Lupe Fiasco has become one of rap’s most interesting characters. Whether it’s a dispute with the record label playing out in the public eye or dramatic political mindsets, (being an early and vocal advocate of Occupy Wall Street, performing on BET while wearing a Palestinian flag, calling the President “the biggest terrorist” in an interview) the story is always about more than the music. To many, that is the appeal of “Cool Young Lu”. If you are a fan of the edgy and bold approach of Lupe Fiasco, then Food & Liquor II: The Great American Rap Album Part I won’t disappoint. I’m not kidding... that’s the name of the album.

Lupe continues tradition and lets his sister, Ayesha, introduce the album. She does a brilliant job of foreshadowing the themes that appear later in the album with slam poetry and addresses topics such as terrorism, corruption, Egypt, racism, sexism, and gang life, just to name a few.

The biggest strength of the album by far is the sharp delivery of Lupe’s strong lyrics. The album is built to spark conversation from the bold content and it certainly gets you thinkin’. Regardless of what goes on with Lupe behind the scenes with his somewhat questionable antics, there is no doubting the fact that he can make some thought provoking music.

A perfect example of Fiasco’s lyrical artistry is on the track “Bitch Bad.” In this song, Lupe is somehow able to surmise the culture of the word “Bitch” and how it contributes to the altered perception of women. Fiasco even blames the rap community he comes from for embracing this stereotype. The most memorable line from the song is echoed within the chorus, “Bitch bad, woman good, Lady better, they misunderstood” and eloquently captures the essence of the song. “Lamborghini Angels” is another hard song with a message. On this track Fiasco tackles the issues of American materialism, the War in Afghanistan, and religion all in one swoop.

Not everything on this great American rap sequel spells gloom and doom. “Hood Now” is one of the spotlight tracks on the album and offers a look into the progression of African American culture. From
pop culture to politics, Fiasco highlights the successes of the African American community despite centuries of oppression. Fiasco even acknowledges President Obama taking the White House as a major accomplishment although openly not being a fan of the man.

The content seems a bit too heavy for the production at times and it is easy to get overwhelmed by political theory and radical opinion. If you’re feeling a bit bogged down by some of the intense themes, my recommendation is to give “Battle Scars” a listen. Some may critique this track as a reach for radio with its poppy sound and even using the all too common “love is a battlefield” metaphor, but hey… it’s a catchy tune. “Battle Scars” definitely stands out from the rest of the album simply because it is so different. Lupe’s smooth lyrical delivery accompanied by the vocal stylings of Guy Sebastian in the hook makes for an epic collaboration and it’s definitely worth a listen… it’ll be stuck in your head in no time.

Although I applaud the lyrical creativity of Food & Liquor II, it is far from a perfect album. While tracks like “Bitch Bad” are incredible conceptually, the rest falls short. The musicality of many tracks just isn’t up to par and the beats are an inharmonious match with their lyrical counterparts. While it is an album that can be appreciated under careful analysis, the casual listener may tune out.

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Rating: 3.5 out of 5