

**Text: Excerpt from George Packer, “Just Business: Jay-Z” (2014)**

*The rapper Jay-Z (real name: Shawn Corey Carter) grew up and started his career in the Marcy Houses Project in Brooklyn – a predominantly African-American neighborhood notorious for poverty, drugs, and shootings. When he was 15 he started selling drugs. He quit dealing drugs in 1994 but continued making music.*

His dream was to be the rich guy in the nice car with the big gun [...]. Kids who put on their orange uniform and walked past the hustlers on the corner to a job at McDonald’s were suckers trying to play by the rules. They didn’t have a dream, they had a check, surviving nine to five, but he wasn’t trying to survive – he was trying to live it to the limit. Better die enormous on the street than live dormant in a  
5 little box called Apartment 5C. He rarely smoked weed and stayed sober when he drank – being conscious let him focus on the money. He was always about the money. Second best wasn’t worth the ultimate price on the street, so he learned to compete and win as if his life depended on it. [...] Music was just another hustle. He was a reluctant artist, still about the money and not apologizing for it, but to make this hustle work over the long run you needed art. He was as cold and focused as he’d  
10 been on the streets – seven more records in seven more years, all platinum. He softened the tracks and dumbed down his lyrics – more large living, less regret – to hit a bigger audience and double his dollars. It turned out lots of young people could relate [to the lyrics of his songs]. Jay-Z told rap’s eternal story – “why I’m dope, doper than you” – a hundred different ways, no two couplets alike, and the kids believed him, so they wore what he wore, drank what he drank, and made him rich.  
15 He launched a clothing line and it brought in more revenue than his own music company, hundreds of millions. Started his own movie studio, got his own Reebok sneaker, distributed his own vodka, put out his own cologne, trademarked his own shade of Jay-Z Blue, cross-promoted everything. [...] When critics called him a sell-out or materialist, he had the answer: selfishness was a rational response to the reality he faced.  
20 Everything has to be put in context.  
He did the things top celebrities did: became a lifestyle brand, opened a sports bar chain, got sued by his workers for back wages, met Bono in a London cigar room with Quincy Jones, put his name to philanthropic causes, made the Forbes 400 (net worth 450 mil), hung out with presidents, carried on beefs with other stars, hooked up with a singer every bit as big as he was, bought her an island for  
25 her birthday, rented a wing of a maternity ward before she was due and made it their private suite, tried to trademark their baby’s name for future use (the U.S. Patent Office refused) and released a single when Blue Ivy Carter was four days old, rapping: “My greatest creation was you ... You don’t yet know what swag is.”  
The more he won, the more they loved him everywhere, lived through him, celebrated his money and  
30 power as their own. At concerts fans raised their hands together and flashed his Roc-A-Fella diamond logo as if they owned a piece of the deal. He was a mogul and a revolutionary, an icon and a thug [...].

When Jay-Z bought a slice of the Nets and fronted the team's move to Brooklyn, he became the boss and the star [...]. When the new arena opened, he sold it out every eight straight nights. In the smoky  
 35 dark he told sixteen thousand fans, "[...] You'll hear people say I only own a small percentage of the team. It doesn't matter what percentage – the story is that a black kid from a single-parent house made it from the Marcy projects about six minutes away from here. So the fact that I have ownership in this franchise is fuckin amazing. The fact that I have any ownership in this venue is fuckin amazing. Don't let them diminish your accomplishment or dim your shine." Jay-Z held up his middle finger.  
 40 Sixteen thousand middle fingers answered him.  
 There were times when he looked around at his life and thought he was getting away with murder.

Quelle: George Packer, The Unwinding – Thirty Years of American Decline (London: Faber & Faber, 2014), pp. 252-258.

### Annotations

- I. 2 hustler (infml) someone who makes money in any way they can or want
- I. 3 check here: monthly income
- I. 3 nine to five normal work schedule working from nine o'clock to five o'clock
- I. 8 hustle (infml) anything you need to do to make money
- I. 13 dope (slang) here: cool
- I. 22 back wages wages not yet paid
- I. 22 Bono, Quincy Jones famous musicians
- I. 23 philanthropic causes projects that help people in need
- I. 23 Forbes 400 a list with the 400 richest people in America
- II. 23-24 to carry on beef (slang) to have an argument or dispute, to diss
- I. 24 to hook up with (infml) to have a relationship with sb
- I. 25 to be due to be close to giving birth to her child
- I. 28 swag (slang) G.: beneidenswert lässig, cool
- I. 33 Nets Brooklyn Nets – a professional basketball team
- I. 41 to get away with murder to do sth. bad or illegal without being punished

### Hilfsmittel

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