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ERRATA CORRIGE

Nel numero 391 di *Mag-
gio-Giugno*, la foto a
pagina 216 è stata er-
roneamente attribuita.
In realtà è di Bruce We-
ber. Ce ne scusiamo con
i lettori e gli interessati.

Jay-Z by Roberto Croci

New York City. Out of the 10 million people who live there, almost a third were born and raised in the "projects" (another word for ghettos, in which poverty, violence and crime are a part of daily life), whether they're Puerto Ricans, Chinese or Blacks. «Yeah, this is a fact of life. I grew up in the Marcy Houses housing project in the Bed-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, black and without a father, just like the stereotype, in a world of drugs and violence where gangsters, which I think are the most charismatic figure in our society, are the people you look up to, the cool cats». It's Sunday afternoon and I'm on the phone with Shawn Carter, alias Jay-Z, legendary, multi-awarded, often imitated, self-made rap mogul, producer, entrepreneur. «I love "The Godfather" trilogy, but "The Godfather Part II" is my favorite movie, followed by "Scarface». Not Brian De Palma's but the real one, the Black Scarface, Frank Lucas, who ran New York Harlem's heroine market in the late '60s and at the beginning of the 70s. Even the mafia was afraid of him, they had to come to terms with his operation. The same one who dressed in elegant suits, stylish hats, expensive shoes with a lot of jewelry (and the subject of Ridley Scott's "American Gangster"). He was bling before bling bling, you know what I mean». Gangsters, from Hollywood outlaws like Vito Corleone and "Superfly" Priest to the real-life dons like John Gotti and

Frank Lucas, and to the most recent figure of a modern gangster like James Gandolfini aka Tony Soprano, are the cool cats of modern life and we can't deny the impact they have on our culture. Undoubtedly New York City loved her gangsters since a very early age, whether it was in Little Italy back in the '50s, or in Brooklyn with motorcycles and bikers in the 60s or even the Sugar Hills players in the 70s and the wild-styled crack dealers of the 80s. «I love gangsters, without them I wouldn't be where I'm now. The best of them was "Biggie", Notorious B.I.G., the King of New York hip-hop and if someone compares me to him, well, thank you very much, I take it as a compliment». Deep voice, very fast-minded, honest to the point where he tells me that «It's not the "n-word" that bugs me, it's the way you say it. Simple as that. It's not because I grew up in the ghetto that my music and lyrics have to refer only to negative things. That's not real. We have cookouts, family picnics and our friends. All of us are just trying to maintain our balance in the anarchy that surrounds us». Jay-Z is born in a poor section of Brooklyn. When he is 12, his father leaves the family. His passion for music starts when his mother gives him a boombox as a present, and soon after we see him organize freestyle rap battles. «Life at that age was hard. Drugs, guns but also loyalty and respect. You know I'm probably one of the only rappers who didn't get shot. I owe everything to my mom, her spirit of sacrifice made me into who I am today. She

had 2, 3 jobs just to be able to give me and my brothers a normal life». Even with this strong role model, Jay-Z ends up selling drugs in order to produce his first album, "Reasonable Doubt", which features also the famous gangsta rapper Notorious B.I.G. After its completion, he can't find a recording label who wants to carry it, so he decides to start his own recording label. Roc-A-Fella Records, an homage to the mogul John Rockefeller. «Producing it by myself was my only choice. At that time I thought that with the money I would make, I'd just move on to other things. I just wanted to tell the world my story. Then I fell in love with the business and I never stopped working. Even if nobody wanted that record, I knew I was right and the best reward is when you have success and you can prove everybody wrong. It means you really believe in yourself. I don't give up easily. I have never renounced my past and I don't believe in redemption. I am who I am for what I did before. Now, with success comes the opportunity to help others and the power to change the destiny of so many kids, to inspire them to do everything they desire. I love working and when I produce a new album I do it because of the love and respect I have for the business». At the peak of his career, Jay-Z decides to call it quits. His retirement, in 2003, it's not due to illness or age, he simply wants out. At 34 he's at the helm of an empire valued at more than 300 million of dollars. Co-owner of the New York club "40/40"

and of the NBA team New Jersey Nets, president and co-founder (with Damon Dash e Kareem "Biggs" Burke) of Roc-A-Fella Records (part of an empire that includes the clothing label Rocawear with sales estimated at 200 millions), he is also responsible for discovering and launching some of the most legendary hip-hop stars, like LL Cool J, Beastie Boys, Cam'ron and Kanye West. Shortly after retiring from his rap career, he becomes president and CEO of Def Jam Recordings (he stepped down a few months ago). In 2006 he drops the album "Kingdom come". Recently he signed a new mega-deal with concert promoter Live Nation, joining the likes of Madonna and U2. His retirement didn't last that long, after all. «Well, that was my intention; then while I was cleaning out my desk I found so many projects I didn't finish... I decided there was no better time to do it than the present. It's like when you watch fireworks: when you think they are over, here comes the big finale!» We hear a voice in the background: it's his long-time girlfriend, beautiful Beyoncé, whom he married recently. "Jigga" laughs, without saying anything. It's time to ask him about his creative process. «In the beginning I would write first and then I would take care of the beat. Now it's the exact opposite. I listen to the music and then write the lyrics. If you know my music, you may have noticed it has a lot of funkiness, it's a happy party music, just to dance to in the club. But when you go home and listen to it again you will realize that there's a pre-

cise message in it. There's my life, personal experiences. I travel through the social structure of my culture. Of my people. That's what I did for "American gangster", in which I talk about my street-hustler days, pointing out little subtleties of that time that were not included in Ridley Scott's movie». That album (which is not the soundtrack to the movie, rather a concept album inspired by it) was even praised by senator Barack Obama for the vitality and the truth at its core. Does Jay-Z have any interest in playing an active role also politically? «Not at all. I was born in the street, where you have to have integrity or you won't be there long. You pay with your life. I then discovered the business world and, let me tell you, there's no fear of retribution there. You can be fucked by somebody on a deal, then sooner or later you will have the chance to fuck him back on another deal. That's business in a nutshell. I know nothing about the political arena and I am not ready to tackle that world. I come from the ghetto. Hip-hop is what you live, rap is what you do, man.» Spoken like the words of a true prophet.