

= American Life ( song ) =

" American Life " is a song by American singer @-@ songwriter Madonna . It is the title track from her ninth studio album American Life ( 2003 ) , and was released digitally as the lead single from the album on April 8 , 2003 by Maverick Records . It was written and produced by Madonna and Mirwais Ahmadzaï ; the lyrics to " American Life " feature violent transitions and a political and religious view from Madonna . She questions the shallowness of modern life and the American dream under President George W. Bush 's conservative watch . Towards the end of the song , Madonna raps naming the people who were working for her .

" American Life " was panned by music critics , with Billboard criticizing Madonna 's rapping , and Blender naming it as the ninth worst song of all time . Despite receiving mostly negative reviews from music commentators , " American Life " reached number one in Canada , Denmark , Italy , Japan and Switzerland , and the top ten in Australia , where the song was certified gold by the Australian Recording Industry Association ( ARIA ) . However , the song peaked at number 37 in the US Billboard Hot 100 , staying in the chart for eight weeks , while it debuted and peaked at number two on the UK Singles Chart .

Two music videos were shot for the song , both directed by Swedish director Jonas Åkerlund . The first one featured Madonna at a military @-@ themed fashion show , cavorting with a brigade of female soldiers and in the end , she throws a hand grenade at George W. Bush . Prior its release , it caused controversy regarding its political , racial , violence and religious views , leading Madonna to release a statement explaining its concept . After the invasion of Iraq started , Madonna cancelled the release of the original music video , because of the political climate of the country at the time , and released an alternative version , featuring her in front of a backdrop of flags from around the world . The song was performed during promotion for American Life in 2003 and on the Re @-@ Invention World Tour ( 2004 ) .

= = Background and release = =

" American Life " was written and produced by Madonna and Mirwais Ahmadzaï . " I could be having a guitar lesson and something will just come to me , " the former observed . " Or Mirwais will send me over music ? rough stuff that doesn 't have an arrangement : basic chord progressions . ' American Life ' itself came about like that . " In April 2003 , Madonna discussed her motivations behind " American Life " with VH1 while talking about her experience in the music industry . She stated " I look back at the 20 years behind me and I realized that a lot of things that I 'd valued weren 't important " , in response to the non @-@ materialistic themes of the record . Discussing the album , Madonna said about " American Life " :

" [ The song ] was like a trip down memory lane , looking back at everything I 've accomplished and all the things I once valued and all the things that were important to me . What is my perspective now ? I 've fought for so many things , I 've tried so hard to be number one and to stay on top , to look good , to be the best . And I realized that a lot of things that last and the things that matter are none of those things . "

To counter illegal Internet downloads of the song both before and after the single 's release , Madonna 's associates created a number of false song files of similar length and size . Some of these files delivered a brief message from Madonna saying " What the fuck do you think you 're doing ? " followed by minutes of silence . However , the song leaked online one day before its official premiere . " American Life " premiered on March 25 , 2003 , through AOL . The song was released in the United States on April 8 , 2003 . " American Life " went on sale two days later , through digital services Liquid Audio , RioPort , and also through Madonna 's website in MP3 format .

= = Composition and lyrics = =

Starting with Madonna 's voice multi @-@ tracked questioning ? " Am I gonna be a star ? " , "

Should I change my name ? " ? the lyrics develop into what Rikky Rooksby of The Complete Guide to the Music of Madonna states is a complaint about modern @-@ day life . She also questions the shallowness of modern life and the " American dream . " " I know it sounds clichéd , " she admitted . " But I 've had 20 years of fame and fortune , and I feel that I have the right to an opinion on what it is and isn 't . All everyone is obsessed about now is being a celebrity . I 'm saying that 's bullshit , and who knows better than me ? Before it happens , you have all kinds of notions about how wonderful celebrity is and how much joy it 's going to bring you . Then you arrive ... In America , more than any other place in the world , you have the freedom to be anything you want to be . Which is all well and good , but it only works if you have a value system ? and we seem not to have one anymore . It 's , ' Whatever it takes to get to the top , that 's what you gotta do . ' It 's the allure of the beautiful life : ' Look like this , you 're gonna be happy . Drive this car , you 're gonna be popular . Wear these clothes and people are gonna want to fuck you . ' It 's a very powerful illusion and people are caught up in it , including myself . Or I was . "

After three minutes , Madonna performs a rap naming the people who are working for her . Basically , we [ she and Ahmadzaï ] had recorded the whole song and we had this instrumental thing at the end , " said Madonna , " and Mirwais was like , ' You know what , you have to go and do a rap . ' And I was like , ' Get out of here , I don 't rap . ' And he was like , ' Yeah you do . Just go in there , just do it . ' He totally encouraged me . I had nothing planned , nothing written , and he just told me to do stream @-@ of @-@ consciousness , whatever I was thinking . Because I was always drinking soy lattes in the studio , and I drive my Mini Cooper to the studio , I was just like , ' OK , let me just talk about the things that I like . ' So I went and it was just total improv and obviously it was sloppy at first , but I got out all my thoughts and then I wrote everything down that I said and then I perfected the timing of it . So it was totally spontaneous . "

The repeated acoustic guitar riff " adds a touch of pathos " to the song , according to biographer Carol Gnojewski . The lyrics accompany a " punchy octave synth figure " synchronized with a drum and bass beat . " American Life " is written in the time signature of common time with a moderate tempo of 102 beats per minute . It is composed in the key of F @-@ sharp minor with Madonna 's voice spanning from C3 to B4 .

= = Critical reception = =

" American Life " was met with generally negative reception from music critics . Sal Cinquemani from Slant Magazine labeled it a " trite , self @-@ aggrandizing and often awkward song about privilege " and a " dour and robotic " track . Stylus Magazine gave a negative review and said that when one of the world 's richest women complains about commercialism and the emptiness of entertainment culture , it seems hypocritical rather than insightful . He also noted that in the song , she 's raging against the life she herself is leading .

Chuck Taylor of Billboard gave a negative review for the song , criticizing Madonna 's rapping and calling the song " a blurry snarl of style and composition that 's sounds more like a disjointed medley than a song . " Alexis Petridis from The Guardian was disappointed by the lyrics saying that " what on earth might her extreme point of view involve ? That the world is ruled by a shadowy cabal of super @-@ intelligent lizards ? ... Sadly not . Her extreme point of view turns out to be that money can 't buy you happiness and that fame isn 't all it 's cracked up to be . " He also panned the lyric " I like to express my extreme point of view " , saying that it 's difficult to hear that line without feeling a prickle of excitement .

Entertainment Weekly called the song a list of celeb perks : trainer , butler , assistant , three nannies , a bodyguard or five . It seems , at first , not like the clever self @-@ twitting she clearly intended , but rather a facile confirmation of her haters ' conviction : that the middle @-@ aged Madonna does not have a worldview beyond her next Pilates appointment . In 2004 , Blender magazine listed the song at number nine on the list of the 50 Worst Songs Ever , stating that Madonna " updates the ' Material Girl ' -era satire of commercialism and spiritual emptiness ... with what is hands @-@ down the most embarrassing rap ever recorded . Nervous and choppy , she makes Debbie Harry sound as smooth as Jay @-@ Z . " The magazine also said that the worst

moment of the song is when after rapping , Madonna sings ' Nothing is what it seems ' with no profundity . Stephen Thompson of The A.V. Club considered the song to be " jittery , tuneless , and shallow to the point of self @-@ parody " .

= = Chart performance = =

" American Life " debuted at number 90 on the US Billboard Hot 100 on the week of April 5 , 2003 . A few weeks later on April 26 , 2003 , the song peaked at number 37 , being the greatest gainer song of that week . In Canada , the song peaked at number one on the singles chart . In Australia , " American Life " debuted at its peak of number seven , during the week of April 24 , 2003 . In the following week , the song began its decline , and experienced a total chart trajectory of eight weeks . The song was certified Gold by the Australian Recording Industry Association ( ARIA ) . In the New Zealand , the song peaked at number 33 , and remained on the chart for one week . On the UK Singles Chart , " American Life " debuted at its peak of number two on the week of April 26 , 2003 .

On April 27 , 2003 , " American Life " debuted at number seven on the Ö3 Austria Top 40 chart , spending a total of 11 weeks in the chart . The song achieved moderate chart positions in both the Flemish and Wallonian territories in Belgium , peaking at numbers 12 and 10 , respectively . Making its debut at number 61 , " American Life " charted for a total of 11 weeks in France and peaked at number 10 , before falling out on July 6 , 2003 . The song was certified Silver by the Syndicat National de l'Édition Phonographique ( SNEP ) . On the Dutch Top 40 chart , the song made its debut at number 34 . The following week it rose to number 21 and peaked at number 4 , before the ending of its eleven @-@ week run . On April 24 , 2003 , " American Life " debuted at number three on the Swedish Singles Chart . Similarly in Switzerland , the song debuted at number one on the Swiss Singles Chart , spending 13 weeks on the chart . In Germany , the song peaked at number 10 .

= = Music videos = =

There are two different music videos for " American Life " , the first of which was not released by Madonna . It was shot in the first week of February 2003 at Los Angeles Center Studios in Los Angeles , California by Swedish director Jonas Åkerlund , who worked with Madonna in the videos for " Ray of Light " ( 1998 ) and " Music " ( 2000 ) . Madonna had the idea for the music video in November 2002 , then she and Åkerlund developed the idea to make an anti @-@ war and anti @-@ fashion mini @-@ movie . With " American Life " , she took her music videos to a different level by focusing on war , politics and , according to media interpretation , the then @-@ upcoming invasion of Iraq . " It is an antiwar statement ... " she subsequently clarified , " but it 's not necessarily against this war . At any given moment there 's at least 30 wars going on in this world and I 'm against all of them . " Shortly after it was filmed , Warner Bros. Records released a statement regarding the music video : " [ The video ] expresses a panoramic view of our culture and looming war through the view of a female superhero portrayed by Madonna . Starting as a runway show of couture army fatigues , the fashion show escalates into a mad frenzy depicting the catastrophic repercussions and horrors of war . " An exclusive sneak peek of the video was available on VH1 's program Backstage at the Grammys .

The video begins with several male and female models dressed up as soldiers on a fashion runway , wearing military garb and gas masks with one male model sports a shirt that reads " Fashion Victim " while it is inter @-@ cut with scenes of Madonna singing in front of a black background . In the second chorus , middle @-@ eastern children are seen walking on the runway , and being bullied by the soldier models . During the bridge , Madonna and her group prepare to enter the runway in a restroom , while she carves " Protect Me " on the partition of a stall and dances angrily with them to the song . The women also are seen dancing in front of surveillance cameras . When the rap section starts , Madonna is seen crashing into the show driving a Mini Cooper and pummel the photographers with an industrial @-@ strength water hose , while rapping and dancing on top of the car with her gang . In the end of the video , Madonna frantically drives out of the runway into the

amused audience , and pull a hand grenade with her teeth and then throws it to George W. Bush , and the video ends with him using it to light up his cigar .

Due to the political climate of the country at the time , on April 1 , 2003 , Madonna pulled the video and released a statement explaining why : " I have decided not to release my new video . It was filmed before the war started and I do not believe it is appropriate to air it at this time . Due to the volatile state of the world and out of sensitivity and respect to the armed forces , who I support and pray for , I do not want to risk offending anyone who might misinterpret the meaning of this video . " After pulling the original video , it was then released an edited version that premiered on April 16 , 2003 on VH1 , immediately after a special program called Madonna Speaks . This version features Madonna singing in front of a backdrop of ever @-@ changing flags of different countries .

In 2005 , a director cut of the video leaked onto the Internet . It shows heavier scenes , like wounded and maimed soldiers , war scenes , images of poverty and death . In 2010 , Slant Magazine placed this alternate video on the nineteenth place of decade 's fifty best music videos list , stating : " It isn 't like either the video 's message about viewing war as a form of popular entertainment or its striking , loaded images leave much room for misinterpretation . Prescient ? Yes . Relevant ? Surely . Subtle ? Not so much . " This version of the video ends with the tossed grenade landing on the catwalk and Madonna putting her hands on her ears .

= = Live performances = =

To promote American Life , Madonna embarked on the American Life Promo Tour . A performance on Tower 's Fourth Street in Manhattan was presented to around 400 people ; the set started with Madonna , wearing black beret , polka @-@ dot blouse , black trousers and heels , performing an acoustic performance of " American Life " followed by the track " X @-@ Static Process " . The promotional show also saw Madonna perform two other tracks from the album being " Mother and Father " and " Hollywood " , before performing an " impromptu " performance of " Like a Virgin " , and lastly performing the album version of " American Life " . A stage was built in preparation for the performances with long dark drapes and large speakers , and according to Billboard was so that over one thousand fans nearby could hear the performance . Madonna also performed the song at HMV store in Oxford to around 500 people . While in the United Kingdom , she performed " American Life " and " Hollywood " at BBC One 's Top of the Pops .

The following year , " American Life " was included on her Re @-@ Invention World Tour . It opened the Military @-@ Army segment and started with the sound of a helicopter in the background as Madonna 's backup dancers , dressed as soldiers , crawled on their bellies as though in the middle of battle , then hugged each other as if saying goodbye . Madonna appeared onstage , on top of a structure made up of TV sets , wearing camouflage pants , an olive army jacket and black beret . She started performing the song as war footage of death and destruction flashed on screens behind her . At the end of the song , it showed a George W. Bush look @-@ alike lovingly resting his head on the shoulder of a Saddam Hussein look @-@ alike , as though the pair were waiting for a marriage license . During the performance , Madonna ran down a lengthy V @-@ shaped catwalk that descended from the ceiling and allowed her to reach the middle of the stadium . Toronto Sun 's Jane Stevenson praised the performance , but called the background images " sober " . The performance was included in the I 'm Going to Tell You a Secret live album and documentary .

= = Track listings and formats = =

= = Credits and personnel = =

Madonna ? songwriter , producer

Mirwais Ahmadzaï ? producer , programming , guitar

Mike " Spike " Stent ? mixing

Tim Young ? mastering

Tom Hannen ? assistant engineer

Simon Changer ? assistant engineer

Credits and personnel adapted from American Life album liner notes .

= = Charts = =

= = Certifications = =