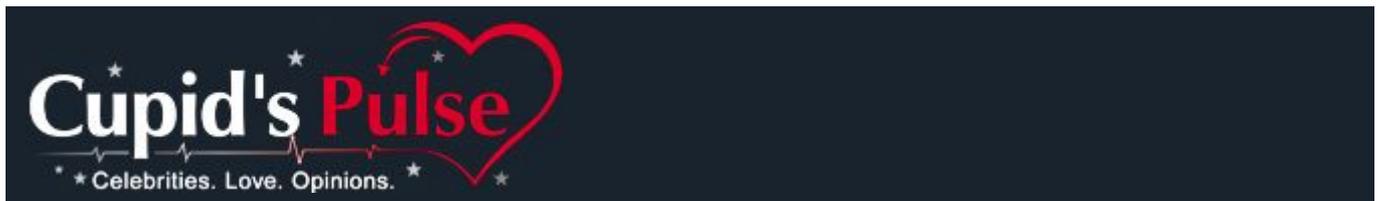


Jay-Z



An empire in and of himself, Jay-Z continues to prove that he is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, living rappers. It's clear that he not only views success in financial terms but in artistic terms as well. He's the epitome of a "rags to riches" story and has faced many hurdles in his rise to fame. Born Shawn Carter, he was the youngest of four children raised by a single mother and grew up in Brooklyn's Marcy Housing Projects. He attended Eli Whitney High School where he was classmates with legend Notorious B-I-G. While he was hustling the streets, he met rapper Jonathan Burks, who went by Jaz-0 and became a mentor for Jay-Z. Soon enough, he saw rap as his way out of the streets, and he became known as Jay-Z, a play on his childhood nickname "Jazzy" and a reference to the J/Z subway station near his Brooklyn home.

After releasing his third album *The Black Album*, he announced

he was retiring from rap due to lack of competition. During this break, he became the president of Def Jam Recordings and signed a slew of popular acts. He later resigned, complaining about the company's resistance to change, and took on many other projects, including becoming part-owner of the New Jersey Nets. Beginning in 2006, Jay-Z made his comeback to rap, releasing three albums: *Kingdom Come*, *American Gangster*, and *Blueprint 3*, which were, of course, all hits. In 2008, he signed a 150 million dollar contract with Live Nation and created a joint venture called Roc Nation, an entertainment company that handles all aspects of an artist's career.

Jay-Z, although a huge icon and mogul, is very protective of his private life. Before becoming the luckiest and most envied man in the world for marrying the beautiful and talented Beyonce Knowles, he dated the late singer Aaliyah in 1999. The [celebrity relationship](#) didn't last, and unfortunately, Aaliyah died two years later. He was rumored to be with Shenelle Scott in 2000, and tabloids have claimed that he's the father of her child. In 2002, the successful rapper met Queen B, and the rest is history. While dating, the pair was very hush-hush about their relationship and love. They were married on April 4, 2008 in New York City on the rapper's penthouse terrace. The famous couple welcomed a baby girl named Blue Ivy Carter in January 2012, and the family of three appear to be living happily ever after.