Ice Cube

Voice of the Youth

Ice Cube is a rap pioneer. Ice Cube is a movie mogul. Ice Cube is talking shit to HUSTLER exclusively! Check it out, y'all.

PHOTOS BY LADI VON JANSKY

Since leaving the seminal gangsta rap group N.W.A. (short for Niggaz With Attitude) in 1989, Ice Cube can do no wrong. Starting with *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted*, his solo albums have gone platinum, and *Boys N the Hood* opened the door to prominent film roles in *Anaconda*, *Three Kings*, *Friday* and *xXx: State of the Union.* Now the heavy hitter in music and cinema does HUSTLER right by speaking his mind.

HUSTLER: What do you remember about your N.W.A. days?

ICE CUBE: My best memory was that we were doing something constructive. You know what I mean? There were so many things to get into that weren't constructive. I felt good that I was doing something that was not only fun, but also being a part of hip-hop and being respected. Even before N.W.A. it was about finding something to do. Because I grew up in an area [of South Central Los Angeles] where we used to have after-school programs. We used to have Little League. But as soon as I came of age, all those things started leaving the community. We were still into football and basketball, but the parks were closing, and things started to dwindle.

We were looking for more things to get into. You could either get into good shit or get into bad shit. Hip-hop was good even though adults didn't like it. It had a good energy. With N.W.A., I was around people that were making records. We had a style that we knew people in our neighborhood liked, but didn't know people would like around the world. So being West Coast rappers, we went for it! I still haven't come down off that cloud which has carried me on this journey. I'm still riding that same wave that started when I was 17 years old.

When you hear tracks from back in the day, do you recognize that younger version of yourself?

Yeah, totally. I listen to those old tracks, not often, but every now and then. My kids are getting into that kind of stuff now. I'm the same guy I hear on those cuts. Just a very young version of me. At 17 or 18 years old you only know 17 or 18 years' worth of shit. You know what I mean? Twenty years later you know more.

You've collaborated with Dr. Dre, but do you keep in touch with the other N.W.A. guys?

I talk to MC Ren and Yella. Every now and then we get on the phone and try to make things happen. Ren sent me some beats for my new album. Yella is thinking about putting a channel on the Internet network I got called UVN-TV [UVNTV.com]. You know, we keep in contact. We might do some business together in the future.

What was the groupie scene back then?

The groupie situation don't change. (*Laughs.*) They always the same. You got a group that people like, the women gonna be around. Period. I don't know if that will ever stop.

As a family man, how do you deal with groupies now?

I don't give a fuck about groupies no more! Them days is over. I've been in the game over 20 years, man. The whole scene is played out.

Why do you think white suburban kids love hip-hop?

It's the voice of the youth, and I think that's the draw. It's the voice for a kid who might not be able to sing or might not be able to play an instrument. Hip-hop gives them a chance to be a part of music. Rap gives them a chance to express themselves. That is the ingredient that brings all these different cultures together.

Are they drawn to the graphic lyrics?

The youth having a chance to express themselves in the most real and uncensored way possible is the key. When it comes to getting on TV or being in magazines—except HUSTLER, you can be yourself in HUSTLER—most of the world they want to suppress reality if it crosses a certain social line. It's all expression and how people feel. Profanity. Sex.

How did you make the initial transition into acting?

I wasn't even thinking about acting. That was the furthest thing from my mind. I had just left N.W.A. and was trying to get respect as a solo artist. I was just focused on trying to be the best MC in the world. I met John Singleton, who directed *Boyz N the Hood*, when he was just an intern at *The Arsenio Hall Show.* I was backstage, and he recognized me from being in N.W.A. I didn't have a recognizable face at the time, so I knew he had done his homework. He told me he was at USC film school and had a movie I would be perfect for. I was like, "Yeah, right. Sure kid."

Two years later here he come with a script asking me to try it. He had me audition. I was terrible because I hadn't ever read the script. He had me come in again. When I read the script and found out it was about how we grew up, I said, man, I can do this. It's easy. I like the filmmaking process. I like creating on that level. Once I got into it, I never got out.

Why do you think so many of your hip-hop contemporaries—such as Ice-T and Queen Latifah—got into acting?

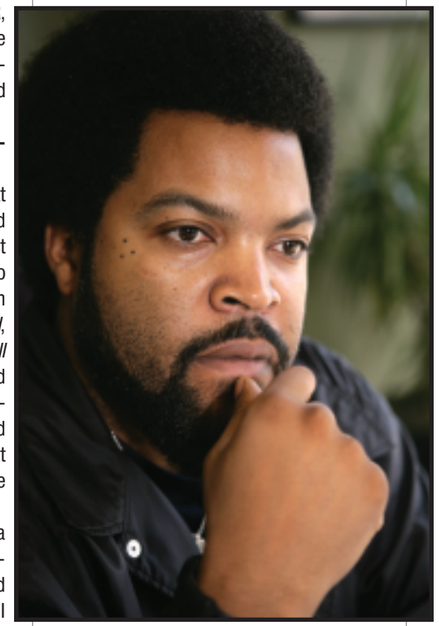
I think if you got the charisma, you should go for it. It's not like brain surgery. Anybody who has it can do it. You could. It's not the hardest thing in the world. You just got to have something that the camera likes or loves. Musicians before us have done it. You go to Frank Sinatra and Elvis [Presley] and on. People like your music and your personality, they might want to see you on the big screen.

What films are you most proud of?

Boyz N the Hood because it was my first film. *Friday* because it's the first one that I wrote and produced. Those two are closest to me. *Three Kings* I'm proud because it kind of took me to another level. *xXx* I'm proud of—*xXx: State of the Union* (*laughs*), not to be confused with the Vin Diesel *xXx* movie. That one also took me to another level as far as an actor and people accepting me as more than just a one-dimensional actor.

What was working on *Three Kings* like?

We worked outside of Phoenix in a place called Casa Grande, Arizona. Working out there with George Clooney, Mark Wahlberg, Spike Jonze and director David O. Russell was fun. I think we made an interesting movie. In shooting the movie, I was very confused by how out



of order we shot it. Sometimes I would ask, "Are we making a serious movie, or are we making a comedy?" There were all these comedic things happening in a serious frame. But when it all came together, it worked.

Any films you regret doing?

I mean, I don't think I should have done *Ghosts of Mars*. I don't like that movie. I'm a big fan of John Carpenter. The only reason I did it was because John Carpenter directed it, but they really didn't have the money to pull the special effects off. It was a movie that should have been done in 1979.

Ever turned down a role you should have taken?

I was offered *Menace II Society*, but I turned it down because I had just done *Boyz N the Hood* and *Trespass*. I didn't want to get stuck playing just characters from the hood. That's the only one I said, "Damn, that's a good movie; I wished I had been in."

As your acting career thrives, have you ever considered dropping Ice Cube and using your real name?

Nah, because that's mine. Ice Cube is for the public. You know what I mean? My real name is my real name, and that's for me. I don't want to give that.

Have you ever thought about leaving music behind?

Nah, music is my heart. First I did it from the heart. I didn't know I was going to make a quarter at it. I became rich and famous off the music. Now I can really do it again back from the heart because I don't have to sweat about the game the music business plays. I can just worry about Ice Cube fans that are down with the stuff that I do—give it to them and be happy with whatever I get back from that.

The movies have provided me with a cushion. It makes me a better artist because I'm not worrying about the things that most big artists are worrying about, which is making money back for the people that invested in it. I put out my own records with my own money.

Having appeared in mainstream family movies, how do you maintain street cred as a rapper?

Because in a movie I'm just an actor. In real life I'm me. People think if you do a certain type of movie that you're a certain type of person. People think: "Oh, [because] you did a family-friendly movie or comedy like *Barbershop*, you can't be hard." That ain't got nothing to do with me. That is a character I'm playing. To me hip-hop is reality.

A lot of people go to movies for a lot of different reasons. Poor people go to the movies to escape the shit they are going through. Why give it back to them when they get there? If I'm spending a hundred dollars or whatever it cost for me to take my family out, why would I go see the same shit that I can see in my neighborhood? I'm gonna go see something that pulls me away for a few hours. That's why people enjoy the movies, because it takes them away.

Are you really playing Kotter in a big-screen version of *Welcome Back Kotter*?

Yeah, there is a truth to that. I'm not going to be "up your nose with a rubber hose!" It's not that. If you remember the TV show, in 1979 even for a sitcom they talked about some real issues. They were dealing with

some kids that no one wanted to deal with.

Fast-forward: You take any situation in South Central Los Angeles, and you can have these same kind of kids. Our Sweathogs are dangerous. For real. No one wants to deal with these kids. You know what I mean?

We are bringing the movie to the future and putting a little twist on it. Purists may hate it, but I'm not going to do like a *Brady Bunch*-style spoof of it. I'm gonna do a real movie about a real teacher with some kids that are dangerous but likable and reachable. It's a dramedy to me. It's a drama in the way *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* is. It's not new slapstick-comedy. It's more or less old-school-cool comedy.

What's your beef with Oprah?

I ain't got no beef with Oprah! She got the beef with me.

What's that about?

She never told me. Maybe she'll tell you. (*Laughs.*) You need to get at her. It's just like she ain't fucking with me. That's cool. I ain't fucking with her neither. That's her problem, and the world may never know. (*Laughs.*)

Who are you backing this election year?

I want Obama to win simply because we need something new. We need a change. We don't need that same old same old. Those other candidates are not going to inspire me to do nothing than what I've been doing every day: Get up, go to work, worry about my family and the people I love. Right now it is time. Let's stop playing this bullshit game. Let's play it together and win. That's why we losing, because it's a team divided.

Can we play with your Yo-Yo?

Yeah, go on, take her! Shit! Do what you want with her. (*Laughs.*) Just send me 20 percent. (*Laughs.*)

What is your new CD like?

Raw Footage is just that. It's raw. It's not commercialized hip-hop. It's for your brain, not your booty, so to speak. It's for people that want insight into what's going on inside the community.

As one of rap's originators, do you get the respect you feel you deserve?

If you are talking about the people whose opinions I care about, then yeah, I get all the respect in the world. Fans, people in the industry, people that are into the culture? No problem. People that are into how many times are your videos being played and how many magazines are you in? Probably not.

Are you impressed by any new MCs?

I like what Kanye West and Lupe Fiasco are doing and where they are taking hip-hop. Those are good styles that are making hip-hop grow. It's not dying as people say just because the mainstream is not paying attention anymore. It's just back to where it came from—underground. In the '90s, mainstream took hip-hop and tried to play it out. Rap is something that can't die because it's the voice of the youth. There is always something to be said by somebody somewhere, and there's so many ways to say it now.

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