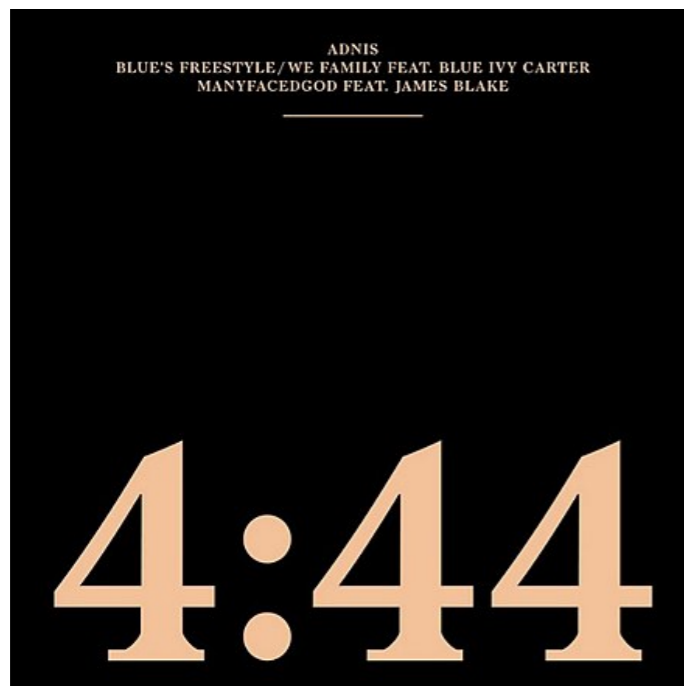
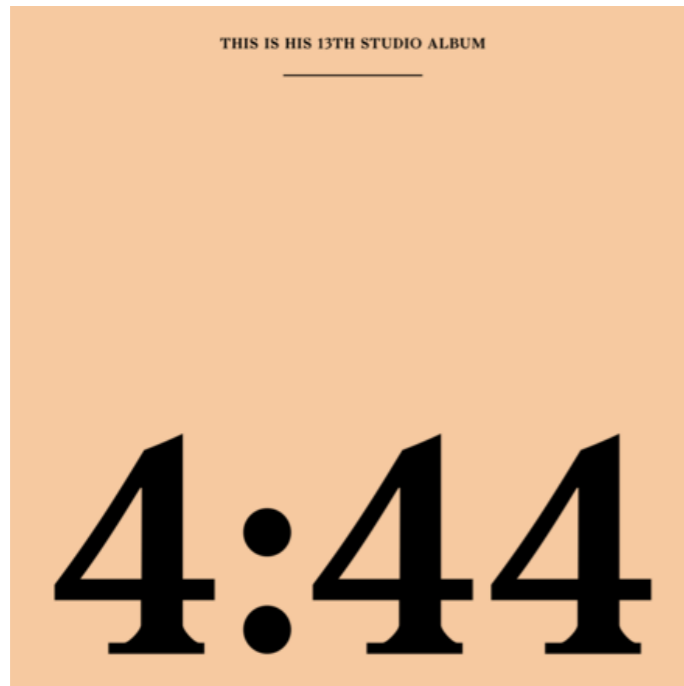


Thinking on 4:44 [DWR, 7.7.17]



There is little room for debate in pointing to JAY Z's new album as important. The tight, ten-track release – with a bonus three cuts on CD and vinyl – presents as watershed because of popular attending to the vulnerability put center, and because of JAY Z's deep Black identities that anchor the long play. Bluntly, mainstream isn't used to the complexity of adult men of color outlining mistakes, assuming responsibility, and maintaining fidelity to their Culture in ways that remain unapologetic while also apologizing to those they've hurt. This humanness is publicly relegated to a special-whiteness. So then, when a Black man occupies this human touch he becomes a novelty, ironically objectified with his break from typical objectification and reduction to stereotype.

No doubt, JAY is a special one. He is a master artist, a clever businessman and has effectively worked the angles to become iconic without being a clown. The strength of 4:44 is not in the trappings, rather it's in the letting go. The sub-sixty-minute narrative wins as a statement of psychological balance. It is a release of the shame assumed in trying to fit to that special-whiteness, in performance to the respectability gaze that has us tapping to a rhythm that is not our own. Producer No I.D. pivots from Nina Simone to Donny Hathaway to Stevie Wonder and other thick soul samples as a blueprint for freedom fighting, allowing JAY Z the space to take deep breaths and to be.

Being is the album's achievement. It serves as testament to other, ordinarily complex Black selves that are shuffled into oblivion when not highlighted as celebrity.

The JAY Z 4:44 LP is made up of lyricism that articulates the regular and production that embraces it. The album is important because it demonstrates a strength to love one's whole self. It is defiant enough show that we are enough, and in that there is freedom.