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# THE SOURCE

THE MAGAZINE OF HIP HOP CULTURE & POLITICS

**DR. DRE**  
FIRES UP THE NEW  
**CHRONIC**

**GZA**  
CUTS BENEATH  
THE SURFACE

**CAM'RON**  
YOU WANNA FIGHT?  
LET HIM KNOW

INTERNATIONAL:  
**THE BABY  
KILLERS**  
OF  
**RWANDA**

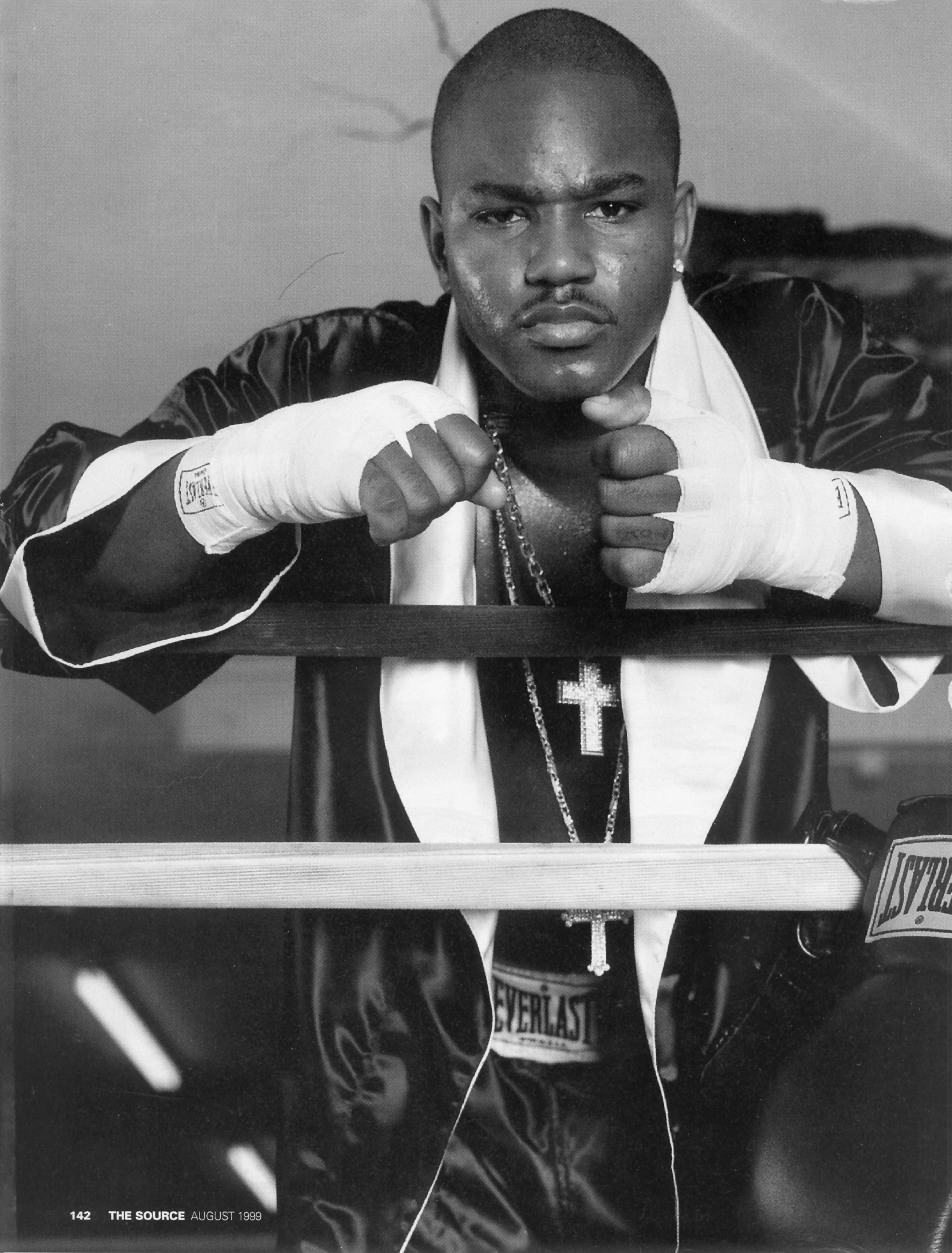
**TOO  
SHORT**  
TELLS YOU  
WHY REAL PIMPS  
NEVER DIE

SEARCHING FOR THE  
**PHARCYDE**

**PLUS:**  
THE NEW ORLEANS  
EXECUTIONERS  
ABOVE THE LAW  
THA LIKS & FRIENDS ROCK  
LEFT COAST FASHION  
OMAR EPPS

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CAMERON "CAM'RON" GILES: THE PEOPLE'S CHAMPION

# SECOND

★ ★ R O U N D ★ ★

# KNOCKOUT

WORDS BY JERRY LAWRENCE BARROW

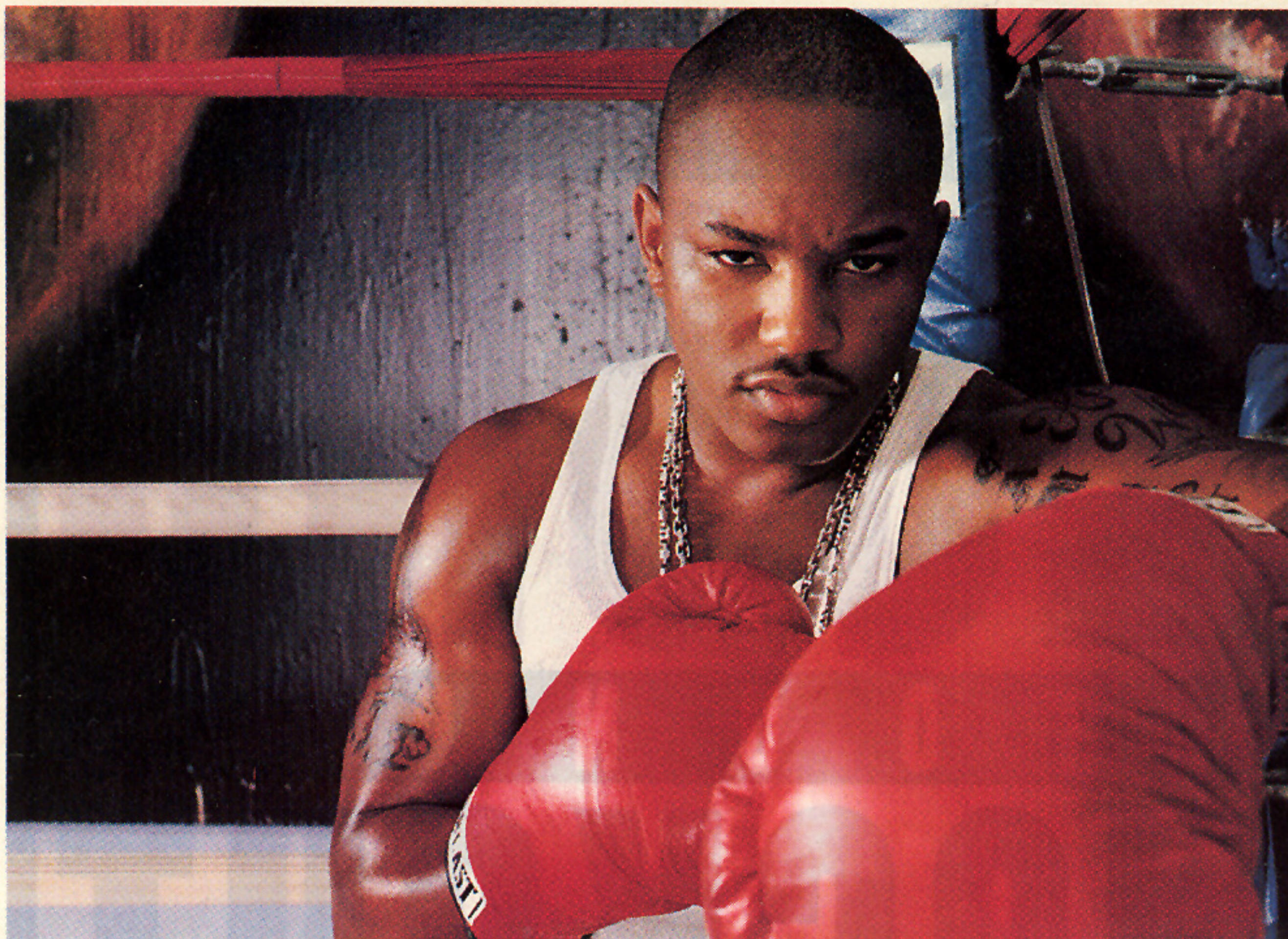
**LAST YEAR, THIS ROOKIE RHYMESAYER SET THE STREETS OFF WITH BURNERS LIKE ".357" AND "PULL IT." NOW HE'S GONNA RING THE FINAL BELL. KNUCKLE UP, Y'ALL.**

**A**s the sun sets on the Harlem skyline, puddles of water recede into the cracks of the asphalt. With an end to the day's torrential rains, residents gather on the corner of 140th and Lenox Avenue to commune with the night. Local salesmen peddle everything from pit bull pups to glazed hams to the cats on the corner. One broad-shouldered brother happily takes in the scene, sipping Alizé from a Sprite bottle as the police make their third pass in an unmarked car. A gun-toting eagle with the words HARLEM WORLD DIPLOMATS adorns his shirt. His jewel-encrusted pinkie ring clicks against plastic as he answers his phone's incessant beeping. Responding to the call, he asks his boy next to him, "Yo, you wanna puppy?" After a moment, Cameron Giles gently shakes his head, letting the mutt merchant on the phone know that he won't get a sale out of him this night but to be sure to check with him again. In the midst of his people, one of Harlem's native sons continues to laugh into the phone and play the dozens with his boys. For tonight, there is no better place to be.

It's been one year and 500,000 records since Entertainment's lead artist jacked Magnum P.I. for his Ferrari and rode the beat for the smash single ".357." The raspy-voiced point guard turned MC sprayed verses with such intensity that he didn't just bless a mic, he gave it last rights. A few months later on his debut, *Confessions Of Fire*, Cam'ron played out



★ ★ PHOTOS BY T. HOPKINS ★ ★



the battle between good and evil through introspective tracks like "Wrong Ones" and "Confessions." But the single that meant the difference between drinking vinegar and wine was the popular "Horse and Carriage." With his partner Mase playing Ricky Ricardo on the hook, the club jam got more radio spins per week than a local laundromat. Despite that single and Cam's star-studded associations, *Confessions Of Fire* didn't live up to its high expectations.

"My concentration is to create a complete balance," explains Entertainment CEO Lance "Un" Rivera. "His last album was balanced, but I think it fell one street record short of controlling the streets." Originally, "Pull It," Cam's collaboration with the Dark Man X, was intended to be that one record. The animated horns and rapid-fire bass ran through the underground like a rabid mole, but the sample used couldn't be cleared and it never made it on the album.

On the new *Sports, Drugs & Entertainment*, the horse has been put to pasture and the carriage is up on blocks. Cam's lifelong partner Digga, who produced ".357" and "Confessions," has assumed the majority of the production responsibilities, and this time around every effort is being made—both musically and lyrically—to represent the influences and experiences that have shaped the MC we've come to know. And the logical place to begin is Harlem, his home base.

In the video for the lead single, "Let Me Know," family and friends pack basketball courts, storefronts and project lobbies of Cam's Harlem stomping grounds to watch him spike the mic over the theme from "Monday Night Football." See, Cam

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**"FOLKS ARE REPPIN'  
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BRING IT BACK TO MY HOOD."**

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doesn't just want to control the streets anymore; he is the streets. "No disrespect to Harlem World, but folks are reppin' Harlem and doin' their videos out in Cali. I wanted to bring it back to my hood."

**It's a warm summer day** in New York City, and after a long afternoon in an ad hoc media training class at his record label's offices, Cam'ron seeks refuge on the corner of 110th Street and First Avenue. This is just one of several uptown Manhattan neighborhoods he had called home growing up. But this corner holds a special place in his heart. As he steps onto his native soil, the welcoming calls echo against the brick buildings. "Yo, Killa!" And a swarm of Cam'ron's childhood friends converge upon him as palms meet backs and the news of the day is exchanged. Earlier this month, the crew came out to celebrate the birthday of Cam's lifelong friend and rhyme partner Bloodshed, who died in a car accident in March 1997. Bloodshed was the third member of the homicidal triumvirate, Children of the Corn, along with the artist

they formerly knew as Murda Mase. Friends painted a mural on this corner in Blood's memory but the cops have recently threatened to remove it because it attracts too much attention. Cam doesn't let it phase him. Instead, feeling grateful he has beaten the odds thus far, Cam'ron has dedicated his career to the memory of his friend.

"I believe I'm in the situation I'm in now because of Blood. He took rap more serious than me, and I feel like he's livin' through me. That's why I put him in everything I do."

*Sports, Drugs & Entertainment* attempts to take the three elements of Cam's life and place them under a microscope. Sports started the tale, when Cameron Giles first felt the glare of the spotlight as an All-City guard for Manhattan Center High School.

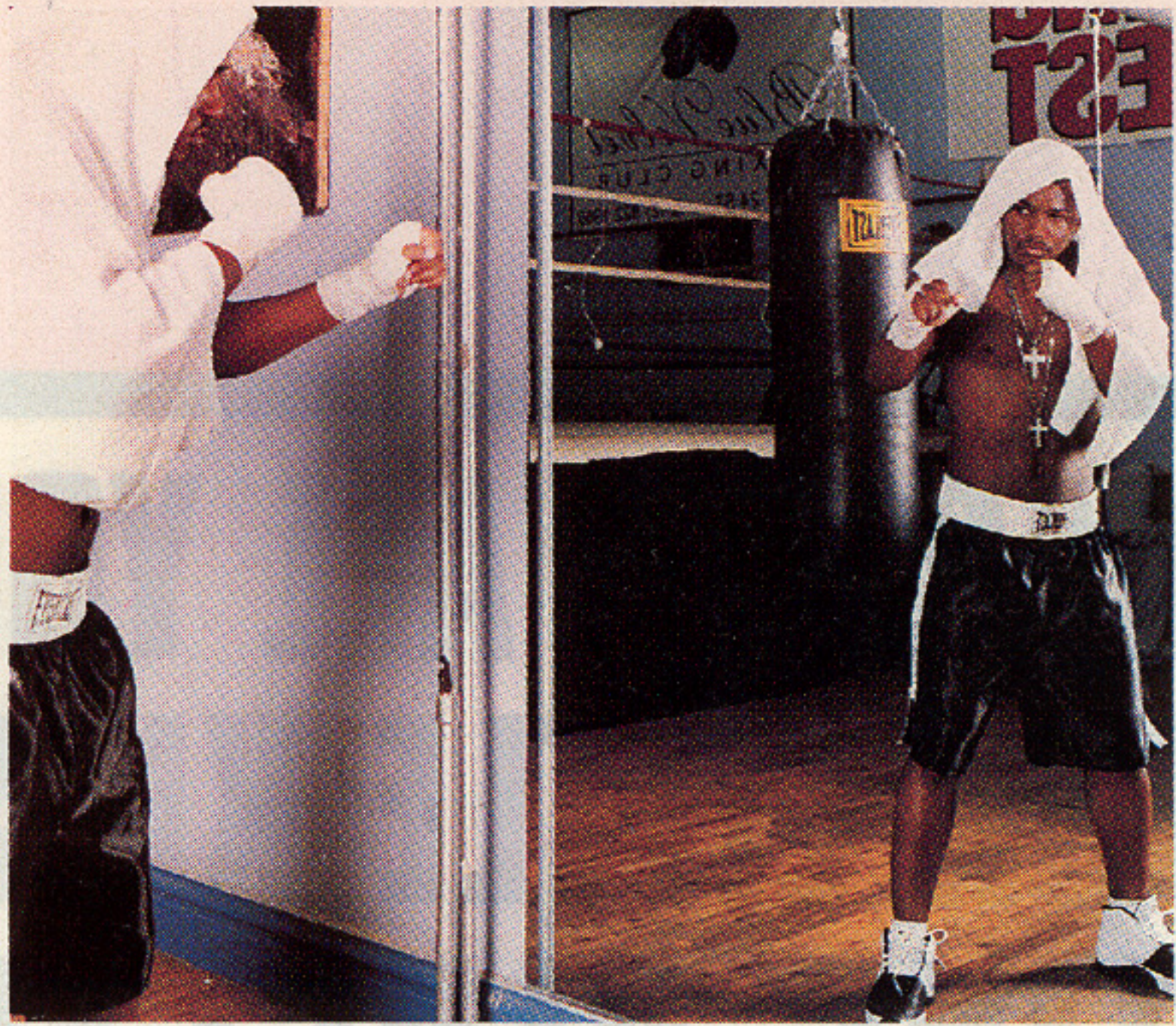
"Cameron could've been a college Division I player," begins Dermon Player, his former basketball coach at the prestigious Riverside Church program who is now an assistant coach at St. John's University. "He's a great slasher, he knew how to score, and he was great defensively." Though Coach Player had some reservations about Killa Cam's persistent NBA aspirations, he remembers Cam'ron matching up quite well against a swift point guard from the Coney Island Projects.

"We went to a tournament out in New Jersey and we were waiting for Stephon Marbury [to play with us]. But we went to our morning game, and Stephon was there playing with the Gauchos. So, we faced them in our championship game, and I was tellin' the team Stephon better not score. Cameron stepped up and said, 'I got 'em coach.' I thought Cam was a little too short for him, but he insisted and he locked him up for like six points and won the defensive award for the tournament."

But while balling for Navarro Junior College (poor grades prevented him from qualifying for Division I ball), Cam's hoop dreams were derailed by a hamstring tear. The season-long injury left Cam idle, and he stopped going to class. He was eventually kicked out of school.

With no school and no more ball, it was here that Cam tried to focus his attentions on an earlier love—entertainment.

"He used to tap dance," his mother, Ms. Giles, begins affectionately. "When he was four years old, he did a show at the Beacon Theater." Ms. Giles knew of her son's interest in rhyme, but she wanted him to focus on other things first. "When he was about 12 years old, he'd be in the elevator and he'd be rappin', and I'd tell him to stop that mess. I



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**"I'M INTO THE RAPPIN',  
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didn't condemn rap, but my whole thing was for him to write the English language first. That's how you get along in life."

And as the new album title suggests, there was a stop in between the sports and entertainment phases of Cam's life. After getting kicked out of school, Cam didn't tell his grandmother, whom he'd been living with, so he stayed with friends struggling to make ends meet. He would scrape together 500 pennies to get smoke and split dollar chicken sandwiches with his boys for dinner. And he would hustle.

"We was never like no kingpins or nothin'. Cats was like, 'We gotta eat and pay bills.' I was like, 'I need money and I'm from Harlem, so I'm supposed to have at least three pairs of sneakers a month,'" he jokes.

Soon, his art of the hustle would come in handy for less nefarious reasons. His biggest challenge—with three seconds on the clock and no time-outs left—would be to sell his MC skills to none other than Brooklyn's Finest, The Notorious B.I.G. Fellow MC and ballplayer Mase hooked up the meeting, and Cam knew that in the

room with B.I.G. he would either go home with a ring or a sneaker deal with Xanthus. It was the kind of catch-and-shoot situation true ballers live for.

"Biggie was laid up in a bed with these two girls, an aunt and a niece. He couldn't really walk 'cuz of the car accident (suffered with Lil' Cease in 1996). Me and my man AJ was smokin' and we couldn't believe we was smoking wit' B.I.G.! But Mase had told him I was nice and I spit this for him: 'Check the situation/ That Cam is laced in...FBI framed me/ Inside the blue 3 laced me with two keys/ Luchi and movies of me rapin' groupies, hoochies with doobies/ Even got the coke that they twist in my loosies...'"

After spitting another Casanova flow, it was here that the rapper Cam'ron was born. After Biggie's death, Cameron Giles signed with Undeas Records, the label Biggie had started with his partner Lance "Un" Rivera.

**Back on 110th Street**, as the clouds overhead threaten to baptize us again, Cam runs to his car to get the latest Diplomats T-shirts for his people. The blue ones have become the flavor of the month, and Cam takes a particular joy in handing them out. As far as he's concerned, everyone who sports one is a Diplomat, because more than being the hottest logo in his hood since FUBU, the Diplomat Eagle represents the next phase for Cam'ron and his crew. With his partner Jimmy Jones, Stan, McGruff and others, Diplomats aspire to be a nationwide platoon of MCs.

"I'm tryin' to monopolize it so I got Diplomats in every state. So that if Jimmy isn't doin' well in Chicago, we gotta cat in Chi that can help him sell records and vice versa."

But as talented an entertainer as he is, Cam doesn't want his business aspirations to end with the microphone. In addition to a Diplomats record label, the 22-year-old already owns a liquor store and has plans to open up a laundromat and a day care center. You know, whatever the community needs.

"I'm into the rappin', but it's not anything to me to write music. It comes naturally. God gave me the gift to do it. What I like about the game is that I get to voice my opinion. But rap could introduce you to somethin' else. It can take you to places further than rap. I have other things I'm tryin' to get. I gotta make sure people in my life are all right."

Maintaining that link to his support group is critical for Cam'ron. He keeps his childhood friends close, and his mother looks over all of his contracts and helps him run the stores. Their presence gives him inspi-

ration for his music and keeps him focused. And Cam'ron has seen the dangers in letting those kinds of associations slide.

"I don't think he [Mase] should retire forever. But I feel that it's a good move for a minute, because he needs to check on who he around. I spoke to him and he said he realized that he's not around anybody he grew up with. So he needs to sit back and get his priorities straight. To be young and be a millionaire, that's a lot. You gotta figure how many 20-year-old millionaires are there out there? But just to have money and not have no friends is wack. I wouldn't want to have \$2 or 3 million and not be able to hang out with my peoples or my girl."

Later that evening, Cam has turned his neighborhood into a mobile office. As he goes in and out of the numerous urban clothing stores that line the block to politic with the owners, a radio DJ is talking to him on his cell phone trying to get him to promote his new album. Then, as if on cue, ".357" begins to play over the radio, and one of the security men excitedly points Cam out. In a heavy Senegalese accent, the rent-a-guard tells Cam he heard his song in a taxi on his last trip home. Brothers in the motherland are feeling him, he says. Then, before the guard can finish smiling, a woman who was working in the back of the store rushes up to him yelling.

"You remember me?" she asks, eager to remind the young star about her recent appearance in the "Let Me Know" video. Cam regretfully shakes his head.

"In that one shot—that was my ass!" she cries blissfully. Cam smiles and then goes to his car to get his happy-to-be-faceless fan a signed poster.

**It's getting late now**, the sun went to bed on Harlem's skyline a few hours ago, and a cool breeze brings relief from the day's humidity. The score from the Knicks and Hawks playoff game is yelled out of a window to passersby. Two sistas roll up in a minivan with out-of-state plates and hand out promotional material for their independent label. And a desperate brotha in the midst of relocation offers a good deal on a used fish tank. In the midst of it all, Cam offers his undivided attention to three aspiring MCs as they twist tales of keys, trees and M3s over the noises of the Harlem night.

On the song "Do It Again," a reflective collaboration with Destiny's Child on *Sports, Drugs & Entertainment*, Cam wonders whether he would live his life over. The answer is written in his smile as he sips his drink, answers another phone call and nods his head to the rhythm of the rhymes in his head, the rhythm of home. **S**