

THE CURRENT

M A G A Z I N E DOCUMENTING THE CULTURE AS IT HAPPENS

ISSUE 002

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\$9.99

BELLY GANG KUSHINGTON
THE NEW KID
ON THE BLOCK

WHAT IS MOVING

INSIDE ISSUE 002

The stories, shifts and people shaping the culture right now.

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LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

WE'RE NOT CHASING THE CULTURE. WE'RE DOCUMENTING IT.

Issue 002 moves THE CURRENT MAGAZINE from an idea into a standard. The mission remains simple: document the people, decisions and pressure points shaping music, business, beauty, sports and neighborhood culture while they are still happening. This issue is led by Belly Gang Kushington, an Atlanta voice whose rise reflects something the industry often forgets: momentum can arrive late, but purpose makes it durable. His story is not built on overnight mythology. It is built on lived experience, consistent records and the decision to leave one path behind for another.

Across these pages, we also look at Milwaukee's changing basketball identity, the debate over who controls the city's sound, the push to protect human creativity from synthetic music, and entrepreneurs turning attention into infrastructure. Each story serves the same objective - capture the moment, add context and leave a record.

THE CURRENT is not gossip without accountability and it is not promotion without substance. It is documentation with a point of view. The post may own the moment. The story owns the legacy.

OUR EDITORIAL STANDARD**VERIFY**

Names, dates and claims are checked before the story becomes part of the record.

CONTEXT

We explain why the moment matters instead of repeating the loudest reaction.

DOCUMENT

The people shaping the culture receive space to be understood, not reduced.

THE STORY IS THE LEGACY.

COVER STORY

Belly Gang Kushington: The New Kid on the Block

EDITORIAL PROFILE

ATLANTA'S NEXT TRAP VOICE



PHOTO: PROVIDED BY BELLY GANG KUSHINGTON

Belly Gang Kushington's rise is rooted in Adamsville, on Atlanta's west side, and in a life that existed long before the industry's attention arrived. Born Victor Thomas, he spent years releasing singles and building local recognition before a highway performance created the viral moment that introduced him to a much wider audience.

The attention worked because there was already a story behind it. His music carries the weight of family history, street experience, fatherhood and the decision to commit fully to a different future. That combination gives his records something marketing alone cannot manufacture: a point of view.

What separates a durable rise from a viral accident is preparation. Kushington had already spent years making records, learning his voice and building regional relationships before wider attention found him. The highway performance did not create the artist; it revealed work that was already underway.

The next phase requires control of the audience relationship. Streaming can identify where attention exists, but touring, direct merchandise, consistent visuals and dependable communication turn that attention into community. The operating priority is to protect the authenticity while building a professional system capable of supporting wider demand.

THE VIRAL MOMENT OPENED THE DOOR. THE STORY MADE PEOPLE STAY.

SOURCES: Atlanta Journal-Constitution, "Belly Gang Kushington makes strong case to be Atlanta's next trap star"; XXL 2026 Freshman profile.

COVER STORY

Belly Gang Kushington: The New Kid on the Block

THE DEBUT

THE STREETS IS YOURS



THE STREETS IS YOURS ARTWORK / LVRN

Released through LVRN, *The Streets Is Yours* introduced Kushington through a 14-track project without guest features. The choice placed the burden on his own voice, writing and personality. Rather than use a crowded guest list as a shortcut, the album centered his biography and Atlanta perspective.

The record reaches beyond traditional trap posturing. Songs such as *Sorry Mama* address abandonment and the emotional questions carried from childhood. The project also documents his shift away from street life and toward music, management and fatherhood. That vulnerability is the bridge between the

image and the person.

A feature-free debut is a statement of confidence and a commercial risk. It makes the artist responsible for every transition and emotional turn while giving the team a clear identity for future collaborations.

The debut gives the team a benchmark. Future releases can be measured against its writing, emotional range and Atlanta identity instead of chasing every new trend. A strong first chapter introduces the voice, establishes the stakes and leaves enough room for growth.

THE IMAGE GETS ATTENTION. VULNERABILITY BUILDS CONNECTION.

SOURCES: Atlanta Journal-Constitution interview and album reporting; LVRN release information.

COVER STORY

Belly Gang Kushington: The New Kid on the Block

MOMENTUM

THE NEW KID ON THE BLOCK



PHOTO: COURTESY DARIEL JOSEPH / AJC

The sequence tells the story: a debut album established the foundation; industry recognition expanded the platform; the 2026 XXL Freshman selection confirmed his place among the year's emerging voices; and new music kept the conversation moving.

Pitchfork's review of No Jewelry highlighted his ability to turn recognizable Atlanta scenes into memorable bars. That local specificity matters. The strongest regional artists do not erase where they come from to reach the world - they make the world understand the place that made them.

Kushington's next challenge is the same one every breakout artist faces: convert attention into a durable catalog, a live audience and a

business that can outlast the first wave of discovery.

The business opportunity now extends beyond streaming. Touring, direct merchandise, brand partnerships and disciplined release planning can turn recognition into leverage and momentum into a durable catalog.

Longevity will be measured by decisions made after the spotlight moves. Consistent releases, memorable performances and careful partnerships can convert recognition into a career. When the music, visual identity and business strategy carry the same message, momentum becomes an asset that can be managed.

THE NEXT MOVE IS NOT MORE ATTENTION. IT IS LONGEVITY.

SOURCES: XXL, Belly Gang Kushington 2026 Freshman; Pitchfork track review, "No Jewelry"; Atlanta Journal-Constitution profile.

THE TEA

The Game reopens The Documentary

WEST COAST CONVERSATION

THE GAME REOPENS THE DOCUMENTARY

A surprise third chapter, a Drake collaboration and another line drawn in hip-hop's longest-running debates.



PHOTO: ERIC GARCETTI / CC BY 2.0

The Game announced The Documentary III as the newest chapter in the catalog that first established him as a major West Coast voice. The release arrived with renewed attention around No Brakes, a collaboration featuring Drake.

The record immediately became more than a song. Listeners interpreted portions of it through the unresolved Drake-Kendrick Lamar conflict and The Game's complicated position inside West Coast rap. That is the modern attention cycle: a release, a lyric and an old relationship can merge into one larger cultural argument.

Beyond the controversy, the album presents a

business question. Legacy artists must honor the catalog that built their audience while still creating a reason for current listeners to care. A familiar title can open the door, but the new music must justify the return.

The Documentary name carries expectations created by an album that helped define a generation of West Coast rap. Reusing it creates awareness, but it also invites direct comparison with the original.

What happens next will be measured after the opening conversation fades. The strongest campaign will use history as context while allowing the new chapter to establish an identity that can stand beyond controversy.

HISTORY OPENS THE DOOR. THE NEW MUSIC MUST EARN THE NEXT CHAPTER.

SOURCES: Complex coverage of The Documentary III announcement and the Drake-assisted "No Brakes."

WHO'S TRENDING

YKNiece turns momentum into position

FRESHMAN MOMENTUM

YKNIECE: BUILT FOR THE MOMENT

The Atlanta artist is converting personality, collaborations and visibility into a position that can last.



PHOTO: XXL

YKNiece entered the 2026 XXL Freshman class with momentum already working in her favor. Her presence alongside Belly Gang Kushington on Friend Do (Remix) connected two rising Atlanta stories and showed how collaboration can accelerate discovery without erasing individuality.

Her appeal is not based on one metric. It combines recognizable personality, direct records and an image that translates quickly across clips, performances and social platforms. That combination matters in an industry where audiences often meet the person before they hear the complete project.

The next stage is conversion: turning viral

familiarity into repeat listeners, ticket buyers and a catalog people return to after the trend moves on. Being seen is the opening. Building a reason to stay is the business.

Freshman recognition creates a temporary spotlight, not a permanent position. Follow-up records, strong visuals, live performance and an owned audience determine whether attention becomes leverage.

The practical move is a release calendar connecting music, performance and personality to an owned destination. That structure can carry YKNiece's energy after the algorithm turns toward somebody else.

VISIBILITY CREATES THE MOMENT. STRUCTURE BUILDS THE CAREER.

SOURCES: XXL, YKNiece 2026 Freshman profile; Billboard 2026 female rappers coverage.

CURRENT SPORTS

Milwaukee enters life after Giannis

MILWAUKEE BASKETBALL

LIFE AFTER GIANNIS

The Bucks face a new identity while the city prepares for an emotional homecoming.



PHOTO: MHCL947 / CC BY-SA 4.0

Milwaukee is entering a basketball season unlike any in the modern Bucks era. After Giannis Antetokounmpo was traded to Miami, the organization moved from building around a franchise cornerstone to defining what comes next. New responsibilities now fall across the roster, front office and coaching staff.

The most emotional date on the schedule is January 28, when Giannis and his former teammate return to Milwaukee. The game will carry competitive stakes, but its larger meaning is historical. Championships, community investment and years of shared identity cannot be reduced to a transaction.

For the Bucks, the operational challenge is

clear: respect the past without living inside it. The next era needs its own leaders, its own style and a credible plan for returning to contention.

A superstar departure changes more than the box score. Milwaukee must manage the basketball transition and public confidence while honoring the history that established the standard.

Milwaukee must identify its long-term core, define a sustainable style and communicate a credible direction. Fans can accept a difficult transition when leadership explains the standard and the plan.

HONOR THE LEGACY. BUILD WHAT COMES NEXT.

SOURCES: NBA.com official 2026-27 schedule coverage and reporting on stars returning to former teams.

BEHIND THE GAME

The fight to prove music is human

MUSIC AND TECHNOLOGY

CERTIFIED HUMAN

As synthetic music grows, independent artists may have to prove that the person behind the record is real.

3 LABELS

HUMAN • HYBRID • AI

Rap Fame introduced a Safety Shield program that classifies tracks as Certified Human, Human + AI or AI-made. Fully generated songs must be disclosed and are excluded from standard competitions and cash prizes. The policy treats selective technology use differently from prompting an entire performance into existence.

That distinction is becoming critical. Artists already use technology for editing, mixing, mastering, artwork and idea development. The real threat is not every tool; it is deception, impersonation, fraudulent streams and synthetic competition that removes human work from the marketplace.

For independent artists, documentation will

become part of protection. Session files, stems, publishing records, metadata and clear credits can establish provenance when a voice or song is copied. In the next music economy, authenticity may need evidence.

The policy question is whether listeners, collaborators and platforms were told the truth. Dated sessions, stems, split sheets, vocal takes and licenses can protect the human record.

Independent creators should register compositions and master ownership promptly while documenting every artificial tool used in the process. Organized proof protects authenticity, royalties and the catalog.

AUTHENTICITY WILL NEED EVIDENCE.

SOURCES: Rap Fame Safety Shield announcement; Spotify transparency and verification updates; Reuters/AP reporting on AI music chart rules.

CURRENT BEAUTY

Jackie Aina plays the long game

BEAUTY TO BUSINESS

JACKIE AINA: THE LONG GAME

The creator who challenged beauty standards is turning audience trust into ownership and long-term value.



OFFICIAL PHOTO: FORVR MOOD

Jackie Aina's influence was never limited to makeup tutorials. She built her position by asking questions the beauty industry preferred to avoid: Who gets represented? Who gets overlooked? And who participates in the business once Black consumers create the demand?

Her early content exposed gaps in foundation shades, product development and marketing. She did more than criticize brands. She demonstrated that Black women were informed consumers whose expectations could influence product decisions. That credibility created a community that trusted her judgment because she consistently addressed problems its members experienced firsthand.

Her career also shows how a creator can mature without abandoning the audience that created the opportunity. Beauty opened the door, while

lifestyle content, entrepreneurship and ownership expanded the business. Recognition from the TIME100 Creators list confirmed what her supporters already understood: longevity is built by evolving the platform while protecting the voice that made it matter.

Through FORVR Mood, Aina moved from promoting other companies to building an asset of her own. Manufacturing, distribution and customer retention determine whether influence becomes a sustainable company.

Strategic partnerships should expand manufacturing, retail access and customer acquisition without removing the founder from the value created. Cultural influence becomes economic power when support is organized and sustained.

THE PLATFORM BUILT THE AUDIENCE. OWNERSHIP BUILT THE LEGACY.

SOURCES: TIME100 Creators: Jackie Aina; FORVR Mood founder story; Business Insider founder profile; PEOPLE interview on originality and entrepreneurship.

MODELS MAKING MOVES

Anok Yai turns resilience into power

FASHION AS A STATEMENT

ANOK YAI: POWER IN MOTION

The model continues to turn visibility, health adversity and creative risk into cultural authority.



PHOTO: TIME

Anok Yai's 2026 Met Gala appearance used fashion as narrative. Working with Balenciaga, she presented a Black Madonna-inspired look designed to communicate mystique, resilience and hope. The moment carried additional weight after she disclosed a congenital lung condition and robotic surgery.

Her career reflects a larger shift in modeling. The strongest modern models are not only faces selected to carry a garment. They are collaborators, storytellers and public figures whose perspective can influence how a campaign is understood.

Moving from representation to power means

having agency over the message, the partnerships and the future. Yai's work shows how image can become language when the person wearing it understands what the moment should say.

The next frontier is ownership beyond the booking. Creative direction, production, licensing, brand equity and investment allow visibility to become infrastructure.

Models with cultural reach can negotiate creative input, licensing participation and opportunities behind the camera. Representation opens the door, but ownership determines who keeps the value.

THE IMAGE OPENS THE DOOR. OWNERSHIP CHANGES THE FUTURE.

SOURCES: Vogue, Anok Yai 2026 Met Gala profile; Business of Fashion career profile.

STREET STORIES

Who gets to control Milwaukee's sound?

MILWAUKEE MUSIC

WHO CONTROLS THE SOUND?

An alleged no-play directive involving Black artists and Milwaukee rap forces a larger conversation.



IMAGE: THE GARAGE - MILWAUKEE, WI

A Milwaukee bar faced backlash after leaked messages appeared to direct DJs not to play a list of artists, including Milwaukee rappers and major Black hip-hop performers. Local artists described the alleged restriction as disrespectful to the same culture often used to attract customers.

The facts must remain separated from assumptions: the reporting centers on messages attributed to management and the public response that followed. But the issue reaches beyond one venue. DJs, promoters, owners and audiences all participate in deciding what music receives space in the city.

Milwaukee rap cannot grow if it is welcomed

only when convenient and excluded when decision-makers become uncomfortable. Local culture needs stages, playlists and venues willing to support it consistently - not just when the image can be monetized.

Milwaukee needs transparent venue standards that address conduct and safety without treating an entire genre, city or racial identity as the problem.

A workable path begins with written standards that apply to every genre and audience. Access becomes more stable when the culture owns part of the rooms, production and promotion infrastructure.

LOCAL MUSIC NEEDS LOCAL ROOMS.

SOURCES: TMJ4 reporting on leaked messages and local artist responses. Allegations are attributed and not presented as adjudicated fact.

WHAT THEY MISSED

Bronzeville and Black Arts Fest MKE

THE CULTURE WAS OUTSIDE

BRONZEVILLE SHOWED UP

Black Arts Fest MKE and Bronzeville Week put music, fashion, food, history and enterprise in the same public space.



IMAGE: BLACK ARTS FEST MKE

Milwaukee's cultural calendar delivered more than entertainment. Black Arts Fest MKE and Bronzeville Week created space for performance, visual art, fashion, literature, food, wellness and local vendors while connecting current creativity to the neighborhood's historical identity.

These gatherings matter because culture needs physical places. Online visibility can spread a clip, but a festival creates contact between artists, families, businesses, elders and the next generation. Vendors test products, performers meet new audiences and organizations turn awareness into relationships.

What people may have missed is the economic layer. Every booth, stage and partnership is part of a local cultural market. Supporting the event means supporting the businesses and institutions that keep the neighborhood visible after the tents come down.

The impact grows when event traffic becomes year-round relationships, follow-up sales, booking contacts and documented value for the community.

Organizers can publish vendor directories, capture professional media, track attendance and create follow-up opportunities. A festival proves demand; a year-round network turns it into neighborhood value.

CULTURE CREATES THE MOMENTUM. COMMUNITY SHOULD KEEP THE VALUE.

SOURCES: City of Milwaukee event listings and Common Council Bronzeville Week announcements.

BOSS MOVES / HUSTLE TO BUSINESS

Stormi Steele and Angelique Sharpe

BOSS MOVES

FROM SERUM TO SCALE



PHOTO: PROVIDED

Stormi Steele founded Canvas Beauty in 2018 around Hair Blossom Serum and expanded the company across hair, body and fragrance. Her path demonstrates what happens when a founder treats one successful product as the opening move rather than the finish line. The strategic lesson is disciplined expansion: build demand, understand the customer, strengthen operations and then extend the brand into adjacent categories. Visibility may introduce a company, but infrastructure determines whether it survives growth. For emerging founders, the important takeaway is not to copy the product. Study the sequence. Steele built around a clear customer problem, used direct response to understand demand and allowed the audience to see the founder behind the company. Expansion worked because the original offer had already earned trust. Growth without that foundation can multiply expenses faster than revenue.

A PRODUCT CAN TREND. A SYSTEM CAN SCALE.

HUSTLE TO BUSINESS

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AT EVERY STAGE

Milwaukee educator and prosperity strategist Angelique 'MsLadyInc' Sharpe is using her role as Entrepreneur-in-Residence at the Milwaukee Public Library to teach business principles that are often missing from traditional conversations. Her message reaches young people, parents and first-time founders: the starting point may differ, but the need for structure does not. Moving from hustle to business requires clear pricing, records, customer follow-up, legal organization and repeatable systems. Passion may open the door, but sustainability comes from knowing the numbers and building beyond one person's daily labor. The library setting matters because it lowers the barrier to entry. Practical business education becomes available in a familiar public institution instead of behind an expensive conference ticket. That access can help a side hustle become a registered operation, a reliable income stream and eventually an employer inside the same neighborhood that produced the idea.



PHOTO: PROVIDED

FROM HUSTLE TO OPERATION

SIX SYSTEMS THAT BUILD A BUSINESS

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 01 DEFINE THE OFFER | 02 PRICE FOR PROFIT |
| 03 DOCUMENT THE BUSINESS | 04 BUILD CUSTOMER FOLLOW-UP |
| 05 PROTECT OWNERSHIP | 06 REINVEST WITH DISCIPLINE |

SOURCES: ESSENCE: Stormi Steele on scaling Canvas Beauty; Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service: Angelique Sharpe and entrepreneurship at every stage.

THE MARKETPLACE

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THE REAL • THE TRUTH • THE CULTURE

CODE RED

**THIS IS NOT CONTENT.
THIS IS DOCUMENTATION.**

CODE RED delivers unfiltered, in-depth interviews with artists, entrepreneurs and cultural voices. The platform gives the people who shaped the story room to explain the work, the sacrifice and the lessons in their own words.

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