





# NUMBER ONE SPOT

If you're mad that **50 CENT**'s on top, don't wish him gone. Take him out. Go 'head, he dares you. The G-Unit general is ready for all comers. Don't cross him.

Words Keith Murphy  
Images Clay Patrick McBride

G Unit



## 50 CENT MIGHT VERY WELL BE THE MOST HATED MAN IN NEW YORK

Not that it much bothers him—it's a distinction the Queens MC has coveted, in fact, since 1999, when his underground street salvo "How to Rob" gave tongue-in-cheek stick-up lessons at the expense of most everybody else in the rap industry. But to hear 50 tell it, two years after the multi-platinum success of his debut album *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* put him front and center in the entertainment-biz viewfinder, the hate is reaching epidemic proportions.

"I can feel it when I come back to NYC," he says, sitting in a dusty old warehouse in Los Angeles, prepping for a photo shoot on this mid-December afternoon. "There's a lot of envy there."

If it is indeed jealousy that has 50's critics and foes foaming at the mouth, 2004 presented reasons aplenty. The *New York Times* reported that the enterprising MC raked in well over \$50 million during the past year. This from a G-Unit clothing line, a shoe endorsement with Reebok, Formula 50 Vitamin Water, a deal to make a movie based on his life and of course the Interscope-distributed G-Unit Records—which launched G-Unit crewmembers Lloyd Banks and Young Buck to stardom, signed Compton rappers The Game and Spider Loc to start a western branch, and got into the R&B market with Queens songstress Olivia.

Last June, 50 rubbed a lot of folks wrong at Hot 97's Summer Jam concert when he disparaged his hometown Jamaica, Queens neighborhood and mocked headliner R. Kelly by pretending to urinate on the stage. Former G-Unit associates threw chairs and bottles from the crowd. 50 threw them back.

More recently, the G-Unit boss's ire has been raised by Ja Rule's comeback hit "New York," a musical statement that find 50's longtime nemesis recruiting Fat Joe and Jadakiss for a show of East Coast solidarity. 50's response? A two-fisted diss cut called "Piggy Bank."

Out here in L.A., there's trouble of the legal variety, as Young Buck was recently charged with stabbing a man at the *Vibe* Awards show—an incident largely attributed to the long-standing troubles between Death Row heavy Suge Knight and one of 50's mentors, Dr. Dre.

On the eve of the release of his new album, *St. Valentine's Day Massacre*, though, 50 remains unflappable. Dressed in a chocolate-brown, pin-stripe gangster suit, he finds inspiration from O.G. Chicago mobster Al Capone, the man behind the infamous 1929 incident from whence 50's taken his title. Yep, 50 Cent has revenge on his mind, among other things.

**Y**ou say you feel envy in New York City. Are you speaking of the fans' reaction to your success?

No. I think it comes from the creative... I think it comes from the New

York rap artists. I don't think people like me very much in the hip-hop industry. And I can understand why. You could take everybody's previous releases and they didn't sell as many records as I sold with my first album.

**You recently released a song, "Piggy Bank," attacking some of your fellow artists. Fat Joe and Jadakiss both appeared on Ja Rule's "New York," but they haven't made any direct statements against you, have they?**

I made a record that places names and obvious people's acts. I speak about people generally, and they making it like, "This is Fat Joe, this is Jada and this one and that one..." That's 'cause it's visible to the general public's idea. When they hear it, they go, "Oh, that's what he's doing, and that's what that one's doing..."

**But doesn't such a record inflame your**

**image as the bad guy? The guy that loves starting beefs?**

You know what's crazy? I'm responding to the actions of others. I'm not actually starting it. In their interviews, they say, "Fuck 50," off the record. But they won't say it to my face. And the difference between them and me is, I don't have a problem saying, "Fuck them" in front of them.

**What was it exactly that upset you? Just the fact that they appeared on a track with Ja Rule—who you've had such a public beef with over the years?**

It's not even that. It's more like, finally your true feelings are coming out. A person dislikes you so much that subconsciously they start saying things, doing things. And you see it and you go, Yo, *where's that from?*

**I think people are surprised to hear that you have beef with Jadakiss, an artist that has been compared to you...**

[Cutting in] You know what? I don't even see him as competition. When you can't break a million records, and you call yourself going platinum... I know your numbers is 800 and change, and you can't get over that hump? [As *XXL* went to press, sales of *Kiss of Death* stood at 922,000.] And you haven't put out a

record with your voice on the chorus? He's a great rapper, but he's not a great songwriter. I got artists under me that are better than him. They sell more. And when you're in the music business, you in the business of selling music.

**So you don't buy into the whole artistic credibility thing?**

Nah, there's no such thing as artistic credibility. Now that doesn't mean I'm going to sell

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out to sell more albums. I'm going to be true to myself as an artist. But we're in the music business and artistic credibility won't help you out when your mortgage is due, in the day-to-day, in real life. I try to deal with reality as much as possible.

**This past summer your appearance at Hot 97's Summer Jam concert at Giants Stadium was met with a mixed reaction from the fans. What was your take on that?** It's positive. When I'm in New York City, nobody remembers these other guys. They remember us. But the truth is, where I come

from, I got a shady background. And because of that, I meet people who have that shady lifestyle that envy me. They look at me and go, "Yo, why he can do that and I can't?" **Did you really tell the fans at the show, "Fuck the hood"?**

You know, when I say, "Fuck the hood," *I am* the hood. I got Southside Jamaica, Queens tattooed across my back. I can say, "Fuck the hood," 'cause I'm *from* the hood. And I don't know nobody who wants to be there.

**You were the only artist on the bill at the Hot 97 show to voice displeasure over the fact that R. Kelly was performing. In fact, you mocked him onstage. How did the suits over at Hot 97 react to your actions?**

They wanted me to apologize to R. Kelly. They were like, "Will you apologize to Robert?" I don't care about your relationships. R. Kelly was scheduled to go after me. I was like, Whoa, whoa, there's a possibility that he may try to bring Ja Rule out behind me. [Kelly and Ja Rule had recently collaborated on the song "I Wonder."] And he may realize that this may be an opportunity to be disrespectful to me and everything that I'm building in front of 55,000 people in New York City.

**So you did a preemptive strike?** Yeah. I fucked it up for him before he could even get out. And then when I leave, 50 per-

cent of the audience is leaving with me. We walked out. They stayed in the fuckin' trailer for thirty or forty minutes after we left the stage. I don't even have issues with R. Kelly. I'm playing chess.

**The public is well aware of the problems you've had with Ja Rule and Irv Gotti. Do you think there will ever come a time when you guys can meet up without all the hype and squash the beef?**

The way I came up, if you are saying something about me, I'm going to address it. But that's not going to stop me from listening to what you are doing. I'll still listen to Murder Inc.'s music.

**You listen to Ja Rule albums?** I'll listen to Ja Rule's record to hear if there is anything good there. I might sign Ja Rule when he's done at Murder Inc. After I destroy him, I'll rebuild him. Because he never was strong enough to individually go against me. He needs the support of everyone else to try to attempt that. And they should have been smart enough to tell him not to directly go against me.

**Your name has been attached to drama for so long. Do you sometimes feel you attract trouble?** The music, for me, is a way for me to get away from the bullshit. It got me outta the streets.

But I'm comfortable with what they would consider drama. I'm used to having issues. I'm used to having some type of threat, some type of threat issues where I have bulletproof cars. **But people might say, now that you've made more than \$50 million, and you're living in an eighteen-bedroom mansion in Connecticut, you ain't hood no more.** I'm going to buy more shit. [Laughs] I'ma buy more mansions, I'ma buy more cars, I'ma buy a whole lot of shit. If you think that

wearing my jewels. I know they will kill him for that jewelry, because back in the days, my mind-frame would tell me to kill him for that jewelry. It would be like hitting the Lotto. I sat him on the bench just for that. If he had been killed it would have been my fault. **It always comes back to you?** I feel responsible for my crew. Now, I get the guys from my hood that say, "I deserve this." You get the whole pitch: "You know me, kid... I'll do whatever. I just got to get out the hood."

musically, I'll never top how you felt when I first came out. Music marks time. Certain music comes on, and you can remember the girl you were with at the time because y'all used to play that song while y'all were together or hung out. But I can make a better record. **One artist that has experienced immense success, backlash and success again is Jay-Z, who you toured with in 2003. Do you look at Jay-Z's career as something to pattern your own career after?**



envy is gonna stop me from going after what I want... I've always been a hustler, more than anything else. So it's like, I could've been content with the money that I made off that record and sat back. Instead, I built for my crew. I'm setting up. They gonna watch it go to the next level next year...

I like to watch myself on television so I can think about what my old friends are saying. From where I'm from, niggas don't like to see niggas do good. It's like they get upset at the fact that I'm doing good. Banks' [album sales] is one-point-three, on his way to two million. Like, Banks, he understands. He watched it go from, "Yo, I like Banks better than I like 50..." to "Yo, I can't front, I'm feeling Young Buck, I ain't feeling Banks..." You see what I'm saying? But internally, in the camp, we have no problems.

**How has your success affected your friendship with people from your hood?**

My old friends don't understand anything but what we did already, the street shit. I've had to let people go. I had this one guy that was around me that was a real cool guy. He's still a good friend. I gave him a car and he went back to the hood. I had a jewelry case in the car and he put on some of my jewelry.

**Dude was asking for trouble...**

Yeah. Now he's riding around in a new car

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But I can't use anybody directly around me to deal with beef issues. I got a whole set of niggas that I *don't* keep around me to deal with those situations. The fuckin' hip-hop police got pictures of everybody that's around me on a regular. I'm smart enough to know that.

**There's a lot of pressure on you to do well with your new album. Do you worry about failing to live up to expectations?**

*Get Rich...* has sold over ten million records worldwide. So to me, anything less than what I've already done is a failure. If I came out and sold ten million records, I would feel like I failed. That's just me.

**But you're following up one of the most successful debuts in music history. So the doubts are going to be there, right?**

If they doubt me, then that's cool. It makes me feel like I'm making my first album again. I'm trying to destroy [*Get Rich or Die Tryin'*]. But

I watched dude sell a Linkin Park record! [Laughs] I look at that and say, "Damn!" I handle my business, he handles his business... We never have any friction. The whole Rock the Mic tour, no issues. I guess it's 'cause he has his own money to count—while these niggas spend all they time counting mine. I respect dude.

**As much as people try to paint you as this "reckless street nigga," you are probably one of the more business-savvy artists in hip-hop.**

I always try to appear less intelligent than I am, so I can stay ahead of them. [Laughs] The guy that is talking to you in passing can't complete the deals that I complete. When I sit down and handle my business, I'm in a different mind-frame.

**The Vitamin Water acquisition left some people scratching their heads like, "What**



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**the fuck is 50 doing?"**

Yeah. But while other artists are doing alcoholic beverages, which limits how far they can go with it, I support a brand of product that's actually healthy for you.

**Is it true that you no longer drink or smoke? Are you a health nut?**

I don't got time for that shit. I'm trying to win.

**With all of the business ventures, do you feel like you are spreading yourself too thin? Are you forgetting about the music?**

No way, absolutely not. Everything runs with the music. G-Unit as a clothing brand is growing faster because it's a constant representation of the music. The kids that are going, "Yo, Young Buck is my favorite," or, "Lloyd Banks is my favorite," are directly linked back to G-Unit. It's a continuous process, and it's going to continue with Tony Yayo, Olivia and Spider. I think people look at G-Unit as just the group, when I'm working on making people respect me the way that they respect labels like Def Jam.

**Talk about The Game, who's getting a lot of buzz, and your involvement with his album, which is being released on G-Unit/Aftermath Records. Is The Game officially a part of the G-Unit crew?**

We work together. I saw the opportunity to actually work with another artist that wasn't from around the corner. And I think he sounds good, so I work with him, with Dre. Game is to 50 Cent and Dr. Dre what 50 Cent is to Eminem and Dr. Dre. He's a part of G-Unit, but he doesn't function the same way

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the rest of the camp does. Like, our camp is so close that it feels like he's an outsider.

**And that's not his fault.**

It's not his fault, it's just not the same. We so in-house, so close together... With Spider, it's like he's moving into that direction of being in-house also.

**Steering other artists' careers must be a full-time job in itself. What are your thoughts on the fight that Young Buck was involved in at the Vibe Awards?**

That's the reality. That's the same thing I be saying about when people rock with artists directly. Like in the hood, if you got a nigga that got drama with the kids over there, you don't stand next to them—'cause you know they got problems.

**There's been speculation that Suge Knight orchestrated the attack on Dr. Dre. Would you say that Dre's beefs with Suge Knight have been passed down to G-Unit?** Yeah. I don't have any real beef with Suge and them niggas. But I'm connected with Dr. Dre—you know what it is. He knows where the checks are coming from. It's like *The*

Source magazine is anti-50 Cent. They anti-50 Cent because of Eminem. I inherited that beef... I don't have a problem with it.

**Do you find it ironic that you appear in the video for Eminem's "Like Toy Soldiers"—a song in which he speaks about burying beefs with *The Source* and Murder Inc.?**

I don't think Em is realistic. On certain levels, he's being logical. Anybody, like I said, would want to avoid those type of situations. Em's seeing if it's possible to not have these issues. Why? Because he makes hit records. But we talk to each other all the time. Not just when we are making records together, but just regularly. He's a friend of mine.

**You can't say that about a lot of people?**

Naw, I can't. He gives me his take and opinion on things. I don't really value many people's

opinion. I feel like people have to convince me that they have good intentions. Em and Dre are the only people that I listen to, really.

**What are your thoughts on the success of Kanye West? It seems like his mainstream acceptance might have been fueled by the fact that he represents the socially conscious alternative to 50 Cent.**

That's exactly what it is. It's the yin and the yang. Kanye didn't allow my situation to alter his. Meanwhile, all the other artists that adapted to me and what I was doing couldn't cut through it, because they didn't stay who they were. Look at the difference in the content of the mixtape circuit. 50 comes out, and all of these niggas are shooting. It's garbage to me.

**So you listen to socially conscious MCs?**

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Absolutely. I enjoy their music. I respect Kanye. I hope he wins all [the Grammys]. There's a part of me that agrees with what they're saying, Common Sense, Talib Kweli, Mos Def, Dead Prez... Somebody else is always going to have some quality that you don't have.

**Last year, you were involved in P. Diddy's "Vote or Die" campaign. But when the press found out that you weren't registered to vote, they put you on blast.**

I did register at the end. I realized that it was a different process for me because I had to regain my rights to vote because I was a felon. Puff reached out and told me that he wanted me to be a part of that with him. But I didn't know dude was going to sell "Vote or Die" T-shirts and shit like that. [Laughs] Puff is a hustler. But I do feel that voting is important.

**50 Cent the politician?**

Naw... But I actually went to Iraq. We performed for the troops. This was two months ago. But I didn't do it for the press. I did it to entertain the troops.

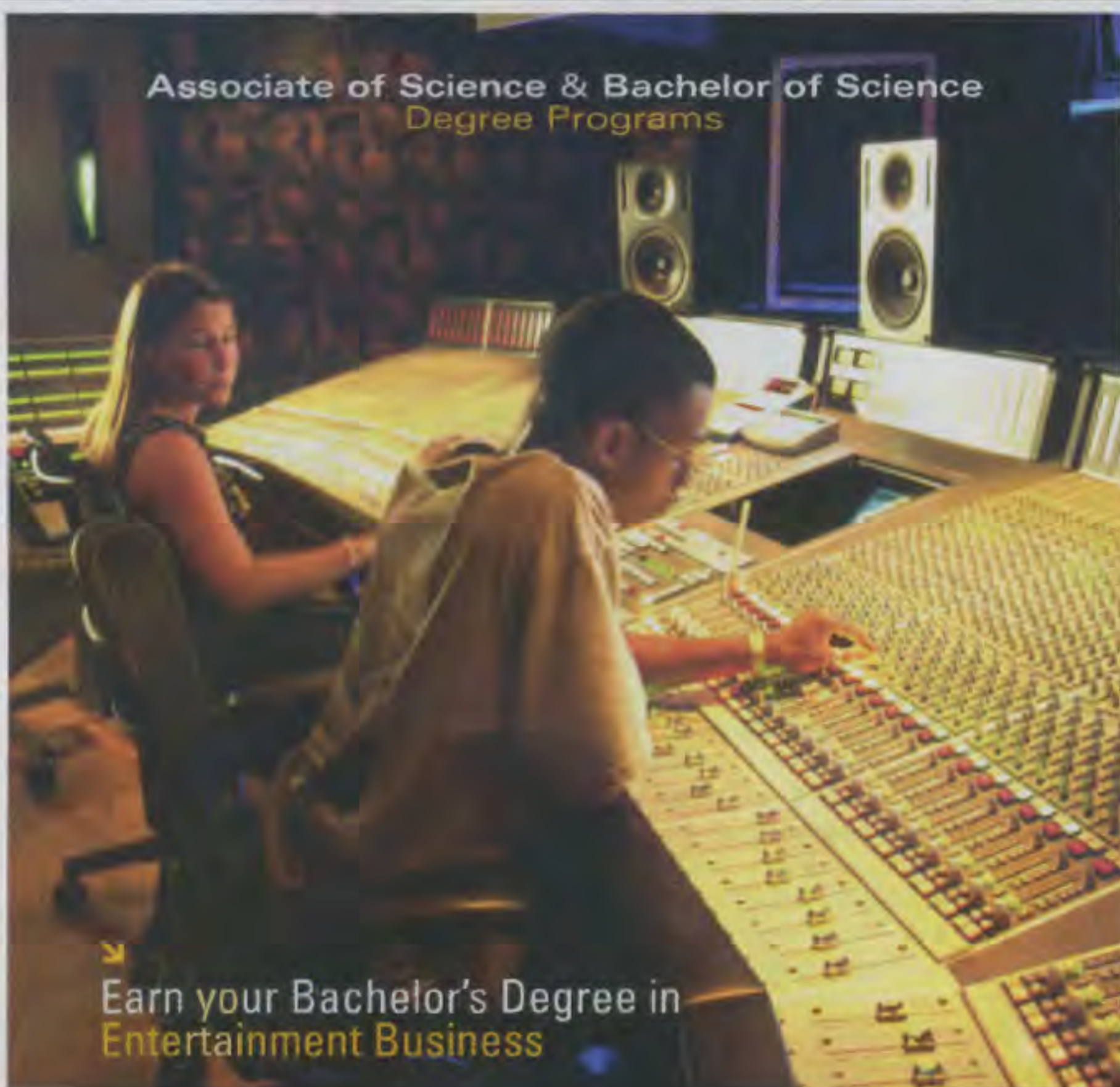
**You support the war?**

No. You may not support the war, but the troops are people that come from where I come from. These are kids in the hood that joined the military just so they can go to college. You get around the soldiers out in that situation, they are kind of different because they constantly have death around them. I'm sure the people that I met over there weren't the people that the U.S. knew before they went off to war.

**Over the last few years, your success has allowed you to experience things—traveling to foreign countries, for example—few people get to experience. Do you ever sit back and look at it all and say, "I'm a nigga from the Southside of Queens"?**

You know what's ill? I go to a place overseas, and I'm on stage and I tell people to put their hands up. I feel like I'm in control of 100,000 people. For a minute, while I'm out there, it's not a performance. It's me telling them what to do, and them responding. Now maybe I'm a little wrong, but I enjoy it so much that when I come back home, I don't like it when rappers don't do what I tell them to do. [Laughs] I just want to tell them: I just came back from *Africa!* And I know they don't have a clue. I'm back in the city and a nigga want to tell me about another nigga's freestyle? They just don't understand.♣

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