

The third-annual class of XXL. Freshmen have mastered the beginning of today's new game. Now they're just a few semesters away from graduation. →

JUST



BEGUN

Moderated by Matt Barone, Rondell Conway, Brooklyn Gipson, Jesse Gissen, Rob Markman, Anslem Samuel and Vanessa Satten Images Travis Shinn Styling Big Smiley & Coffey



Buzzes are important; yet, they're subjective in their measure. Co-signs are cool, too, but with hip-hop's superstars selling fewer records than ever before, a protégé's success isn't a sure thing anymore. So the game is back to square one, where artists are judged strictly on their talent and output. Fittingly so, the *XXL* 10 Freshmen for '10, who converge inside Manhattan's Industria Superstudio on a balmy mid-January day, have all grinded their way to become the next generation of MCs, with fresh skills and creative new hustles.

It's not hard to keep up with the bunch. They mingle close among one another once they arrive. OJ Da Juiceman and Jay Rock trade pleasantries and compliment each other on their music. Wiz Khalifa smokes joints and focuses in on Big Sean, Donnis, Pill and Nipsey Hu\$\$le, talking rap politics. The most reserved characters of the bunch—Freddie Gibbs and Fashawn—listen to the groups chat, then eventually dip away, but don't walk too far off. Although J. Cole is the last to straggle in, close to the end of the day, he gets a shape-up, a change of clothes, and fits right in with the rest of the Freshmen, who welcome him with daps and pounds.

There's a healthy and visible amount of adoration shared between all, and also a collective air of confidence as individual solo artists. Musically, they're all entering their zones. Pill is poetically street, Wiz is fun and the ultimate showman, and OJ has clinched the charisma factor. Fashawn is a rhyme animal, Freddie is unapologetic with his words, Jay Rock is straight gangsta, and Nipsey screams vintage West Coast. Big Sean's flow is slick, Donnis makes big-sounding records, and J. Cole is a real rap head's MC. Together they create a melting pot of heat, heart and talent, ready to claim hip-hop's future.

The flashing camera lights visually document the annual gathering, and relevant topics are discussed as a group: Big-name co-signs, the lack of a New York artist in this year's Freshman class, putting new cities on rap's map, and the Internet's effect on the

game are all touched on.

It ain't easy to predict the future. If it were, a whole bunch of people would be a whole lot richer. But *XXL* took a stab at it again this year. Meet the 10 Freshmen for '10.

—ROB MARKMAN

XXL: What do you all think about coming together today and being part of *XXL*'s third freshman class?

Jay Rock: I feel real blessed and appreciative for even being here right now, around such remarkable artists. The music is what brought us here anyway, so it feels real good.

Nipsey Hu\$\$le: Just adding to what Jay Rock

said, like, especially being an artist from the West...we not the prominent coast right now as far as what's in the mainstream. So to be recognized from our mixtape grind and the underground legwork we put in, it means a lot... It's, like, validation for what we doing and going in the right direction.

Do any of you feel like you should have been on the cover last year?

Nipsey Hu\$\$le: Hell yeah! [Group laughs, then most agree]

Big Sean: I think everybody here feels like they could've been on it last year. I guess it was a type of thing where we saw a lot of new artists last year who were doing the

J. COLE



MOST WELL-ROUNDED

Gov't Name: Jermaine Cole

Age: 25

Reppin': Fayetteville, North Carolina

Notable Releases: Single: "Lights Please," 2009; Guest verse on Jay-Z's "A Star Is Born," 2009; Mixtape: *The Warm Up*, 2009

Currently Working On: As-yet-untitled debut album, due late spring 2010

Label: Roc Nation/Columbia

Aligned With: Jay-Z

Side Hustle: Producing

The Next 10 Years in Hip-Hop Will Be... "another golden era."



same thing we were doing—as far as being on the same blogs, doing shows—and they deserved it, too. But we felt like we deserved it. It could have been the Freshman 20, to us. So it's dope that XXL came and got everybody from different parts. You see South, you see East Coast, Midwest, West Coast, everything. That's a dream come true.

When we were putting this cover together, there weren't a lot of East Coast artists that came up in our discussions. As you see here today, we have a lot of Atlanta artists, some West Coast guys, some new locations represented. What do you think of the East playing such a dominant role in hip-hop history but there's really no one here from the area? J. Cole's from North Carolina, which could be East or South, depending on who you talk to, but...

J. Cole: Yeah, if you asked someone in North Carolina, they will say [it's] the South, but you can't deny the fact that it's on the East Coast. We just had this conversation on the way [here], too. We heard Juelz [Santana] on the radio; he was killing it. We couldn't think of too many people to rival Fabolous—it was like, Damn, New York started this. A lot of our favorite rappers are New York artists. It's no hating involved. I remember when the West was the best shit out, period. All



WIZ KHALIFA



MOST CHARISMATIC

Gov't Name: Cameron Thomaz

Age: 22

Reppin': Pittsburgh

Notable Releases: Single: "Say Yeah," 2008; Mixtape: *Flight School*, 2009; Independent album: *Deal or No Deal*, 2009

Currently Working On: Mixtape: *Kush and Orange Juice*

Label: Rostrum Records (Independent)

Aligned With: No one

Side Hustle: Owner of Taylor Gang clothing brand

The Next 10 Years in Hip-Hop Will Be...

"Wiz Khalifa."

I wanted to do was play Dr. Dre and Tupac. The same thing with New York. It was Nas; it was Jay-Z. And to look on the map right now and to see that, on this cover, it's really nobody. I feel like some kids in New York should be inspired and should be motivated, like, Damn, it's about time to step the game up. Not saying they not doing it, [but] somebody gotta create it and step to the forefront, from New York, from Philly, from somewhere.

Wiz Khalifa: I think it's definitely about just the music that you bring to the table, too. You know, me being an artist from Pittsburgh, nobody ever heard of anybody rapping from Pittsburgh. A lot of people don't even know where it's at, and they get me confused and be like, "Oh yeah, you're from Philly, right?" Just because they don't know Pittsburgh. Same thing for you [speaking to J. Cole],

like, being from North Carolina. There's no real rapper that they can put the face to it and be like, This is that dude. So I think it's a good thing. It's really motivating dudes from any and everywhere to go harder and see the outcome.

Pill: I think it's a change of the times. It's a role reversal, know what I'm saying? You got one group of people, one coast that started it in the beginning—it's integration. Everybody loves music, so everybody is gonna try to take it and own it and make it their own form of music. I think throughout the years, people got a hang of [hip-hop] a little bit more, and it showed that it was always here but it was just not televised. Like, with the South, people thought it was only booty-shaking music. So for lyricism to be coming out of the South, it changed everybody's mind for us to have



Wiz Khalifa: Artists such as myself, such as Pill, such as Gibbs over there, Fashawn, haven't really had too many co-signs. It's not to knock anybody who had a co-sign, but we just realistically didn't have those co-signs. So instead of lookin' forward to that or lookin' toward that, it's, like, you just gotta go hard on your own, and people gonna respect you for that.

Nipsey Hu\$\$le: Regardless if you have a big artist co-signing you or not, you have to define yourself. Even if Jordan ain't co-sign Kobe, but they still going to compare you to the greatest when you come in and start doing your thing. So if you got an artist standing behind you, saying, "I'm fuckin' with this dude," that's cool, but you still have to define yourself and create your own brand. Like, Snoop ain't never co-signed me, but I know everybody is like,

"That's the next Snoop." Nah. I'm Nipsey, and I got to work to define myself and make them distinguishing marks.

Donnis: At the end of the day...co-sign or no co-sign, it's hard to get in this game, period, point blank, right now, with everything that is going on. So whether you, Sean, J, Pill, Wiz, me, Nip, whoever, all of us had our own grind to get into this light in the first place. And this shit right here ain't even promised. Tomorrow you get slapped in the face by a chick, that shit's on YouTube, and you done, homie. [Group laughs] I'm not gonna say no names, but it's real out here, and you gotta watch what's going on.

Pill: Feels like he's aiming at somebody with that one. [Group laughs]

J. Cole, obviously, everybody knows you're signed to Jay-Z's Roc Nation.

J. Cole: Man, it's crazy to think, when I was fuckin' 13, 14 years old, me and my nigga was in my crib writing to instrumentals. I remember so clearly writing to the "Roc the Mic" instrumental. [Starts humming the beat] I just wanted to get signed. Even at 14, 15, I was like, I just wanna get a deal. I don't give a fuck if it's No Limit, Def Jam, I just want to get signed. Never in my life was I like, I'm going to get signed to Jay one day. I'm sure you wasn't like, I'm going to get signed with Kanye. [Looks at Big Sean]

Big Sean: Crazy thing is, I was, though. [Group laughs] Sorry to fuck your point up. I used to ride to school listening to everybody—Jay, Kanye, Lil Wayne, all them. But I always knew, Man, I'd love to fuck with... I was thinking Jay, too. I was like, I'm gonna either be signed to Jay, Kanye, Def Jam. And I ended up signing to Kanye and Def Jam.

Wiz Khalifa: For me, I wanted to fuck with Bone Thugs-N-Harmony. [Group laughs] Straight up!

J. Cole: The point I'm trying to make is, the whole time I was working toward that, it was never a goal. It was so impossible to me that it wasn't even a goal. I just wanted to get a deal. Even when things started to fall into place and I got the meeting with Jay. If you



BIG SEAN



MOST STYLISH

Gov't Name: Sean Anderson

Age: 22

Reppin': Detroit

Notable Releases: Single: "Get'cha Some," 2007; Mixtapes: *Finally Famous*, 2007, and *UKNOWBIGSEAN*, 2009

Currently Working On: Mixtape: *Finally Famous*, Vol. 3: *B.I.G.*, due February 2010; Appearances on Kanye West's upcoming album; As-yet-untitled debut album

Label: G.O.O.D. Music/Island Def Jam

Aligned With: Kanye West

Side Hustle: Modeling

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a stronghold on it right now. It's a real big statement for how long we been in it. It's new, emerging artists like myself, Donnis, J. Cole, OJ and everybody from the South. Then you got the West Coast reemerging. They had it locked real strong. Then for them to die off for a minute, and then for them to come back, it's a breath of fresh air. It's not knocking nobody from up top, from New York, or nothing, but it's like, Okay, let us have a swing at it. Let's get it cracking.

Freddie, you're from Gary, Indiana, which is known as Michael Jackson's hometown, and not too much hip-hop-wise. Do you feel that pressure of bringing a new city into the rap game?

Freddie Gibbs: Nah, it ain't no pressure. It is what it is. I'm doing that same shit that any other street nigga or street rapper is doing. I'm just telling my perspective of it. It's fresh because nobody else has ever told it the way I could tell it. Niggas see Gary, Indiana, or they hear about it, and they think about Michael Jackson and shit, but me and Michael Jackson ain't from the same Gary, Indiana. I'm after the crack era. I'm just shedding light on the shit, how I seen it, how I done, and just giving my insight on the streets.

One thing that differs between you guys is some of you have the big-name co-sign and some of you don't. How does that help or hinder you, to be affiliated with that big artist or not have a big star behind you?

Pill: I don't have that. I just hit the ground running, 150 on the dash. I don't wanna be [in] nobody shadow. I want to make a statement for myself. I want people to know me, my music, [and] hear my testimony.

Donnis: We want to be able to give that co-sign.

Pill: Exactly, so I can be the person doing it.

Donnis: Just like Andre 3000 hit Pill up, or

T.I. hit me up. That's cool, and we respect them and the fact they watching us and their—

Pill: Approval.

Donnis: Approval, yeah, that's cool. We want to give a co-sign one day, to give somebody else a chance.

Big Sean: I feel like, co-signs, you could see the advantage and the disadvantage—it's however you use it. I'm co-signed by Kanye West. Obviously, he's one of the greatest people in music right now. I take all that I could learn from him. I definitely feel like what y'all saying, like y'all don't want to be shadowing nobody, but if you shine on your own and show your individuality—like, [Kanye] started under Jay's shadow; he had his co-sign, Roc-A-Fella. Sometimes you got a co-sign; sometimes you don't. It's just how you use it.

JAY ROCK



MOST HOOD

Gov't Name: Johnny McKinzie

Age: 25

Reppin': Watts, California

Notable Releases: Single: "All My Life in the Ghetto" 2008; Guest verse on Omarion's "Hoodie," 2010

Currently Working On: Debut album: *Follow Me Home*, due summer 2010

Label: Top Dawg Entertainment/Warner Bros.

Aligned With: No one

Side Hustle: Mentoring youth at the William Nickerson Recreation Center in Watts, California

The Next 10 Years in Hip-Hop Will Be... "like how it used to be...alive."



NIPSEY HU\$\$LE



MOST DETERMINED

Gov't Name: Ermias Asghedom

Age: 24

Reppin': Los Angeles

Notable Releases: Single: "Hussle in the House," 2008; Guest verse on Snoop Dogg's "Upside Down," 2009; Mixtapes: *Bullets Ain't Got No Name, Vol. 2*, 2008, and *Bullets Ain't Got No Name, Vol. 3*, 2009

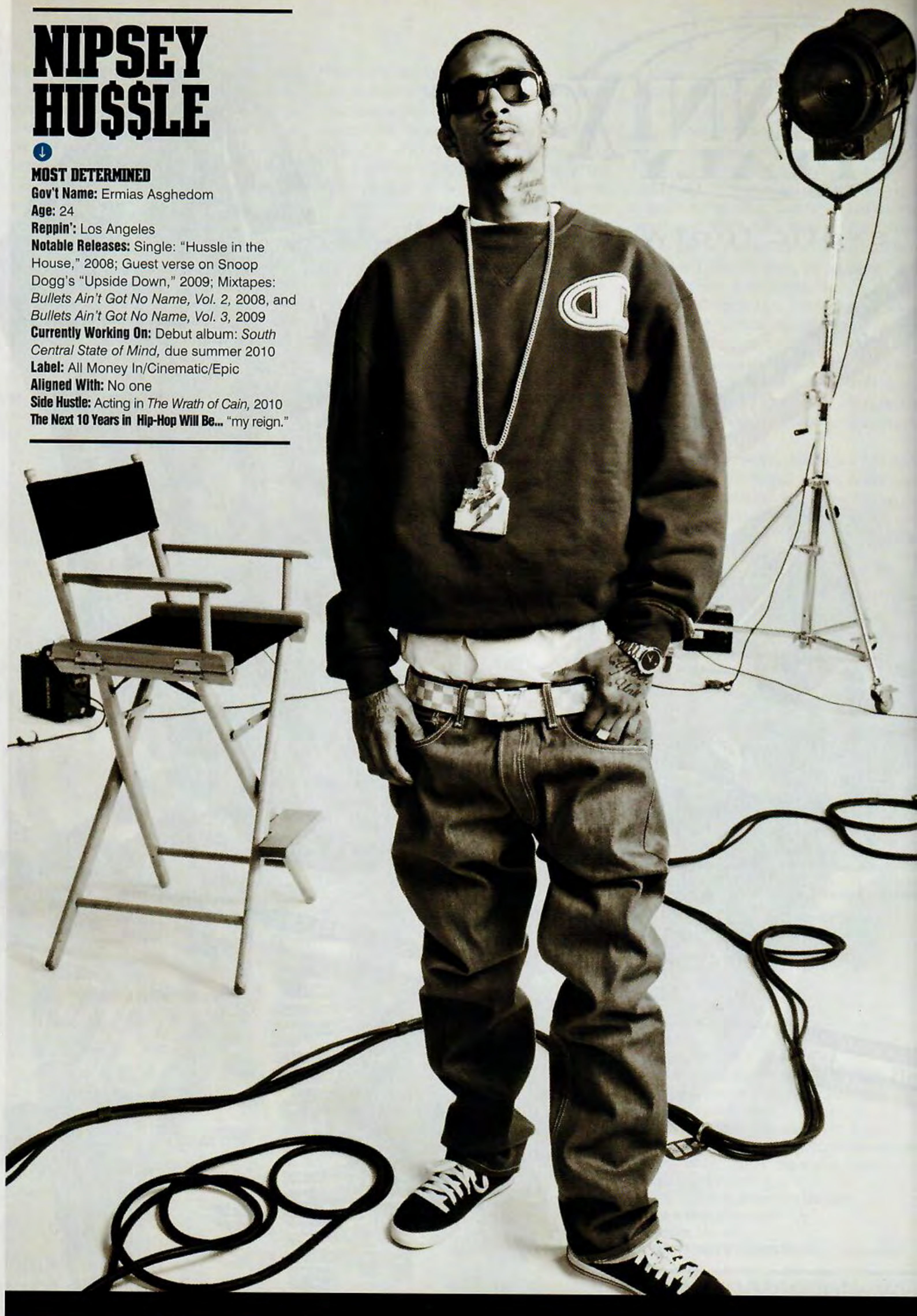
Currently Working On: Debut album: *South Central State of Mind*, due summer 2010

Label: All Money In/Cinematic/Epic

Aligned With: No one

Side Hustle: Acting in *The Wrath of Cain*, 2010

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will believe it or not, after I left with Jay, my main concern was, Damn, it's Jay-Z, but do I really want to sign to him? 'Cause that's a big fuckin' shadow to be under. Especially when, in my mind, I'm trying to be the greatest.

OJ, is it different for you, because you and Gucci Mane grew up together but, as an artist, you still came up under him?

OJ Da Juiceman: We were picking up cans back in the days, tryna make a dollar to go to the store to buy some pickled pig feet. We always kept it two, 100, OJ and Guch... We went and got that deal with Asylum Records, and Gucci took off first... Even before that, Gucci

was putting out albums, when he was with Big Cat Records. I was still in the streets. I'm 31 mixtapes in the game. I been rapping since '99. I look at it as, Guch was a big help—that's big bro. We gonna always rock like cutoff stockings, no matter what, and that little boost he gave me, like, "Hey, Ju, you need to get out that trap to come and do this rap shit, 'cause you really got that gift of gab." I looked at it as, "Man, you don't know what the hell you talkin' about." But, really, to this day, the homie playa told me some real shit. Really, a nigga could've been dead or in jail if I kept fuckin' around. I'm just happy and blessed to be there and for

Guch to open up the door with it.

Wiz Khalifa: I'm from Pittsburgh, dog, and I've seen [it]... From when [OJ] first started rapping, coming out on all Gucci's stuff when people first started hearing his stuff and people wouldn't even think that he was serious or that he was going to be a rapper. That was one of the first places [OJ] really blew up and took off at. He was gettin' money for shows, verses, and niggas was going crazy.

Jay Rock: Ain't nobody got no choice but to respect a nigga's hustle.

Wiz Khalifa: You could come to Pittsburgh and sell out any club on the strip, the South Side, anywhere. After-parties, doing shows, verses—people love you.

Why do you think people have that response to you?

OJ Da Juiceman: Because of the fact that people probably seen the grind I was going through, especially them DVDs that I was on. I was straight-up gold-mouth reppin' this shit. Before all the "ayes" and "okays," gettin' playful with the music. I really foreseen that grind, and then especially after being shot. I had got



PILL



MOST INTENSE

Gov't Name: Tyrone Rivers

Age: 24

Reppin': Atlanta

Notable Releases: Single: "Trap Goin' Ham," 2009; Mixtapes: *4180: The Prescription*, 2009, and *4075: The Refill*, 2009

Currently Working On: As-yet-untitled EP, due May 2010

Label: Asylum/Warner Bros.

Aligned With: No one

Side Hustle: None

The Next 10 Years in Hip-Hop Will Be... "more influential to the kids, in a good way, instead of so fuck[ed] up."



shot eight times on [a] Sunday, out the hospital on Wednesday, doing a show that Friday. [I was] on crutches. Them folks were like, "What the fuck, shawty? You trippin', cuz." I was like, "Boy, I'm finna get these bags, boy. I ain't finna turn these bags down for no kinda reasons, boy." As long as I'm breathin', a muthafucka gonna get that sack.

How, as new artists, do you deal with the Internet and use it for you? It seems like everything is so disposable these days.

Pill: Me, personally, I only put out one mixtape, at the top of the year—that's all. My first solo project ever. I hadn't did shit else besides being a feature artist. I believe in quality over quantity any day, feel me? So I'm not going to flood you with a bunch of bullshit. Bullshit's like snot on the wall: It stick for a little minute, then it get hard and crumble up and blow away. So you put that real shit on the wall, it's going to stay. 'Cause when you give people something to hold and embrace, to love, and something to ride to every day, something they could appreciate, they could hear it in your voice. Like, This nigga done took his time and spent a lot of time doing this shit.

Wiz Khalifa: I just think you have to use the Internet and all that stuff to your advantage. Find out what works for you, and then just go with that, because a lot of artists blame the Internet for what's going on and why they aren't selling and stuff like that, but the Internet is the sole reason why a lot of us are sitting here right now. Straight up, niggas made mixtapes and talk to our fans on Twitter, then put that shit out on MySpace. [We] made videos that was strictly on the Internet, that wouldn't be on TV. That got us



OJ DA JUICEMAN



MOST FLASHY

Gov't Name: Otis Williams Jr.

Age: 28

Reppin': Atlanta

Notable Releases: Single: "Make the Trap Say Aye," 2009; Mixtapes: *Culinary Art School*, 2008, and *Alaska in Atlanta*, 2009; Independent album: *The Other Side of the Trap*, 2009

Currently Working On: Debut album: *The Otis Williams Jr. Story*, due summer 2010

Label: Asylum/Warner Bros.

Aligned With: Gucci Mane

Side Hustle: None

The Next 10 Years in Hip-Hop Will Be...

"more trap music."

shows, got us paid, got niggas all Louis'd up, smoking good and everything.

Fashawn, you're also an artist who doesn't really put out a lot of material for the sake of just putting it out. Why?

Fashawn: I think it's because I *had* put out a lot of stuff. Actually, in the past—I been around since, like, '05, '04, just working with various producers...getting my name buzzing around Cali and certain spots, and really going to these places and performing and winnin' over the crowd and really gettin' my foundation strong. I got a little independent deal February '09, and that's the first time I ever put my name on ink. I flew to New York for the first time ever. I was on Green Lantern before I knew it, and Hot 97 with Tony Touch, my first time ever in New York. It's always been a dream just to pursue this shit.

There's been a lot of talk about the breakdown of the record industry and records just not selling anymore. How do you all survive in these times? How can you make money and succeed if you can't look forward to the sales of a big solo album?

There aren't nearly as many endorsement deals and financial opportunities these days. Is it all shows and performing?

Freddie Gibbs: That's the only place you can make money at. You got to do what you got to do, point blank. You tryin' to squeeze blood out of a rock sometime. You got to do what you got to do.

Nipsey Hu\$\$le: It's trial and error.

Big Sean: Shows is, like, the jackpot, baby. Without shows we will be living off of advances and stuff. You got to get shows, especially how the record sales [are]. The Internet has made it that we could do shows, sell

FREDDIE GIBBS



MOST SLEPT-ON

Gov't Name: Fred Tipton

Age: 27

Reppin': Gary, Indiana

Notable Releases: Mixtapes: *The Miseducation of Freddie Gibbs*, 2009, and *Midwestgangstaboxframecadillacmuzik*, 2009
Currently Working On: Mixtape: *Str8 Killa, No Filla*, due April 2010; Independent EP: *The Devil's Palace*, with the Alchemist, due summer 2010

Label: Unsigned

Aligned With: DJ Skee

Side Hustle: None

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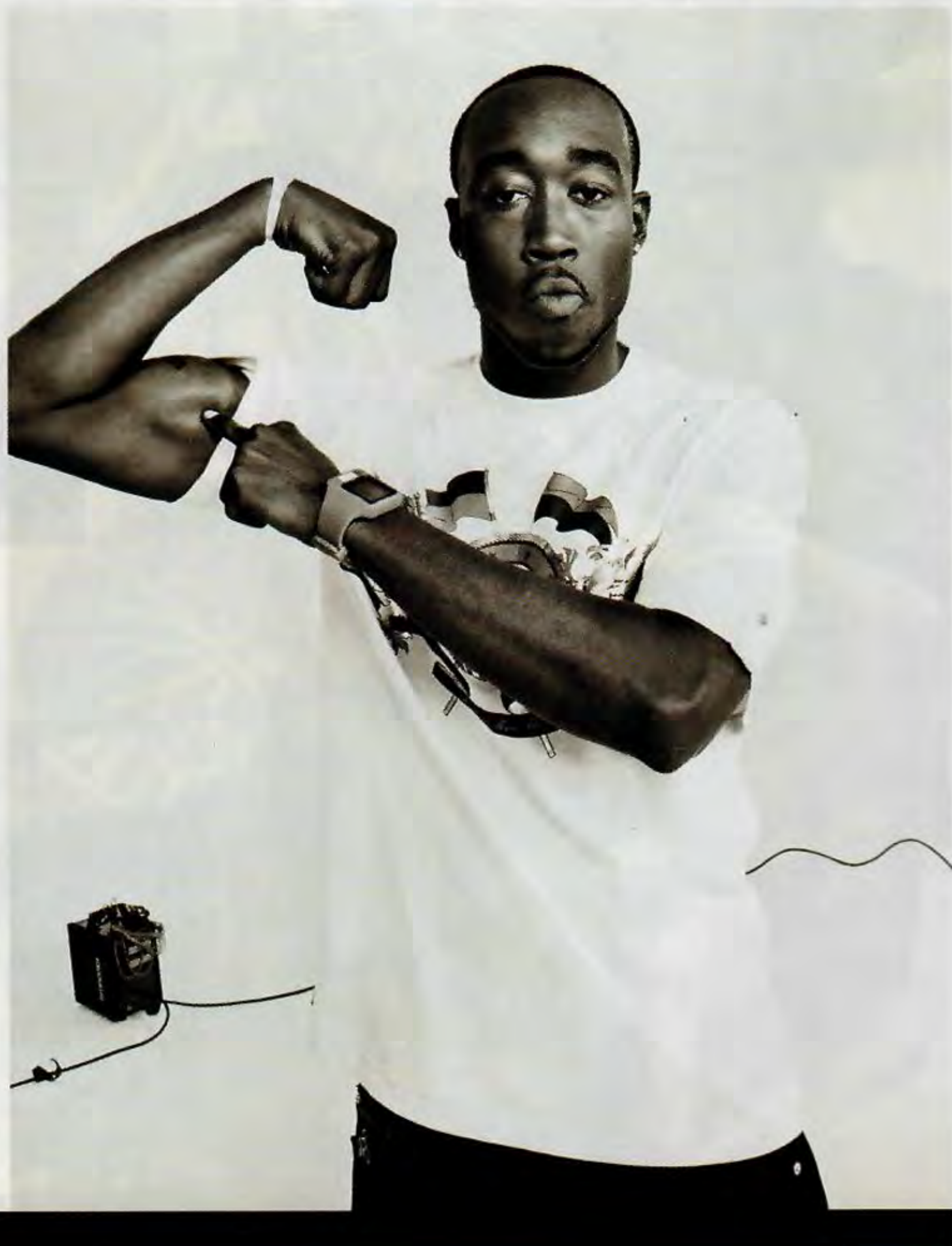
"Freddie Gibbs."

out shows, get 1,500 to 2,000 people in the crowd. The Internet is all about using it to your advantage. You don't put stuff out on the Internet expecting it to sell music. You put it out there and expect the people to just look at it, see it and hear it.

Wiz Khalifa: It creates opportunities. You put it out there for free to create the opportunity to create the buzz, and [then] you get the people goin', then you get poppin' somewhere, and you get a show. You get numerous shows in that area 'cause you poppin' out there. Like, a lot of people, it's hard to figure that out, until you get into it.

Pill: I was doing free shows.

Nipsey Hu\$\$le: One thing I'll tell any new artist is, just get hot. If you just get yourself hot, everything will come to you. It may not be from your album sales as your main source of income. It might be your feature money, when you hit these cities. Every hood nigga in every city I go to damn near got some dope money, or some weed money,



OPPOSITE PAGE: CARDIGAN BY BLAC LABEL; THIS PAGE: T-SHIRT BY 8732

or some robbery money, or whatever, some 9-to-5 money, and be like, "Nip, come to the studio." Yeah, come on. Let's knock it out. I charge this, but what you got, my nigga?

Wiz Khalifa: It be real paper. And it's not hard either, 'cause as soon as I realized that's what I needed to do, that's when I did it, and that's when shit started poppin'.

Donnis: You gotta strategize; this is war.

Freddie Gibbs: It definitely start in the studio, man, 'cause there's a lot of muthafuckas puttin' bullshit out there, you know what I'm sayin'? The Internet's flooded with a lot of bullshit.

Nipsey Hu\$\$le: I think that's why niggas stopped buying music.

Because of the bullshit? What's the message in your music?

Nipsey Hu\$\$le: My goal is to impact the culture. I'm not trying to change one individual or impose my will on one individual. I come from L.A. I come from a gangbanging culture. So my goal is to impact that culture [and], in turn, impact the culture in the streets in a positive direction... I feel like, comin' from where I come from, I wanna see change. I'm sure Jay Rock wanna see change. Jay Rock a Blood; I'm a Crip. Traditionally, our hoods don't necessarily see eye to eye, but by us being on TV, pushing a certain line, the culture [is] impacted.

Jay Rock: Now, what's crazy is when you talk about, I'm a Blood, he a Crip. I mean, you can go through my hood right now. There's one of my young niggas playin' [Nipsey's] CD. Like he said, he impact[ed] the culture when he dropped his shit. He impacted some of my homies. I dropped my shit. I impacted some of his homies.

Wiz Khalifa: [Where I'm from,] basically niggas is just doin' whatever they have to do to get to tomorrow. And me, personally, I was never involved in the streets. I seen everybody, like, my family and all my homies, they still into that shit. They can't get out of it. But for me, I always did my music thing, so, really, my whole thing is to show people that there is another way.

Nipsey Hu\$\$le: It's the same type of shit everywhere, just different regions. Like, we kill over Crippin' and Bloodin' or just gangbanging. They might kill over something different in Atlanta, or in North Carolina, or in Gary, Indiana.

Freddie Gibbs: Gary is a depressed town. I just wanna bring some life to that muthafucka, you know? Shed some light on it and show what it is, 'cause certain people didn't do that. There ain't really been nobody from my area. I gotta show what the streets is from my perspective.

Pill: I wanna just keep good music going for



FASHAWN



MOST ARTISTIC

Gov't Name: Santiago Leyva

Age: 21

Reppin': Fresno, California

Notable Releases: Mixtapes: *One Shot One Kill*, 2008, and *The Antidote*, 2009; Independent album: *Boy Meets World*, 2009

Currently Working On: As-yet-untitled mixtape with DJ Green Lantern

Label: One Records (Independent)

Aligned With: No one

Side Hustle: Endorsement deals with Orisue clothing and Etnies shoe company

The Next 10 Years in Hip-Hop Will Be... "dominated by the 10 [artists] that's here today."

DONNIS



MOST OUTGOING

Gov't Name: La'Donnis Crump

Age: 25

Reppin': Atlanta

Notable Releases: Single: "Gone," 2009; Mixtape: *Diary of an ATL Brave*, 2009

Currently Working On: Debut album: *Past Visions of the Future*, due late 2010

Label: Atlantic

Aligned With: No one

Side Hustle: None

The Next 10 Years in Hip-Hop Will Be... "amazing."

Atlanta as a whole, because, not to knock nobody, you got a lotta club music, you got a lotta dance music, and I want people to be able to think about OutKast when they had it on lock, think about T.I. with his lyricism. Young Jeezy, I mean, he lyrical, but he talk about trap shit. I wanna be the next solid rapper with a good testimony, with a good story. I want people to see Atlanta in a whole different way. That's why, when you see my video, it's fucked up. You don't see nothin' flashy. You don't see nothin' shiny. You don't see no pretty bitches. You know why? 'Cause everybody ain't got it like that.

Freddie Gibbs: Yeah, all the bitches in your video are ugly, man.

OJ Da Juiceman: I love Atlanta, man. One thing about, two things for sure, man. Atlanta

had got me straight. Real shit. I'm talkin' 'bout East Side of Atlanta. Atlanta got that sack up for me, and I turned that shit over and did the rap shit now. Hell yeah. I do jewelry, big jewelry, the rings and the watches and all that shit, 'cause that's what I like. [Atlanta] taught me a lot. It raised me to be the person I am. I appreciate everything it did for me. I just want to give back with the music. That's how I see it with everybody that follows my music, however, no matter if it's with the drugs or with the jewelry, 'cause that's how my new lingo is now, just straight-up jewelry and drugs.

Freddie Gibbs: Like, when I first came in here I saw Rock, and I told him, "Yeah, nigga. [Your song] '12 O'Clock,' that's my shit." When I heard it, it put me where I was at in that situation, so, shit, it's just all about makin' shit that niggas can relate to.

Donnis: Everybody gotta get their message out, because all our parents probably came from nothing—they struggled for it. So it's only right for us to try to take it to the next level, no matter what level your family at. [If your family still on that same level, it's our responsibility to get to that next place... I wanna make sure I can pay for my sister [to] go to medical school. And Nip do it for why he do it. And then, while we takin' care of our families and showin' our families a better way, it's the music that's embracing the community to be like, I can do that or I can do better than that.

Big Sean: I come from a city of pain. I come from Detroit, murder capital. Nigga, you fuckin' get your car stole or shot for whatever, and it's like, my music, you can hear the pain in my music, but besides that, you can hear the fun in my music, too... Everybody got a story to tell. And I think the No. 1 thing we doin' is lettin' people know you can do whatever the fuck you wanna do. Ain't nobody gonna stop you, whether it's fuckin' being a lawyer [or] you in school gettin' your doctorate. Whatever it is, it's like, Man, you can do whatever, 'cause we used to, I used to dream about shit like this. I used to read the *XXL* in eighth grade, sittin' in my classroom, like, This is what I wanna do. I remember, in the second grade, I was like, I wanna be a rapper, and that's what it is. ♠

