to stand next to Luther Vandross and Michael Jackson. Rest in paradise to both of them. That right there was like, Damn, this is what it's really all about. That right there was the moment.

# Ghostface Killah



## [ On arguing in the Def Jam offices ]

I don't really have a big, big [Def Jam] memory, because I was never one to be in the loop over there. I do my album, I give it to you, I don't even see you no more. I let my manager always go into the building and do what it do. Parties and all that, Christmas parties and all that, I was never really there like that... Unless I'm going to yell at somebody. Yeah, I've yelled at a few people and shit. They heard me and shit. L.A. Reid came to get me out the hallway. He caught me out there arguing with somebody out in the hallway. That's when Lyor had just left. I had *The Pretty Toney Album*, and nobody was working my shit. L.A. was new in the building. First, he came to see what the problem was. I explained it to him, and he was like, "You know what, don't worry about it, I'm gonna take care of you." But I liked him for being the man that he was, to sit there and approach me, and, at the same time, he's, like, mad cool. He's not one of the ones that don't look at you and then be on the phone trying to do two things at one time. It's either gonna be you or the phone, but he always kept it, like, me and him direct. That's why I can go ahead and make an album every year. Big up to L.A. Reid.



# Rick Ross

## [ On the release party for his first album, *Port of Miami* ]

My favorite moment had to be the *Port of Miami* album-release party. We had that in club Mansion in Miami. It was the fact that it was the night before my first album was going to hit stores. I'm pretty sure there were more people in the club that night than any other rap concert in Mansion. Every rapper in the game was in that club that night. From Jay-Z to Young Jeezy, and the list goes on. But as I'm standing onstage, I'm really just reminiscing about all the other artists I supported. I remember buying *The Firm* [album], in that dope cassette that just folded out. I just remember the small things about hip-hop and what made me really love it and what made it special to me. Not one time did money run across my mind. It was more like, Damn, I had a vision, and I stuck with it. I was proud of myself... Def Jam has watched the moves that I made and the music that I've made, and everything I do, I do it with patience. It took me over 10 years to get here, so anything having to do with fast money, I'll pass on it. And they see that. That's why it has resulted in three No. 1 albums... It just shows my grind. I said, "Every day I'm hustling," and it wasn't just an anthem, but it was actually what I lived by.



# Warren G

## [ On kicking it with Lyor Cohen ]

Lyor picked me up one day and wanted me to take him to my hood and show him what my hood was like. The funny thing is, the day we went out, Snoop was shooting the "Who Am I [What's My Name]?" video. So we just happened to pull up on 'em shooting the video under the bridge around where I lived. I ended up getting out [the car] and getting in the video. Lyor was just posted up on the side the whole time. That night, Lyor just kicked it with me. I mean, the whole night. It was almost like he was really from my hood.

# Juelz Santana



## [ On participating in the 2008 BET Hip-Hop Awards cipher with Def Jam's Ace Hood, Fabolous and Jadakiss ]

They told us who was gonna be there. I ain't gonna front, [before the taping] I was in the car putting my shit together, and I wasn't gonna spit a rhyme that I already had. I just had to make sure I remembered it. I'm gonna keep it funky. We ran through that, like, two times, all of us. It wasn't just a one-take thing. I'm not even gonna say who messed up their verse, but every time I caught mines... It was dumb fun. The energy was there. You seen niggas in the corner mumbling to themselves. Jada over here, me over there, Fab over here. Niggas be whispering to themselves. The people in the building was looking like it's about to go down. It was love, though. It was good energy. As much as it was competition, we all respect each other. We ain't got no beef or nothing like that. Just as much as fans wanted to see that cipher happen, I wanted to see it happen. That's a dope cipher.



# ?uestlove

## [ On The Roots signing to Def Jam with Jay-Z's help ]

The *Fade to Black* [taping] was a two-week period. We did two dummy shows [with Jay-Z] up in Boston before we did the [Madison Square Garden] show, practicing. Me and Jay were choppin' it up, and I kinda told him that it was frustrating being on Interscope, because we're used to the label being in proximity of Philadelphia. He says, "Okay, I'll see what I can do about the situation." I say, "What do you mean?" He's like, "Can I trust you? I'm about to make a move." I say, "How long is this gonna be?" He said, "It's gonna take a second." Then it just became a back-and-forth. We had one more album left on our Interscope contract, and we had an option to extend it for an additional four albums. This was November 2003. [Jay-Z] basically said, "Hold off on that. I'ma get you your convenience back." I guess he was saying he was about to take over the label.



# Fabolous

## [ On joining Def Jam ]

One of my favorite stories is just the environment of the people that are at [Def Jam.] It's not like a directed story at any individual person, but anybody that I deal with, [there's] a sense of genuine family. That's a good thing. When you're in business with people, you want to feel a genuine relationship with them. Since I've been at Def Jam, I've had that. I haven't had that structure at any other record label. Of course, at the end of the day it's still business, but it makes business a lot better when you're able to deal with each other on a mutual level. A friendship.



## Erick Sermon of EPMD

### [ On getting Redman signed to Def Jam ]

Q-Tip was the main factor as to why [Redman] got signed. At first, Def Jam was like, "Yo, he sounds like you, Erick." I guess [it was his] tone at the time, even though he was lyrically crazy. They said his tone was like mines, because he wasn't as high-pitched as he is now. So I'm like, "What? Do you hear him?" So Q-Tip was in the Rush Management [offices] one time and heard a record called "Jam 4 U," off the first [Redman] album, and told Big D. [Lyor's tour manager] and Lyor, "Listen, you need to sign that kid." I almost didn't get the record deal done because Lyor and them wasn't feeling it. Then we got "Hardcore," the teaser, and then when "Headbanger" came out, they were like, "We made the right choice."

### Parrish Smith of EPMD [ On coming up with 1992's smash hit single "Crossover" ]

Me and Erick had so much appreciation. We didn't even go by our contracts. Whoever we were signed to, we were just in the rhythm of dropping music, whether it was EPMD, Das EFX, K-Solo or Redman. So I remember, when we finished *Business Never Personal*, we had a song called "Play the Next Man," and me and Erick were extra gassed on it. We brought it to Def Jam. We sat there with Russell. We played it. You couldn't tell us nothing. He told us, "You drop this single, and it's over." So we were like, "What?" [Russell said again,] "You drop it, and you're over. Go back and make another record!" We went back and made another record, and it was "Crossover." We were done with the album, without "Crossover." Russell was definitely right, because that was our only gold single.



## Method Man

### [ On meeting Ja Rule for the first time ]

I was chillin' with Nikki D one day and shit—I got so many fuckin' stories—but I was chillin' with Nikki D. She was right there outside of Lyor's office. I always had weed on me, and she introduced me to this little, short dude. He looked young as hell, like he was, like, 12 years old, and when the nigga spoke, the nigga's voice was deeper than mine. So I throw the nigga a \$50 jar of weed. That was some shit back in those days—a \$50 jar of weed? So I threw the nigga a \$50 jar of weed, and Nikki introduced us, and it was Ja [Rule]. The reason why this memory stood out to me so much was because he was pivotal. He came at a pivotal point in Def Jam history and kinda took the world by storm... Def Jam was still on Varick Street, so it had to be 1996 [when I met him]... I was rooting for my nigga when all that bullshit was goin' on. Not exactly with his beef with [50 Cent], because that's between them two. But as far as his relationship with his fans, I really felt like they turned their back on my G, and that was wrong.

## Redman

### [ On his first meeting with Def Jam ]

I was down with RPT, the Revolutionary Posse of Terrorists. That was a [underground, Newark] group with Diesel Don. Doitall from Lords of the Underground was in the group, as well as a couple of other cats that might have not gotten on. We kinda went our separate ways, but me and Diesel Don stayed together, 'cause we hustled on the side, too. Now this nigga took me to Def Jam, and [we] met Kenny Lee—not Kenny Lee, it was Big D. If it wasn't Kenny Lee, it was Big D. Now Diesel Don took me to Def Jam and played my shit for them. [Big D.] said, "You're tight, but we're looking for something more like 3rd Bass, something not too street," because 3rd Bass was just poppin' off. Maybe six months later, I worked with [Erick Sermon] a little bit, went to the same office, and sat down with the same nigga. He said, "Yeah, I remember you." I was like, Damn, is it really who you know? Because Diesel Don took me to Def Jam, and them niggas did not accept me. I guess because me being with Don. It's just funny. I go right back to the same nigga, with a different person, and [then] it's like, "Damn, this is the new nigga coming." I'd like to thank Diesel Don for this interview, because he's the first nigga that took me there. ♦

# Coming of Age

(Compiled by Matt Barone and Linda Hobbs)

XXL CHRONICLES THE PAST 25 YEARS OF DEF JAM RECORDINGS.



## 1982

Long Island native, guitarist in a rock band called Hose, and New York University sophomore Rick Rubin becomes enamored with the city's underground hip-hop scene. Borrowing a slang expression meaning "great song," he attaches a Def Jam Recordings logo to Hose's self-produced EP in hopes of appearing more legitimate. Also included was his NYU dorm room's address: "For info, records, or criticism, send all mail to: Def Jam Recordings, 5 University Place, #712."

## 1985 // September //

Having made waves throughout the music industry with its independent successes, Def Jam closes a \$2-million multialbum deal with CBS Records. Under the new umbrella, Def Jam is given a budget for recording and marketing, as well as almost full creative control. CBS, however, owns the rights to all of Def Jam's masters.

### // October 25 //

*Krush Groove*, a film based on Def Jam's humble beginnings, hits theaters. It goes on to gross \$11 million, nearly quadrupling its \$3-million budget. Rubin starred as himself, alongside Blair Underwood as the Simmons-inspired Russell Walker.



### // November 18 //

Recorded over a quick two months, mostly in Manhattan's Chung King studios, Def Jam's first full-length album, LL Cool J's *Radio*, is released.



## 1983 // December //

Rubin borrows \$5,000 from his parents to record the rapper T La Rock—the brother of Special K, an acquaintance whom Rubin met through Kool Moe Dee—and release a single, "It's Yours."

## 1984

### // August //

At a taping of the short-lived New York hip-hop sketch program *Graffiti Rock*, Rubin meets and befriends Russell Simmons. Simmons, who hails from Queens, runs the Rush Management company, overseeing the career of his brother Joseph's rap group, Run-DMC.



### // November //

Rubin's dorm room is flooded with mailed-in demo tapes. One stands out—that of 15-year-old LL Cool J. After meeting, Rubin and LL record "I Need a Beat." Simmons is floored. With \$5,000 more from Rubin's parents and \$1,000 from Simmons's own funds, Def Jam Records officially goes into business.



### // November //

Originally a punk-rock crew, the three-man Beastie Boys are reshaped into a rap group under Rubin's influence and signed to the label. Their first release, the 12-inch *Rock Hard*, includes a needle over a vinyl record, the cover design that'll become the standard image seen on all Def Jam vinyl.



# 1986 // December 17 //

Beastie Boys' debut LP, *Licensed to Ill*, is released. Two years in the making and propelled by the smash hit "Fight for Your Right (To Party)" and the controversy stoked by reckless escapades and raunchy live shows, the album becomes Def Jam's all-time best seller. (Current tally: 5,361,000 copies sold.)



# 1987 // May 17 //

Nikki D, a 17-year-old Los Angeles native, impresses Simmons enough to earn a five-album Def Jam deal, becoming the label's first female rapper.

## // June 17 //

LL Cool J embarks on The Def Jam Tour 1987, eventually joined by fellow Def Jam artists Public Enemy, as well as non-label-mates Whodini, Eric B. & Rakim, Doug E. Fresh and Stetsasonic.

## // November 6 //

Compiled by Rubin during an extended stay in Los Angeles, Def Jam's first soundtrack, *Less Than Zero*, hits stores. Containing mostly rock music (the film stars Andrew McCarthy, Jami Gertz and Robert Downey Jr.), the album features LL Cool J's "Going Back to Cali" and Public Enemy's "Bring the Noise."



# 1988 // August //

Unhappy with the direction the label has been taking, Rubin parts ways with Simmons and establishes Def American Recordings in Los Angeles. Though Sir Mix-A-Lot and the Geto Boys are early signees, American will come to focus more on rock acts.

In the wake of Rubin's departure, Simmons's chief operating officer and notorious deal maker, Lyor Cohen, works his way into the position of president of Def Jam.

With his empire growing, Simmons launches Rush Communications, a massive parent company that would house Def Jam alongside his other ventures, including Rush Management and the Phat Farm fashion line, and pave the way for synergy.

# 1989 // January //

Empowered by his Rush Communications conglomerate, Simmons starts an all-R&B imprint, Black Gold, signing Alyson Williams and Oran "Juice" Jones—both of whom had previously recorded for Def Jam.



## // June 30 //

Spike Lee's classic *Do the Right Thing* hits theaters nationwide, with a soundtrack featuring "Fight the Power" by Def Jam's flagship group, Public Enemy. The defiant anthem—the video for which is directed by Lee himself—becomes a rallying cry for a reinvigorated Black-pride movement.

Simmons awards Run-DMC DJ Jam Master Jay his own boutique label, JMJ Records—a Def Jam imprint that will be home to acts like the Afros and Onyx.



# 1990 // March //

Simmons and Cohen set up a joint venture known as Rush Associated Labels in an effort to better manage Def Jam's growing stable of subsidiaries.

# 1994 // June 7 //

After months of courting, Cohen signs Warren G., the step-brother of Dr. Dre, to Def Jam. Released within a month and fueled by the smooth megahit "Regulate," the California rapper's debut album, *Regulate...G-Funk Era* (which is Def Jam's first release under Polygram), will sell 2.8 million copies.



## // November //

Reeling from New York hip-hop's first spate of lean years, and \$20 million in debt to Sony, Def Jam is in trouble. Without informing staff or artists, Cohen signs a \$33-million distribution deal that grants Polygram Music a 60 percent stake in Def Jam.

# 1997 // April 8 //



Having established his Roc-A-Fella Records through the success of a Priority-distributed debut, *Reasonable Doubt*, Brooklyn rapper Jay-Z, along with partners Damon Dash and Kareem "Biggs" Burke, finalizes a major distribution deal with Def Jam. Under the deal, which was largely facilitated by young A&R executive Irving "Gotti" Lorenzo, Cohen and Def Jam are to remain largely hands-off when it comes to Roc-A-Fella's daily operations.

After the street success of Irv Gotti discoveries like Yonkers' DMX and Queens' Ja Rule, Def Jam rewards its A&R star with his own label, which he calls Murder Inc. The name was first used for the short-lived Gotti orchestrated supergroup of Jay-Z, DMX and Ja Rule.

# 1998 // June 16 //

In celebration of the label's impressive 1998 album-release schedule, Def Jam's Survival of the Illest tour gets underway in Roanoke, Virginia, featuring DMX, Def Squad, Onyx, Method Man, Ja Rule and Cormega.

## // July 14 //

Only 30 years old, Kevin Liles, who started off as a Def Jam intern in 1991, is promoted from Def Jam's general manager/VP to the label's new president.



## // December 10 //

After an enormous, \$10.4-billion Polygram/Seagram merger, Seagram acquires Def Jam, among many other labels (including A&M and Interscope). What emerges is called Universal Music Group.

## // December 23 //

DMX becomes the second rapper to have two No. 1 albums in one year when his second LP *Flesh of My Flesh, Blood of My Blood* lands at the top of *Billboard*'s 200 chart.

# 1999 // April //

Within Universal Music Group, Island Records is merged with Mercury, resulting in Def Jam's catalog being consolidated with Island Mercury's. Island then drops its last name to pave the way for the new joint title of Island Def Jam.

## // June 1 //

Island Def Jam's first release, Ja Rule's *Venni Vetti Vecci* (also the first album from Gotti's Murder Inc.), lands at No. 1 on *Billboard*'s Top R&B Albums chart and No. 3 on the Top 200.



## // November 3 //

Cohen, Liles and director of A&R Tina Davis oversee the setup of a new R&B imprint, Def Soul. Def Soul's first disc, Montell Jordan's *Get It On... Tonite*, is released on November 9, 1999 and reaches No. 3 on *Billboard*'s R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart.

Simmons forms the marketing venture Def Jam Enterprises, a subsidiary of his Rush Communications, which will specialize in selling Def Jam media products.

# 2000 // May 23 //

Cohen announces Def Jam's first global label expansion, Def Jam Germany, which will sign international Berlin stars Bintia and rap group The Spezialitz.

## // June 23 //

Former Geto Boys star Scarface is tapped to head Def Jam's newly formed Southern division, Def Jam South, whose first signee is the Atlanta-based radio jock turned regionally successful independent rapper Ludacris.



# 2001

## // December //

After his boss, Jim Caparro, resigns from his position as chairman of Island Def Jam, Cohen is named as his replacement. Weeks later he appoints Julie Greenwald, a former assistant who worked her way up the Def Jam ladder, as president of Island Records.



# 2004

## // January 25 //

After 20 years at Def Jam, Cohen turns down a \$50-million offer to remain at the label. Opting instead to take over North American operations at Warner Music Group, he packs up his belongings and leaves his office on the same day.

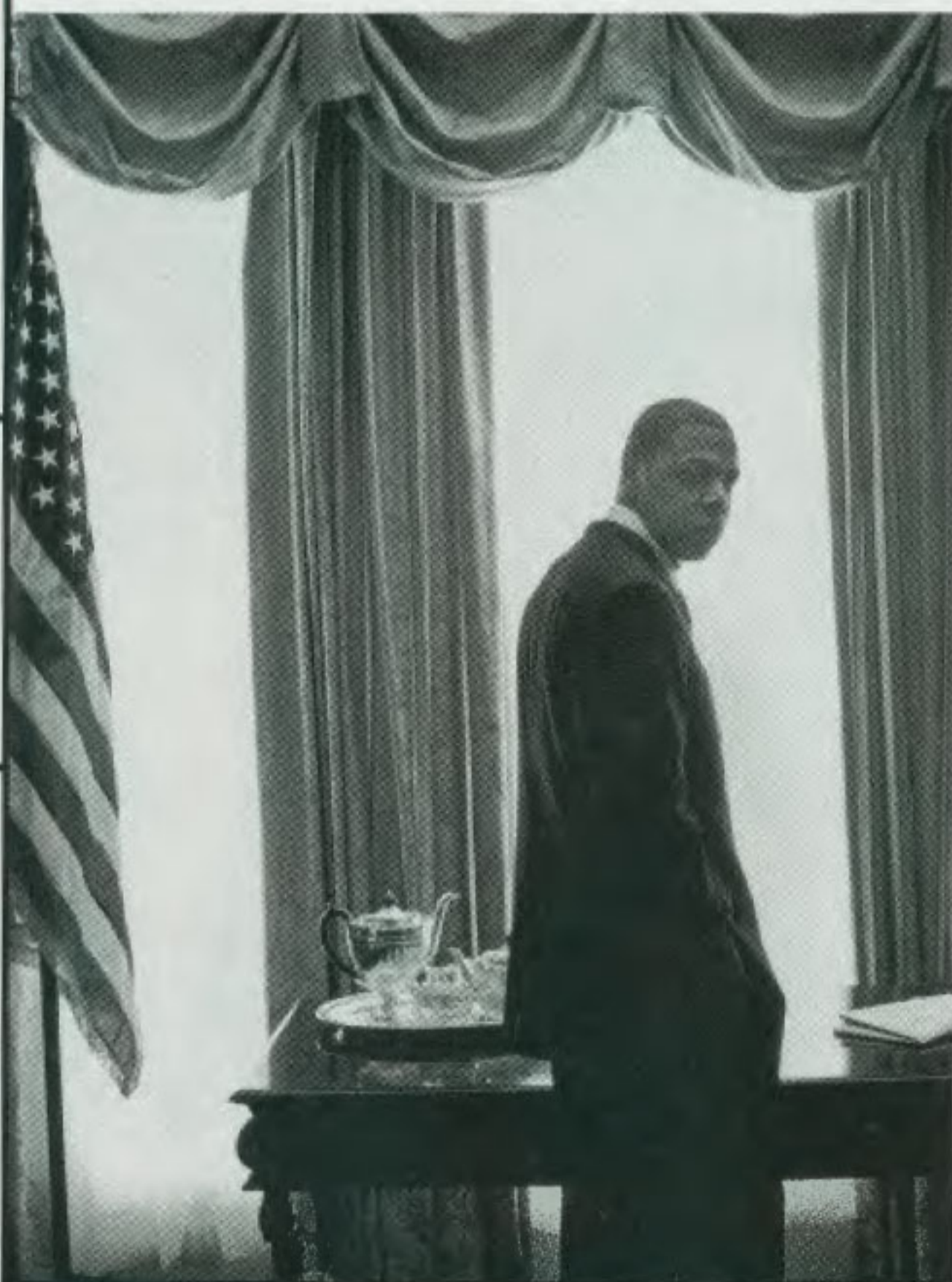
## // February //

After 14 years at Arista Records (nine of which were under LaFace before the merger), legendary Atlanta-based record executive Antonio "L.A." Reid succeeds Cohen as the CEO of Island Def Jam.



## // December 8 //

One year after announcing he was retiring from rap, superstar Jay-Z becomes the first rapper appointed president of Def Jam.



# 2002

## // October 11 //

After the success of the earlier installment, Def Jam embarks on *Survival of the Illest 2*, a 16-city tour that kicks off in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Foxy Brown, Cam'ron and N.O.R.E. headline. After nationwide shows the tour concludes in Norfolk, Virginia, on November 7.

# 2003

## // January 3 //

Police detectives and federal agents raid the Murder Inc. offices in Manhattan, seizing equipment in search of evidence connecting Irv Gotti to a money-laundering scheme involving convicted drug dealer Kenneth McGriff.



## // March 31 //

In an attempt to expand its media ventures, Def Jam partners with Electronic Arts to release its own rapper-starring, *Street Fighter*-like video game, *Def Jam: Vendetta*.

Creative differences between Scarface and Def Jam brass lead the legendary rapper to relinquish his post as president of Def Jam South, which subsequently folds.

# 2005

## // December 2 //

Irv Gotti and his brother Christopher are acquitted of all charges in connection with Kenneth McGriff and money laundering.

# 2006

// January 23 //

After squashing a long-running beef with Jay-Z, rap star Nas signs to Def Jam Records in a deal worth over \$6 million.

// May 21 //

Jay-Z publicly announced his departure from Def Jam Records after 12 years with the label.



# 2008

// June 3 //

Shakir Stewart, the A&R exec behind Def Jam stars Rick Ross and Young Jeezy, is promoted to the position of executive vice president, reporting directly to Reid.

// November 1 //

After five stressful months in his new position, Stewart dies in Atlanta from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

# 2009

// January //

Popular Miami taste-maker DJ Khaled is appointed the new president of Def Jam South.



// January 15 //

Chris Hicks, a former executive at Atlantic Records and Warner Chappell Music, is appointed the new executive VP of Def Jam.

// October 13 //

VH1 premieres its sixth-annual Hip Hop Honors celebration, this one dedicated entirely to Def Jam's 25th anniversary. Hosted by comedian Tracy Morgan, the event features label artists old and new, performances from non-Def Jam stars such as Eminem and Mary J. Blige, plus tributes to a succession of executives, from co-founders to past presidents. 🍷



**Royce**  
da 5'9"



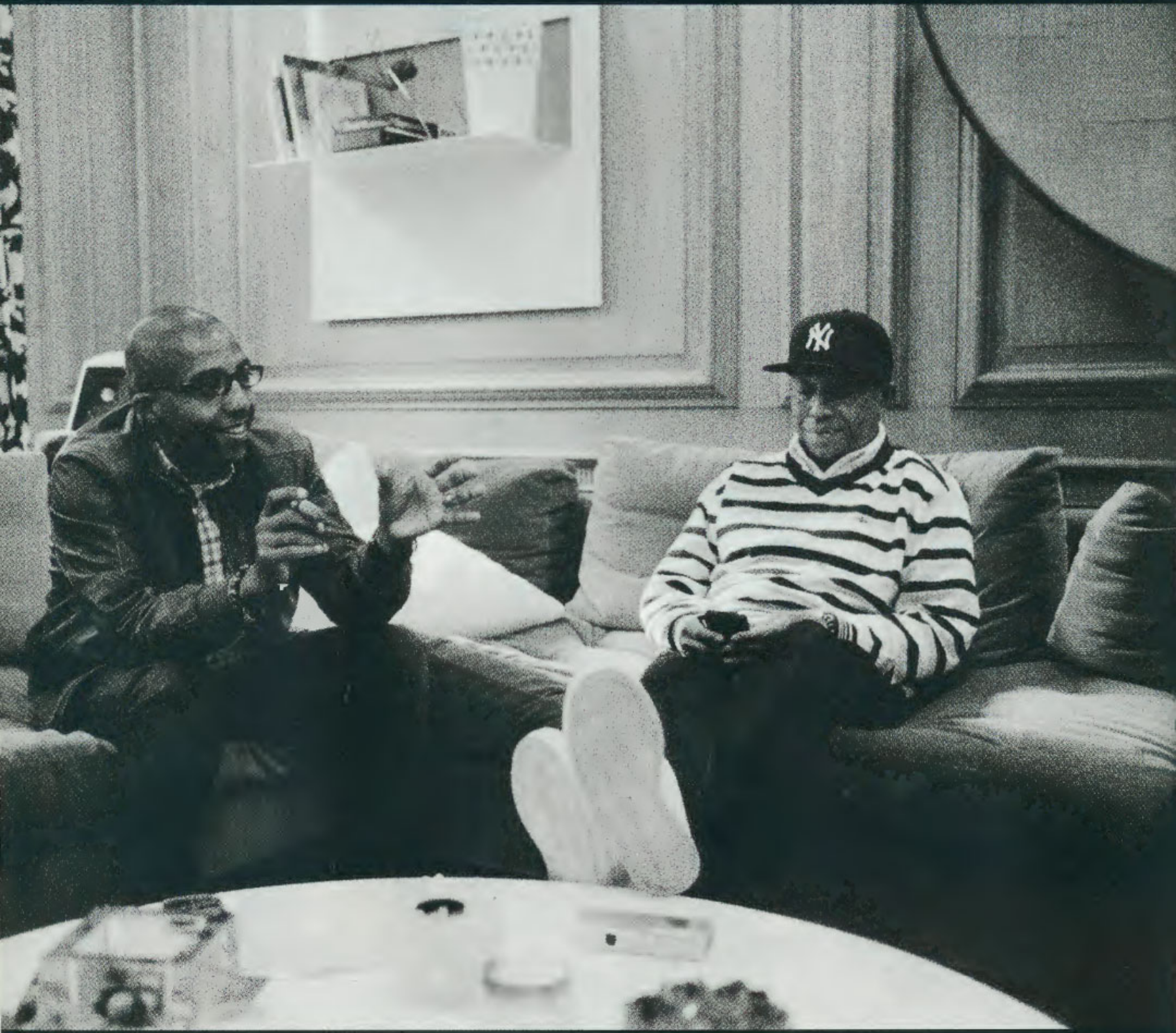
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# Foundation



They built the house and then a legacy.  
**Lyor Cohen, Russell Simmons, Kevin Liles and**

( Words Thomas Golianopoulos Photography Jonathan Mannion )



**Rick Rubin** take it back to Def Jam's roots.

**L**yor Cohen is about to pull a power move. "Is Method Man confirmed?" he asks a publicist. Cohen is inquiring about Meth's participation in VH1's Hip Hop Honors, which, this year, is dedicated to Def Jam. Method Man is not confirmed. "What's Method Man's number?" he demands in his clipped Israeli accent. Cohen is soon dialing the digits. It goes to voice mail.

"Tical, guess who this is?" It's an album skit come to life.

Cohen, the former president of Island Def Jam, is working the phones because the label is celebrating its 25th anniversary. It's also why he opened his Upper East Side townhouse to XXL on Rosh Hashanah for this momentous round table. For the first time ever, Cohen, his Def Jam co-founder, Russell Simmons, and former Def Jam president Kevin Liles will sit together and candidly reminisce (and argue) about hip-hop's most storied record label.

It's about to get bigger and deffer.

#### **XXL: Let's start at the beginning.**

**Lyor Cohen:** I don't think I have ever done an interview in the same room as Russell.

**Russell Simmons:** Really?

**This is history, guys. Russell's story has been told many times.**

**Lyor, in 1985 you left Los Angeles, after working as a hip-hop road manager, and came to New York City to work for Rush Management. Was that a risk for you?**

**Simmons:** I could talk about Lyor better than he can. He's so nice, he might not say it. He was so in love with the music and worked so hard for the artists. He made a lot of money with Run-DMC and then lost all his money on Whodini. He came from a wealthy family but stayed in a raggedy hotel room... He worked for no money for a long time. He was Andre [Harrell's] secretary. Andre shit on him.

**Cohen:** No, excuse me. I don't know what you're talking about.

**Simmons:** I do. Andre had Lyor working hard as hell.

**Cohen:** I didn't even know Andre at that time.

**Simmons:** Andre was the vice president of Rush.

**Cohen:** Wrong.

**Simmons:** And Lyor came in.

**Cohen:** Wrong, wrong. You have a really bad memory... I'm going to tell you how Lyor Cohen was invented... When I came to New York, Run-DMC was at the airport, going to London...and no one had a passport... I went straight to the airport with my passport, and since they saw me from that show before, they were kind of gracious with me. There were some terrible things on that trip that I solved, and after that they asked me to be their road manager. That allowed me to get off the floor at that welfare hotel. It also gave me some sort of credibility, because I was sort of goofy—I didn't look the part... That's how that happened.

**Are they always like this, Kevin?**

**Kevin Liles:** Always. It's usually worse.

**You guys have this good-cop, bad-cop routine down pat.**

**Cohen:** He is such a puss. He would never fire nobody.

**Simmons:** I'm a screamer.

**Cohen:** He has a reputation of never firing anyone and bludgeoning them to death and hoping that they would just understand.

**Simmons:** I have difficulty firing people. Sometimes Lyor would be the bad guy and I would be the nice guy. People would be like, "That nasty muthafucka Lyor."

**Do you have to be nasty to succeed at this job?**

**Cohen:** Not at all. You don't have to be nasty. We were never really nasty. We were determined to survive.

**Simmons:** Kevin Liles can fire people and be their best friend on their way out. "This is what the company has to have. I'm sorry, you're not performing, and you have to go home."

**That's not being mean. That's being honest.**

**Liles:** When you are building a real business, you have to get rid of some of the slackers.

**How did the company outlast other labels?**

**Cohen:** It always comes down to the talent.

**Liles:** It wasn't just the artists' talent. Don't let them sell themselves short. They were the talent themselves, as executives.

**Simmons:** It was always the talent, but we had faith in the talent. We allowed them to be [themselves].

**Cohen:** I think Russell's curiosity was fundamental to our success. He would go to [the Manhattan nightclub] Danceteria with me and meet all sorts of people. He was so interested in other people only so he could...see if it was something we could incorporate and understand. Remember, in the beginning, traditional Black media rejected all of this... The first people to embrace this were Andy Warhol, the fashion people, the *Village Voice*. One of the reasons for that was because Russell was curious. He wasn't stuck on stupid. I really mean this, Russell. Your curiosity was one of the key drivers of what made us. Because of that, we were risk takers. Of course, it wouldn't work unless you had great talent... Grandmaster Flash and those guys wore sequins, leather, and feathers, and it was more aspirational. Something must have clicked for Russell to say, "No one is representing the people who dress like this." Look, people could go to school dressed like Run-DMC. You couldn't go dressed as Grandmaster Flash or the Cold Crush Brothers.

The reason we survived was because of the sheer arrogance of the major labels. We did everything wrong. We had no clout. No experience. No money. And we got by. Every single major label rejected putting money into this area, so there was little competition. So we were able, in an organic way, to make a series of mistakes that weren't deathblows. But the dark period was when I started getting out of management, and Rick [Rubin] had just left, and I signed one bad act after another.

**Simmons:** What was my man who was "the next Will Smith"?

**Cohen:** The Don. I signed one worst act after another.

**Why did Rick Rubin leave?**

**Cohen:** It was about taste. Rick was a control freak. He felt like he should have been the sole arbitrator of what was creative and that Russell should just be the promotion guy.

**Simmons:** I wouldn't call the guy a control freak. He was a hardcore guy, rock-'n'-roll guy. I was an R&B guy. He was making rock. When "I Need Love" [by LL Cool J] came to his desk, it broke his heart.

**Was the split amicable?**

**Simmons:** It was amicable.

**Cohen:** I'll answer that. Amicable? The answer is yes. It was amicable simply for the fact that Rick picked up and left. There was a lot of tension.

**Simmons:** He went to L.A. to produce a record and never came back.

**Cohen:** He thought I was placating him to have more influence.

**Simmons:** Lyor, you were fighting over influence... It was a huge part of our problem. You were a manager, and I, as a manager, understood what you were doing. You wanted to make a movie. The Beastie Boys didn't want to make it. Lyor had a great influence on them. He was their manager... Now, when we look back, [Rick] should have made the rest of their records. He made [*Licensed to Ill*] their best record by far. The best Beastie Boys record since then was "99 Problems." Lyor didn't mean to separate them from him. [Lyor] wanted to manage them. That was his job. That, Rick didn't like that, because they were his babies.

**Cohen:** [To XXL] I'll be curious if you ask Rick, when he left in the '80s, did he think the business of rap music would deteriorate?

**Simmons:** He will tell you today that rap broke his heart. But he could have always found the Geto Boys. He was busy with [the thrash-metal band] Slayer.

**After Rick left, it seemed like Def Jam turned into more of a lifestyle brand, than anything else.**

**Liles:** As an outsider looking in, we always thought that Def Jam was

hip-hop. Def Jam wasn't a label. It introduced me to the S1Ws, fighting for your right to party. It was about a culture, not just a record. I still have my Troop suits [and] my Adidas, [because of] the artists. I became Blacker because of Public Enemy... It was always culture to me.

**Fast-forwarding a couple of years into the future. Russell, what were your thoughts going into the deal with Seagram?**

**Simmons:** I owned a lot more of the company back then. [The deal] was [for] \$50 or \$60 million. [Editor's note: The deal was for \$33 million.] That was before a lot of hits came in. My lawyer called me to curse me out because my partner, [Lyor, didn't want to sell]. I trusted his faith in the company, but I was on the fence.

**Cohen:** He was not on the fence. He was spending money.

**Simmons:** What was I spending money on?

**Cohen:** A new business. A new girlfriend's watch. Another car. Something.

**Simmons:** The point is, I had the right to sell the company.

**Cohen:** You didn't have the right to sell the company.

**Simmons:** I owned two-thirds of the company.

**Cohen:** You couldn't sell it without me. We had a lot of tense moments.

**Simmons:** Then Lyor did something great and kept the [Def Jam] name. They gave us \$130 million, whatever the numbers were. The point I'm making is that he stuck with it and delivered.

**It also helped that Irv Gotti delivered DMX.**

**Simmons:** Irv Gotti was a bad muthafucka.

**Liles:** You have to recognize the people that came in and contributed. I understood what Lyor had to do—protect the money. I knew what Russell had to do—go be Christopher Columbus. In order to keep us all together, the pyramid had to get bigger.

**Cohen:** I had to get out of Kevin's way. Russell had to get out of my way. The reason why we are all sitting on this couch together is that we respected each other enough to grow, to allow for the other person to grow and get some money.

**Simmons:** You start a new company and the time someone smarter comes along, you get out of their way.

**Lyor, when did you feel that way with Kevin?**

**Liles:** I never made you feel like that.

**Simmons:** Kevin didn't want to be president.

**Cohen:** That's not true. Kevin wanted to be president for all the right reasons.

**Simmons:** He said he didn't want the title of president, because he didn't want to offend the people working with him.

**Cohen:** That is true. It was a beautiful balance, but at a certain point, to grow, I had to get out of his way and get into other types of music... Our business exploded when Kevin became president. The decision-making was clearly organized. He was able to say no to an artist, and they didn't need to double-check with me.

**How did you manage all those egos?**

**Cohen:** We told people bad news fast. We never asked people to do stuff we weren't prepared to do. We were a blue-collar company.

**Simmons:** Lyor's love for the artists. He loved DMX. No matter how good [Interscope's] Jimmy Iovine's ears are, he's a melody man. It's a different appreciation of the artist. Lyor would go anywhere to support the artists.

**Cohen:** I can't overstate the fact that, in this business, no one likes telling the truth.

**What was the hardest truth you ever had to tell someone?**

**Liles:** When they sold five million records and the next time around

they sold 500,000. They put out the record and you know it's not the record... That was the hardest truth. One of the hardest truths to a label is when they don't have it anymore. They have to be honest and reinvent themselves... That is a tough conversation to have with people who were superstars their whole life.

**C'mon, give some specific names.**

**Liles:** [Laughs] Millions of them. I can tell you this, every single artist, every single label we've had, we had a point where we had to have a conversation with them about redesigning who they are. To limit it to one [name] would be wrong.

**How stressful is this job?**

**Liles:** We put more pressure on ourselves to perform for them. We didn't want to disappoint them. Everybody had to know, when we were looking at us, that we were doing everything in our power to make them successful.

**Cohen:** When Rick left, I took the Def Jam brand, and it burned in my hand. I was sleepless, just like he was sleepless, scared that, on Lyor Cohen's watch, the Def Jam logo would become meaningless.

**Liles:** When we did the Island [deal], Lyor said, "You've got the rock. Do not fuck up once."

**Cohen:** There was not a chance he was dropping it. There was no question, if Def Jam ever failed for any reason because of Kevin, he would have killed himself.

**Liles:** No question.

**Lyor, were you concerned about that—that the ball would be dropped—when you left in January 2004?**

**Cohen:** We still root for them.

"The reason why we are all sitting on this couch together is that we respected each other enough to grow, to allow for the other person to grow and get some money."

—LYOR COHEN

We want our grandchildren to rip open or download a Def Jam recording. Listen, some of the great labels no longer are here. There is no guarantee, so we pray every day for those that are responsible for the brand.

**Was it tough leaving?**

**Cohen:** Leaving was one of the hardest things I've ever done in my life.

**How about you, Kevin?**

**Liles:** I fought. I was fighting every day... I tried to make it work, to a point... One day I went in, and I was like, "I can't do this. I'm out." And I left. Different people want to do different things. I owned a house. Universal had the lease of the land, so at the end of the day, it's what they wanted to do. I had keys, though.

**Cohen:** He's not going to say what it is.

**Liles:** I told Lyor, "Without disciplined thought, disciplined action, without challenges and responsibilities, we will not be Def Jam." And when I saw that and couldn't control it, I can't do that... Not on my watch.

**Simmons:** They always tried to respect the brand and not dilute it. What's the point of the brand if you want to put a different sculpture on it? Hip-hop has evolved, and Def Jam has evolved, and it's still a hip-hop brand. It's not like it was a reggae brand. It's a Black, hip-hop, young, cultural-phenomenon thing. It may be all different kinds of hip-hop... [But] Taylor Swift is not on there. Def Jam did a good job of signing good records. That's why I say L.A. Reid has done an excellent job, because all he does is get hits.

**Let's get back to the artists. Who was Def Jam's most important act?**

**Cohen:** Public Enemy. And all the rest of them.

**Liles:** The most important act is Def Jam. The logo.

**Simmons:** For me, creatively, LL Cool J and Public Enemy. I can hear "Boomin' System," though, and think it's LL Cool J. It's always changing. I like them all for different reasons. From "Ain't No Nigga" to now, Jay-Z has inspired me, DMX I love. I even like Onyx, for different reasons. It depends on your mood. What's on the radio? What they playing now?



# Rick Rubin

**D**ef Jam Records' first home was a pigsty. In 1984, Rick Rubin started, and later operated, the label in his cluttered dorm room at New York University. He didn't know much about the music industry. But he had good taste. He soon met Russell Simmons, a savvy extrovert who knew all the right people in the burgeoning hip-hop scene. Together they founded Def Jam. Together they made history.

Rubin left the label in 1988 to form Def American Recordings. He later produced massively successful albums for diverse acts like the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Shakira, Metallica and, of course, Jay-Z ("99 Problems"). But Rick made his name in hip-hop. And now, on the eve of Def Jam's 25th anniversary, he's ready to chat about his role in history.

**XXL: Why did you seek out Russell as a partner in Def Jam?**

**Rick Rubin:** He was probably the central figure in the hip-hop movement at the time. Actually, it wasn't even called hip-hop. He managed Kurtis Blow and Run-DMC. They were sort of the biggest rap artists at the time... Meeting Russell made it real. If I did it

on my own, it would have just been a dorm-room record company forever, I think. Russell knew promotion, guys at the radio station, the business of it, which was completely new to me.

**What was the plan when you formed the label?**

It was really meant to be a hobby. There was no grand expectations or aspirations at all. The whole goal was to sell enough of our first single to make another single... At the time, all the rap records that came out were basically R&B records with a guy rapping on them. They, musically, weren't rap records yet... So the mission statement was to—actually, there was no mission statement. I just wanted to make music that sounded like what it felt like at the club.

**Did you guys know that the records you were making were mainstream?**

No, not at all. We were making music for our friends, period. There wasn't really any mainstream to be a part of. Mainstream wasn't rap music... We were making it just for the people who liked the same type of music we liked, which was a short list.

**Were you shocked when it blew up?**

Absolutely. It wasn't even a possibility that it could be successful.

**Even the Aerosmith/Run-DMC record "Walk This Way"?**

It didn't sound like anything else... The reason why I wanted to make that record is because people didn't think rap was music.

**That was an early rap-rock collaboration. Was Def Jam supposed to be just a rap label?**

In the initial stages it was hip-hop and defined by hip-hop. And then I saw Slayer and thought it was really interesting, and I really loved the music. It was like hip-hop, though, in that it was really aggressive. It's, like, the same kids that were listening to LL Cool J were listening to Slayer or Public Enemy and Slayer. It wasn't radically different. It was stylistically different.

**Why did you leave Def Jam? Was it creative differences or conflicting business philosophies?**

Both of those were real issues. Actually, it was probably more the business issue. We all loved different things. The fact that [Simmons] was interested in R&B didn't bother me at all. It might not have been what I liked, but it didn't alienate me. More than anything, what it really was, was that it burned very big, very fast, and we were all kids. It was this huge business. We didn't really have structure to it... We were still really young and really inexperienced... The one thing we had a difference [of opinion on]—I would say that I wanted us to have more autonomy, independence and creative freedom, and Russell was definitely interested in getting a check. It wasn't a bad thing. It was just a different style.

**There were also rumors of tension between you and Lyor Cohen. From the outside it seems like this ultimate battle between art and commerce.**

I would say that when Lyor came in, he did represent more of the commerce side, and I always only cared about the art side. There were no bad intentions on anyone's part... It really had more to do with inexperience, because we could have worked out anything, but we really didn't know enough... It was all this pressure on us... [The record company] wouldn't pay us, and then the artists would get mad at us because we couldn't pay them... We were put in situations that we were not equipped to deal with... We were made out to be villains.

**Like how the business relationship affected the friendship between you and the Beastie Boys?**

That's true. That's very true. It got so big so fast, and then you've seen it happen, when people get successful, all of a sudden, no one tells them the truth anymore. Everyone becomes a yes-man and a sycophant... When you say, "I don't think we should do this," you become the asshole, because everyone else thinks it's a brilliant idea... It's a very difficult situation... What's also really strange about it, there was no competition. Everybody on the label loved everybody else. We were all on the same team. It was like a family situation. LL supported the Beasties, the Beasties supported Run-DMC, Run-DMC supported Public Enemy... We loved this music so much, and there was so little of it that was good. It was unbelievable, because everyone was everyone else's biggest fan.

**When you left Def Jam, did you think the business of rap music was deteriorating?**

No. Matter of fact, I never thought of the business of anything at any time. I thought other rap music at the time was less exciting to me. When we started, everyone that was doing it was doing it with really good intentions. They were doing it out of love. There was this real community of people doing music, and it was exciting to be part of that community. When our stuff got successful... every other record that came out sounded like our records. So it stopped feeling like we were part of a community. It started feeling like, now people were just getting into this just to get successful. It took some of the fun out.

**You know what, though? This was one of the rare splits that worked out for the best for both parties.**

Absolutely. It's all good. As it should be. ♦

"When our stuff got successful... every other record that came out sounded like our records."

# Long Player

(Compiled by Jack Erwin)

XXL PRESENTS DEF JAM'S ENTIRE RAP DISCOGRAPHY.



Release Date: 11/18/85  
Album Title: *Radio*  
Artist: LL Cool J  
Sales: 119,000  
Re-release: 138,000



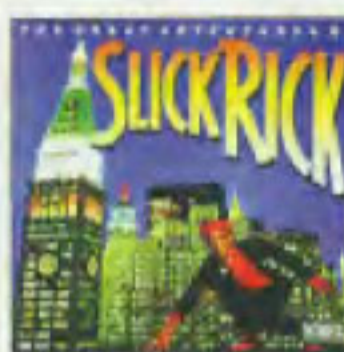
Release Date: 12/17/86  
Album Title: *Licensed to Ill*  
Artist: Beastie Boys  
Sales: 5,361,000



Release Date: 1/26/87  
Album Title: *Yo! Bum Rush the Show*  
Artist: Public Enemy  
Sales: 196,000  
Re-release: 79,000



Release Date: 7/22/87  
Album Title: *Bigger and Deffer*  
Artist: LL Cool J  
Sales: 2,000,000  
Re-release: 703,000



Release Date: 5/02/88  
Album Title: *The Great Adventures of Slick Rick*  
Artist: Slick Rick  
Sales: 301,000  
Re-release: 560,000



Release Date: 7/20/88  
Album Title: *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*  
Artist: Public Enemy  
Sales: 327,000  
Re-release: 389,300



Release Date: 6/09/89  
Album Title: *Walking with a Panther*  
Artist: LL Cool J  
Sales: 536,000  
Re-release: 130,400



Release Date: 10/23/89  
Album Title: *The Cactus Album*  
Artist: 3rd Bass  
Sales: 75,000  
Re-release: 30,400



Release Date: 3/20/90  
Album Title: *Fear of a Black Planet*  
Artist: Public Enemy  
Sales: 373,000  
Re-release: 186,500



Release Date: 8/27/90  
Album Title: *Mama Said Knock You Out*  
Artist: LL Cool J  
Sales: 1,351,000  
Re-release: 110,400



Release Date: 9/07/90  
Album Title: *The Cactus Revisited*  
Artist: 3rd Bass  
Sales: 34,000  
Re-release: 4,100



Release Date: 1990  
Album Title: *Business as Usual*  
Artist: EPMD  
Sales: 317,000  
Re-release: 53,000



Release Date: 6/18/91  
Album Title: *Derelicts of Dialect*  
Artist: 3rd Bass  
Sales: 579,000  
Re-release: 25,000



Release Date: 7/02/91  
Album Title: *The Ruler's Back*  
Artist: Slick Rick  
Sales: 252,000  
Re-release: 47,000



Release Date: 9/03/91  
Album Title: *Ain't a Damn Thing Changed*  
Artist: Nice & Smooth  
Sales: 326,000  
Re-release: 46,000



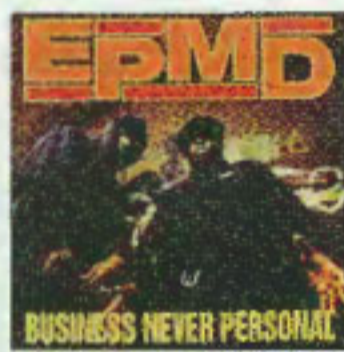
Release Date: 9/03/91  
Album Title: *Daddy's Little Girl*  
Artist: Nikki D  
Sales: 40,000  
Re-release: 900



Release Date: 10/03/91  
Album Title: *Apocalypse 91... The Enemy Strikes Black*  
Artist: Public Enemy  
Sales: 1,428,000  
Re-release: 70,300



Release Date: 11/04/91  
Album Title: *Downtown Science*  
Artist: Downtown Science  
Sales: 12,000  
Re-release: 300



Release Date: 7/28/92  
Album Title: *Business Never Personal*  
Artist: EPMD  
Sales: 418,000  
Re-release: 21,000



Release Date: 8/25/92  
Album Title: *Return of the Product*  
Artist: MC Serch  
Sales: 158,000



Release Date: 9/15/92  
Album Title: *Greatest Misses*  
Artist: Public Enemy  
Sales: 345,000  
Re-release: 26,000



Release Date: 9/22/92  
Album Title: *Whut? Thee Album*  
Artist: Redman  
Sales: 412,000  
Re-release: 242,800



Release Date: 3/30/93  
Album Title: *Badafucup*  
Artist: Onyx  
Sales: 1,093,000  
Re-release: 206,000



Release Date: 6/01/93  
Album Title: *14 Shots to the Dome*  
Artist: LL Cool J  
Sales: 581,000  
Re-release: 1,325,000



Release Date: 10/19/93  
Album Title: *No Pressure*  
Artist: Erick Sermon  
Sales: 232,000  
Re-release: 26,000



Release Date: 5/10/94  
Album Title: *'N Gatz We Truss*  
Artist: South Central Cartel  
Sales: 360,000



Release Date: 6/07/94  
Album Title: *Regulate... G Funk Era*  
Artist: Warren G  
Sales: 2,822,000



Release Date: 8/23/94  
Album Title: *Muse*  
Artist: Public Enemy  
Sales: 266,000



Release Date: 9/06/94  
Album Title: *U.S.A.*  
Artist: Flatlinerz  
Sales: 36,000



Release Date: 11/15/94  
Album Title: *Tical*  
Artist: Method Man  
Sales: 1,613,000



Release Date: 11/22/94  
Album Title: *Dare Iz a Darkside*  
Artist: Redman  
Sales: 587,000



Release Date: 11/22/94  
Album Title: *Behind Bars*  
Artist: Slick Rick  
Sales: 247,000



Release Date: 9/19/95  
Album Title: *Take a Ride*  
Artist: Jayo Felony  
Sales: 42,000



Release Date: 10/24/95  
Album Title: *All We Got Iz Us*  
Artist: Onyx  
Sales: 256,000



Release Date: 11/07/95  
Album Title: *Double or Nothing*  
Artist: Erick Sermon  
Sales: 83,000



Release Date: 11/21/95  
Album Title: *Mr. Smith*  
Artist: LL Cool J  
Sales: 1,882,000



Release Date: 11/05/96  
Album Title: *Seasoned Veteran*  
Artist: Richie Rich  
Sales: 327,000



Release Date: 11/19/96  
Album Title: *T.H.U.G.S.*  
Artist: Flesh-N-Bone  
Sales: 498,000



Release Date: 11/19/96  
Album Title: *Ill Na Na*  
Artist: Foxy Brown  
Sales: 1,454,000



Release Date: 12/10/96  
Album Title: *Muddy Waters*  
Artist: Redman  
Sales: 767,000



Release Date: 03/25/97  
Album Title: *Take a Look Over Your Shoulder*  
Artist: Warren G  
Sales: 767,000



Release Date: 06/03/97  
Album Title: *All Day Everyday*  
Artist: South Central Cartel  
Sales: 45,000



Release Date: 8/05/97  
Album Title: *How to Be a Player*  
Artist: Various  
Sales: 495,000



Release Date: 9/16/97  
Album Title: *Back in Business*  
Artist: EPMD  
Sales: 400,000



Release Date: 10/14/97  
Album Title: *Phenomenon*  
Artist: LL Cool J  
Sales: 758,000



Release Date: 11/04/97  
Album Title: *In My Lifetime Vol. 1*  
Artist: Jay-Z  
Sales: 1,413,000



Release Date: 2/24/98  
Album Title: *Whatcha Gonna Do*  
Artist: Jayo Felony  
Sales: 146,000



Release Date: 5/05/98  
Album Title: *Streets Is Watching Soundtrack*  
Artist: Jay-Z  
Sales: 353,000



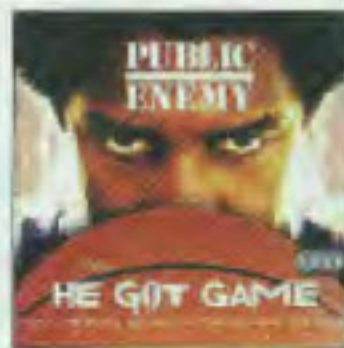
Release Date: 5/19/98  
Album Title: *It's Dark and Hell Is Hot*  
Artist: DMX  
Sales: 4,674,000



Release Date: 6/02/98  
Album Title: *Shut 'Em Down*  
Artist: Onyx  
Sales: 379,000



Release Date: 6/30/98  
Album Title: *El Niño*  
Artist: Def Squad  
Sales: 485,000



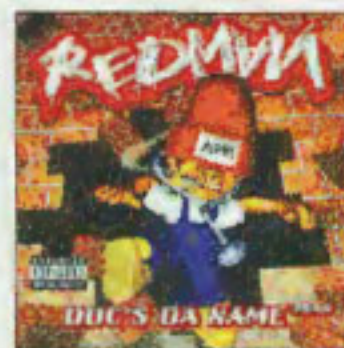
Release Date: 7/21/98  
Album Title: *He Got Game*  
Artist: Public Enemy  
Sales: 280,000



Release Date: 9/29/98  
Album Title: *Vol. 2... Hard Knock Life*  
Artist: Jay-Z  
Sales: 5,300,000



Release Date: 11/17/98  
Album Title: *Tical 2000: Judgement Day*  
Artist: Method Man  
Sales: 1,605,000



Release Date: 11/24/98  
Album Title: *Doc's Da Name 2000*  
Artist: Redman  
Sales: 1,056,000



Release Date: 12/08/98  
Album Title: *The Professional*  
Artist: DJ Clue  
Sales: 957,000



Release Date: 12/22/98  
Album Title: *Flesh of My Flesh, Blood of My Blood*  
Artist: DMX  
Sales: 3,417,000



Release Date: 1/26/99  
Album Title: *Chyna Doll*  
Artist: Foxy Brown  
Sales: 846,000



Release Date: 5/25/99  
Album Title: *The Art of Storytelling*  
Artist: Slick Rick  
Sales: 636,000



Release Date: 6/01/99  
Album Title: *Venni Vetti Vecci*  
Artist: Ja Rule  
Sales: 1,622,000



Release Date: 7/20/99  
Album Title: *Out of Business*  
Artist: EPMD  
Sales: 272,000



Release Date: 8/03/99  
Album Title: *Coming of Age*  
Artist: Memphis Bleek  
Sales: 436,000



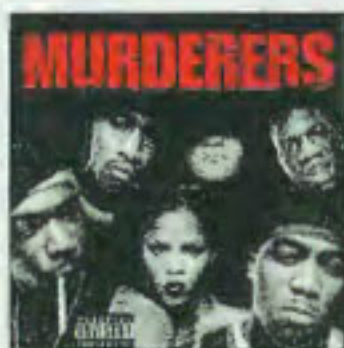
Release Date: 9/28/99  
Album Title: *Blackout!*  
Artist: Method Man & Redman  
Sales: 1,575,000



Release Date: 12/21/99  
Album Title: *...And Then There Was X*  
Artist: DMX  
Sales: 4,950,000



Release Date: 12/28/99  
Album Title: *Vol. 3... Life and Times of S. Carter*  
Artist: Jay-Z  
Sales: 3,095,000



Release Date: 2/15/00  
Album Title: *The Murderers*  
Artist: The Murderers  
Sales: 360,000



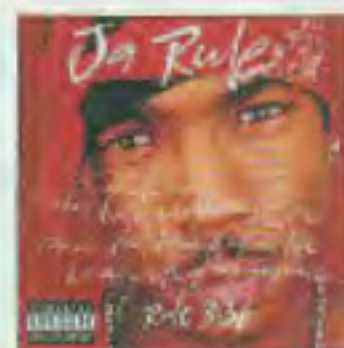
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Album Title: *The Truth*  
Artist: Beanie Sigel  
Sales: 695,000



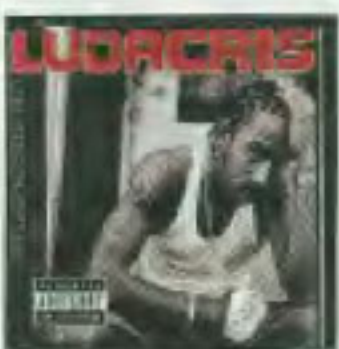
Release Date: 8/29/00  
Album Title: *Backstage Mixtape*  
Artist: DJ Clue  
Sales: 502,000



Release Date: 9/05/00  
Album Title: *G.O.A.T.*  
Artist: LL Cool J  
Sales: 822,000



Release Date: 10/10/00  
Album Title: *Rule 3:36*  
Artist: Ja Rule  
Sales: 3,365,000



Release Date: 10/17/00  
Album Title: *Back for the First Time*  
Artist: Ludacris  
Sales: 3,103,000



Release Date: 10/31/00  
Album Title: *The Dynasty: Roc La Familia*  
Artist: Jay-Z  
Sales: 2,522,000



Release Date: 12/05/00  
Album Title: *The Understanding*  
Artist: Memphis Bleek  
Sales: 833,000



Release Date: 12/19/00  
Album Title: *The Professional, Pt. 2*  
Artist: DJ Clue  
Sales: 884,000



Release Date: 5/22/01  
Album Title: *Malpractice*  
Artist: Redman  
Sales: 686,000



Release Date: 6/05/01  
Album Title: *Broken Silence*  
Artist: Foxy Brown  
Sales: 555,000



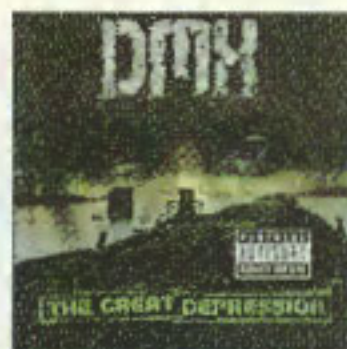
Release Date: 6/26/01  
Album Title: *The Reason*  
Artist: Beanie Sigel  
Sales: 585,000



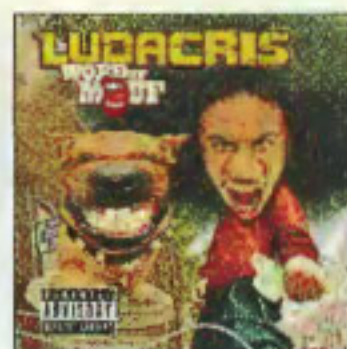
Release Date: 9/11/01  
Album Title: *The Black Album*  
Artist: Jay-Z  
Sales: 2,616,000



Release Date: 10/02/01  
Album Title: *Pain Is Love*  
Artist: Ja Rule  
Sales: 3,662,000



Release Date: 10/23/01  
Album Title: *The Great Depression*  
Artist: DMX  
Sales: 1,862,000



Release Date: 11/27/01  
Album Title: *Word of Mouf*  
Artist: Ludacris  
Sales: 3,617,000



Release Date: 12/18/01  
Album Title: *Unplugged*  
Artist: Jay-Z  
Sales: 770,000



Release Date: 3/26/02  
Album Title: *The Best of Both Worlds*  
Artist: Jay-Z & R. Kelly  
Sales: 938,000



Release Date: 5/14/02  
Album Title: *Come Home With Me*  
Artist: Cam'ron  
Sales: 1,177,000



Release Date: 8/06/02  
Album Title: *The Fix*  
Artist: Scarface  
Sales: 636,000



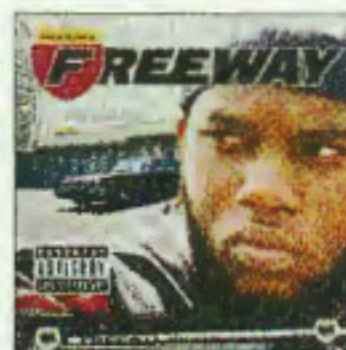
Release Date: 9/10/02  
Album Title: *Golden Grain*  
Artist: Disturbing Tha Peace  
Sales: 497,000



Release Date: 10/08/02  
Album Title: *10*  
Artist: LL Cool J  
Sales: 981,000



Release Date: 11/12/02  
Album Title: *The Black Album 2: The Gift and the Curse*  
Artist: Jay-Z  
Sales: 2,072,000



Release Date: 2/25/03  
Album Title: *Philadelphia Freeway*  
Artist: Freeway  
Sales: 518,000



Release Date: 3/25/03  
Album Title: *Diplomatic Immunity*  
Artist: The Diplomats  
Sales: 599,000



Release Date: 4/08/03  
Album Title: *The Black Album 2.1*  
Artist: Jay-Z  
Sales: 278,000



Release Date: 6/10/03  
Album Title: *Joe Budden*  
Artist: Joe Budden  
Sales: 429,000



Release Date: 8/12/03  
Album Title: *The Chain Gang, Vol. 2*  
Artist: State Property  
Sales: 296,000



Release Date: 8/12/03  
Album Title: *From Me to U*  
Artist: Juelz Santana  
Sales: 360,500



Release Date: 8/16/03  
Album Title: *Grand Champ*  
Artist: DMX  
Sales: 1,204,000



Release Date: 10/07/03  
Album Title: *Chicken-N-Beer*  
Artist: Ludacris  
Sales: 2,648,000



Release Date: 11/04/03  
Album Title: *Blood in My Eye*  
Artist: Ja Rule  
Sales: 468,000



Release Date: 11/14/03  
Album Title: *The Black Album*  
Artist: Jay-Z  
Sales: 3,353,000



Release Date: 12/16/03  
Album Title: *M.A.D.E.*  
Artist: Memphis Bleek  
Sales: 419,000



Release Date: 2/10/04  
Album Title: *The College Dropout*  
Artist: Kanye West  
Sales: 3,139,000



Release Date: 2/24/04  
Album Title: *Tough Luv*  
Artist: Young Gunz  
Sales: 421,000



Release Date: 4/20/04  
Album Title: *The Pretty Toney Album*  
Artist: Ghostface  
Sales: 228,000



Release Date: 5/18/04  
Album Title: *Tical 0: The Prequel*  
Artist: Method Man  
Sales: 533,000



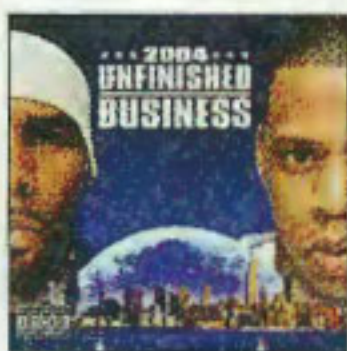
Release Date: 8/10/04  
Album Title: *Godfather Buried Alive*  
Artist: Shyne  
Sales: 460,000



Release Date: 8/31/04  
Album Title: *The Definition*  
Artist: LL Cool J  
Sales: 758,000



Release Date: 9/28/04  
Album Title: *Worth Tha Weight*  
Artist: Shawnna  
Sales: 138,000



Release Date: 10/26/04  
Album Title: *Unfinished Business*  
Artist: R. Kelly & Jay-Z  
Sales: 525,000



Release Date: 11/09/04  
Album Title: *R.U.L.E.*  
Artist: Ja Rule  
Sales: 660,000



Release Date: 11/30/04  
Album Title: *Collision Course*  
Artist: Jay-Z & Linkin Park  
Sales: 1,936,000



Release Date: 12/07/04  
Album Title: *The Red Light District*  
Artist: Ludacris  
Sales: 2,084,000



Release Date: 12/07/04  
Album Title: *Purple Haze*  
Artist: Cam'ron  
Sales: 564,000



Release Date: 02/22/05  
Album Title: *The B. Coming*  
Artist: Beanie Sigel  
Sales: 431,700



Release Date: 5/17/05  
Album Title: *534*  
Artist: Memphis Bleek  
Sales: 164,000



Release Date: 5/24/05  
Album Title: *Brothers From Another*  
Artist: Young Gunz  
Sales: 138,000



Release Date: 7/26/05  
Album Title: *Let's Get It: Thug Motivation 101*  
Artist: Young Jeezy  
Sales: 1,933,000



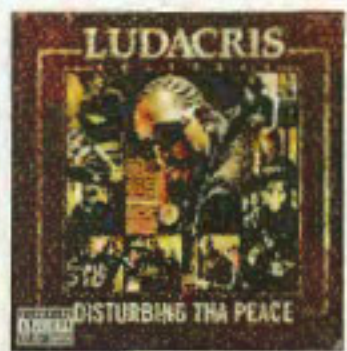
Release Date: 8/30/05  
Album Title: *Late Registration*  
Artist: Kanye West  
Sales: 2,949,000



Release Date: 10/18/05  
Album Title: *Distortion*  
Artist: Rev Run  
Sales: 37,000



Release Date: 11/22/05  
Album Title: *What the Game's Been Missing*  
Artist: Juelz Santana  
Sales: 698,000



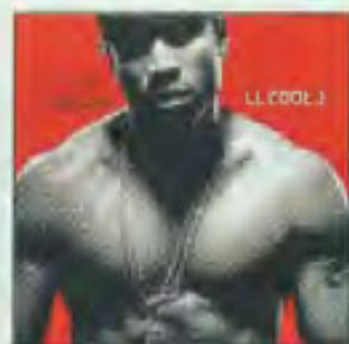
Release Date: 12/13/05  
Album Title: *Ludacris Presents: Disturbing Tha Peace*  
Artist: Disturbing Tha Peace  
Sales: 630,000



Release Date: 12/13/05  
Album Title: *Exodus*  
Artist: Ja Rule  
Sales: 99,000



Release Date: 3/28/06  
Album Title: *Fishscale*  
Artist: Ghostface Killah  
Sales: 332,000



Release Date: 4/11/06  
Album Title: *Todd Smith*  
Artist: LL Cool J  
Sales: 336,000



Release Date: 5/23/06  
Album Title: *The Professional, Pt. 3*  
Artist: DJ Clue  
Sales: 131,000



Release Date: 6/06/06  
Album Title: *Block Music*  
Artist: Shawnna  
Sales: 165,000



Release Date: 7/18/06  
Album Title: *N.O.R.E. y la Familia... Ya Tu Sabe*  
Artist: N.O.R.E.  
Sales: 49,000



Release Date: 8/08/06  
Album Title: *Port of Miami*  
Artist: Rick Ross  
Sales: 857,000



Release Date: 8/29/06  
Album Title: *Game Theory*  
Artist: The Roots  
Sales: 216,000



Release Date: 8/29/06  
Album Title: *4:21... The Day After*  
Artist: Method Man  
Sales: 229,000



Release Date: 9/26/06  
Album Title: *Release Therapy*  
Artist: Ludacris  
Sales: 1,251,000



Release Date: 11/21/06  
Album Title: *Kingdom Come*  
Artist: Jay-Z  
Sales: 1,512,000



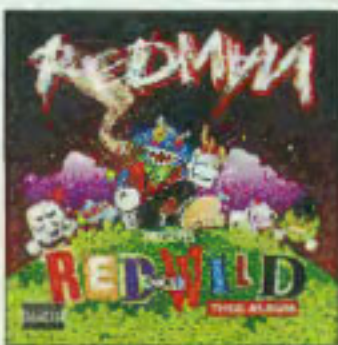
Release Date: 12/12/06  
Album Title: *More Fish*  
Artist: Ghostface Killah  
Sales: 107,000



Release Date: 12/12/06  
Album Title: *The Inspiration*  
Artist: Young Jeezy  
Sales: 1,229,000



Release Date: 12/19/06  
Album Title: *Hip Hop Is Dead*  
Artist: Nas  
Sales: 770,000



Release Date: 3/27/07  
Album Title: *Red Gone Wild*  
Artist: Redman  
Sales: 137,000



Release Date: 5/22/07  
Album Title: *Young Jeezy Presents USDA: Cold Summer*  
Artist: USDA  
Sales: 346,000



Release Date: 6/12/07  
Album Title: *From Nothin' to Somethin'*  
Artist: Fabolous  
Sales: 566,000



Release Date: 9/11/07  
Album Title: *Graduation*  
Artist: Kanye West  
Sales: 2,261,000



Release Date: 10/30/07  
Album Title: *Supply & Demand*  
Artist: Playaz Circle  
Sales: 96,000



Release Date: 11/06/07  
Album Title: *American Gangster*  
Artist: Jay-Z  
Sales: 1,134,000



Release Date: 11/20/07  
Album Title: *Free at Last*  
Artist: Freeway  
Sales: 113,000



Release Date: 12/04/07  
Album Title: *The Big Doe Rehab*  
Artist: Ghostface Killah  
Sales: 114,000



Release Date: 12/11/07  
Album Title: *The Solution*  
Artist: Beanie Sigel  
Sales: 346,000



Release Date: 12/18/07  
Album Title: *Hate It or Love It*  
Artist: Chingy  
Sales: 85,000



Release Date: 2/19/08  
Album Title: *Trilla*  
Artist: Rick Ross  
Sales: 740,000



Release Date: 4/29/08  
Album Title: *Rising Down*  
Artist: The Roots  
Sales: 170,000



Release Date: 6/17/08  
Album Title: *My Life: The True Testimony*  
Artist: Blood Raw  
Sales: 49,000



Release Date: 7/15/08  
Album Title: *Untitled*  
Artist: Nas  
Sales: 455,000



Release Date: 9/02/08  
Album Title: *The Recession*  
Artist: Young Jeezy  
Sales: 886,000



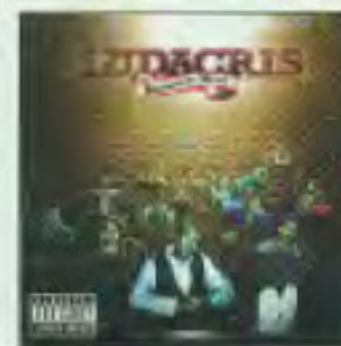
Release Date: 9/09/08  
Album Title: *Exit 13*  
Artist: LL Cool J  
Sales: 108,000



Release Date: 11/18/08  
Album Title: *Gutta*  
Artist: Ace Hood  
Sales: 89,000



Release Date: 11/24/08  
Album Title: *808s & Heartbreak*  
Artist: Kanye West  
Sales: 1,597,000



Release Date: 11/24/08  
Album Title: *Theater of the Mind*  
Artist: Ludacris  
Sales: 650,000



Release Date: 4/07/09  
Album Title: *The Last Kiss*  
Artist: Jadakiss  
Sales: 328,000



Release Date: 4/21/09  
Album Title: *Deeper Than Rap*  
Artist: Rick Ross  
Sales: 382,000



Release Date: 5/19/09  
Album Title: *Blackout! 2*  
Artist: Method Man & Redman  
Sales: 147,000



Release Date: 6/02/09  
Album Title: *Certified*  
Artist: Unladylike  
Sales: 2,000



Release Date: 6/23/09  
Album Title: *Jamboree*  
Artist: Fast Life Yungstaz  
Sales: 13,000



Release Date: 6/23/09  
Album Title: *Tha Connect*  
Artist: Willy Northpole  
Sales: 7,000



Release Date: 6/30/09  
Album Title: *Ruthless*  
Artist: Ace Hood  
Sales: 45,000



Release Date: 7/28/09  
Album Title: *Loso's Way*  
Artist: Fabolous  
Sales: 221,000



Release Date: 8/25/09  
Album Title: *21 & Up*  
Artist: Lil Ru  
Sales: 3,000