

## **Just Leave, Ray** *By Bomani Jones*

On Friday, Ray “Benzino” Scott, co-owner of ‘The Source’ and struggling rapper, announced he would be resigning his position with the magazine and selling his share of the publication. Four days later, reports surfaced that he was going to stay and that announcing that he was quitting was prompted by the threat of a lawsuit. “If me leaving ‘The Source’ is gonna help the magazine then I’ll do it,” he said in an interview with AllHipHop.com announcing his resignation. “‘The Source’ is an institution and is part of history; I want my kids and grandkids to enjoy the No. 1 Hip-Hop magazine for all time.”

Were that the case, he would have left long ago. On board or off, he will go down as the man that killed the biggest name in hip hop journalism.

Things went wrong for the “co-owner and visionary”—that’s his title on the masthead--of ‘The Source’ began with his [campaign against Eminem](#) in the December 2002 issue of the magazine. Interscope Records, Em’s label, responded by pulling all advertising and not allowing its artists to grant interviews with the magazine. Interscope hit ‘The Source’ where it hurts—the bank book. Issues got smaller each month, and the content became spiteful toward anyone that ever took issue with ‘The Source.’ Rappers took shots from it, but even journalists—most of whom once worked for ‘The Source’—were victims of Ray’s wrath. What was once the “Bible” of hip hop began to read like a teenager’s blog, one that railed against anyone with whom Benzino took umbrage. Behind the scenes, ‘The Source’ was coming late payroll, took ridiculous amounts of time to pay freelance writers, and was slapped with a lawsuit by two employees, former editor-in-chief Kim Osorio and former vice president of marketing Michelle Joyce, for “committing gender discrimination, sexual harassment and unlawful retaliation against women.”

Ray contends that the rap game is corrupt and controlled by corporations in ways that keep down the little guys with whom he identifies. He’s right. Music defies conventional wisdom; in this era of media conglomeration and payola, bull---- music will talk if the money walks. Ray went afoul by trying to use crooked journalism to counteract dirty business. Instead being a mix of Don Quixote and Robin Hood, he behaved no better, if not worse, than the evil he claimed to be fighting.

Incredulously, he overestimated his sway in the music industry. Jimmy Iovine, CEO of Interscope, has longer bread than him, and big bank will always take little bank. His bigger error, though, was that he did not understand the business of journalism. A magazine is nothing if readers do not trust its veracity and dedication to objective truths. By not even pretending to be neutral, Ray hit himself back pocket, making him and ‘The Source’ losers on all fronts.

‘The Source’s’ credibility is tattered, and that won’t reappear if Ray leaves. After all, Dave Mays, the co-owner of the magazine that let all of this take place and [jeopardized ‘The Source’s’ credibility before](#), is still around. Somehow, Mays has been spared

criticism—even from Eminem, who dissed Osorio, not Mays, on “We All Die Someday”—but being present while this went on either means he was down for the cause or lacked the backbone to make it stop. The former makes him no better than Benzino, and the latter makes him worse.

Whether Benzino leaves or not, the effects of the last two years will be lasting. By losing access to Interscope’s artists, ‘XXL’ became ‘Aftermath Monthly,’ highlighted by a six month stretch in between 2003 and 2004 when Shady/Aftermath artists were on the cover four times. The mainstream white press—particularly ‘Rolling Stone’—still writes about hip hop voyeuristically. ‘The Source’ was the first magazine to hit newsstands to write about hip hop without its writers sounding like they were visiting the zoo, observing foreign, animalistic behavior from the opposite side of a cage. ‘XXL’ is not guilty of this, but its obvious symbiosis with Interscope makes some of its material questionable. As things stand, there are hardly any mainstream publications with reputable material on rap music.

Perhaps the saddest part of this situation is that it is unquestionable that Benzino loves hip hop. While his inability to rap is lampooned from every direction, that he’s rapped and done his own beats for nearly twenty years shows the dedication he has to rap. There may have never been a bigger fan in charge of a hip hop magazine, something that could have given ‘The Source’ a fresh perspective. Instead, it morphed from being the vanguard of its industry to the diary of a bitter never-was because of his shortsightedness.

Whether he stays or goes, that damage that caused will never be repaired.

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