

# The Truth is Here

Brother Ali tells it like it is - or how it should be

**R**ace, Brother Ali says, is kind of like the Wizard of Oz. It's only real because everyone believes in it. And he should know. Ever since his Rhymesayers debut album, *Shadows on the Sun*, put Brother Ali on the hip hop map, the albino MC from Minneapolis has been under siege by journalists who can't get through an interview without asking him "what he is." So on *The Undisputed Truth*, the song "Daylight" addresses the issue once and for all: "They ask me if I'm black or white / I'm neither / Race is a made-up thing / I don't believe in it."

It's hard to figure out what to ask him in an interview, because Brother Ali lays it all out in his songs - his divorce from his wife of ten years and the subsequent custody battle (he won), his tough childhood, his Muslim faith - all with Gandhi-like eloquence. That is, if Gandhi were an MC. And Ant's (of Atmosphere) beats, which contain soul, reggae and blues influences, make for well rounded aural sustenance.

"I listen to a lot of soul and blues music," Brother Ali says. "Those are probably my two favorite kinds of music. I probably listen to that stuff as much as I do hip hop." In fact, he adds, "That's the

kind of stuff that I wish I could make."

Ultimately, though, it's Brother Ali's uncensored honesty that makes him one of underground hip hop's finest MCs. With every rhyme, Brother Ali strives to illustrate what it's like to be him - and that very specific goal lends his music universal appeal.

"I don't really worry about if people are really offended or like it, or how it's going to make me look - if I'm going to look weak, or like an asshole," he says. And as the album title suggests, the truth is here - the truth about the music industry, the truth about race politics and the truth about America.

But even though *The Undisputed Truth* contains several tracks that blow the whistle on the hypocrisy of the American government, Brother Ali insists he's not striving to be a political commentator.

"I'm not a political artist," he says. "I'm a personal artist. This is just something that's on my heart and on my mind recently." In "Letter to the Government," Brother Ali addresses the disparity between who's fighting our wars and who's supporting them.

Equally important, though, is the demand for more honesty from posturing

MCs who give hip hop a bad name in the mainstream.

"We're just seeing one side of what hip hop is in

the media, and it's not our fault, you know what I mean? These [record] companies have specifically done that because it makes money. But then there's still the underground. And the underground is when you see how the people who are really involved in hip hop really feel."

EW



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