

Nas and the AP

Written by Robert ID650

Tuesday, 04 January 2005 06:08 -

Nas

On Nas' new double album, "Street's Disciple," the first word uttered is "peace." On this, his seventh studio album, Nas has become the mature voice of the hip-hop generation. While Jay Z's lyrical exploits are fading to black and P. Diddy is still partying, Nas is giving his version of today's reality. The 19-year-old that emerged in 1993, like Young Arthur pulling Excalibur from the stone, is now the cornerstone of the new social consciousness fighting to emerge in hip-hop circa 2005.

But while Russell Simmons spearheads the Rap the Vote campaign and P. Diddy demands that you Vote or Die, Nas marches along the lines of Malcolm X preaching self-help, improved education and community renewal. He sat down with The Associated Press to discuss God, politics and the future of his music.

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AP: What's the meaning of your album artwork, which shows you playing every part in the Last Supper?

Nas: The concept was developed by (producer) Salaam Remi and myself, it represents all the sides of me as a street warrior.

AP: What was your main religious influence, your denomination growing up?

Nas: I was surrounded by Christians ... my grandmothers, all my family was from the South, Baptist. As I got older I got into the 5 Percent Nation, and then that pushed me toward Islam. But (I'm not any) religion.

AP: Would you consider yourself agnostic?

Nas: I consider myself (pauses) I know there's a higher power.

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AP: The sequence of your new double album is almost like the New Testament with 27 chapters. Your album has 27 songs. Coincidence?

Nas: I'm a storyteller and the Bible is a bunch of stories about life and things that took place here on planet earth. It's a great example to use and a great reason to be happy about being a storyteller because the lessons of the land are always in stories. I didn't want to bore people so a lot of the records I party to are more slammin", more knockin". This album is not an album that knocks, it's really a storytelling knock from beginning to end. Disc one which is one story and the second disc completes the story both imaginative and personal.

AP: You and LL Cool J were like the Kevin Garnetts of the rap game — early entry draft choices. Who guided you through the pitfalls of the business?

Nas: I was fortunate to be around my family and my crew has always been solid. Russell Simmons is the smartest and most talented person I know. He has never steered me wrong and he has been the biggest influence. Russell is my mentor, he is beyond his years, the smartest out of all of them.

AP: One of your lyrics in your first record, "Halftime," reads, "Cause when it's time to go, I wait for God wit" the .44." What do you think about that statement now, in the context of this new album?

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Nas: That's one of Tupac's favorite lines, he used to scream that line out to me in a rage back in '93, Pac was feeling that line and that stuck with me.

AP: Talk about your new "Unauthorized Biography" song and your feelings for Rakim.

Nas: He's one of the artists who never got what he deserved for his art, which has made a lot of hip-hop fans angry, because we did not see our heroes of that era become the heroes of today (who have) just a pinky of the talent Rakim had. It's hard for me to deal with that. When I go to the bookstores they have books on artists that are not important to hip-hop. ... I'm a reader, so when I go to bookstores I need (stuff) that's going to help me. There a big emptiness there and I want to help fill that through song.

AP: I got a rhyme for you: You went from "Nasty, Nas to Esco to Escobar. Then you were Nastradamus, Going back from Ill to Still, Cornerstone like the R God's son raised hard, Street disciple's trump card." So now what's next?

Nas: There's so much that I've never done. I love clothes but I'm not excited about getting into the clothing business, I love sneakers but not really excited about doing it. My guys are interested in doing both clothes and sneakers that I might support ... but what I'm really interested in is doing books and I like screenplays and I've written some, so you'll probably see some movies and stuff like that coming from me. Not from the big Hollywood end but on the independent end. I'm a student of filmmaking and not a student of the glitz of Hollywood. So

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you'll probably see something from me on the independent end and something really different on the novel end of the book level.

AP: You don't do a lot of endorsements. I saw Puff and Jay on the Rap the Vote and Vote or Die thing. How does the African-American connect to politics in this country?

Nas: I support Puff and anything he's doing dedicated to politics. I support his move, it was very Frank Sinatra, who was one of my heroes like when he supported the Kennedys. I think I wasn't a part of Vote or Die because I'm not a registered voter and I don't agree with voting because of the examples out there, the thievery of an election, the so-called thievery, I can't tell people to stand on line to vote and they're still going to be found in jail tomorrow. I know some brothers like Russell who mention the Rockefeller laws — we only do 12 percent of the crime in America but 70 percent of us get locked up — and say the only way to stop this is to get in politics. This is true, but the angles that hip-hop is using are, I think, the tip of the iceberg. I think Vote or Die is one way but we have to pull other resources. We need a representative in the United Nations (news - web sites) that can make it a real issue to deal with, it's beyond a vote. The minority vote is not going to get anyone in office, it can't deal with middle America. Harlem can't do it alone.

AP: Here are lyrics from 1999's "Nas is Coming": "I bit the fruit from the Serpent, apocalyptic, get bent, stay splifed." And then in your new song "Suicide Bounce" you say, "The devil's calling, but I don't answer." Where does that change come from?

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Nas: Just understanding my warrior spirit. There is genius out there, when they go "Vote or Die" that's genius, but what's missing is that warrior spirit. There's is a whole different spirituality that goes with the warrior spirit that Patrice Lumumba, Malcolm X, that they died for. Muhammad Ali had that. Richard Pryor had the warrior spirit. That's what's missing from hip-hop, and the only one that had it was Pac. I'm nowhere near the mind state he was. The stuff that he wrote, he was 21 years old and here I am 31 years old, and I'm still nowhere as deep as Tupac.

[Source](#)