

Don't Call It a Comeback

Nas at the top of his game

During hip hop's fledgling beginnings, no one thought it would last. The ghetto-grown culture was supposed to be a passing trend overshadowed by the intensely popular disco and rock music of the 1970s. Many artists even considered themselves only ephemeral tourists looking to make a quick buck before the scene's four pillars evaporated. But clearly this wasn't in the cards. Hip hop has endured, providing lifetimes of music for MCs who have been able to distinguish themselves and stay relevant among the best and newest lyricists of the day. So at 35, with 11 albums and countless rhymes to his name, Nas may be a far cry from being the new kid on the block, but he's more on top of his game than ever before.

When *Hip Hop Is Dead* hit stores in 2006, the street's disciple challenged the state of commercialized, present-day hip hop, crouching in front of its grave with black rose in hand and declaring, "If hip hop should die before I wake, I'll put an extended clip inside of my AK, roll to

every station — murder the DJ / Roll to every station — murder the DJ." The album would prove to be a beat-driven dirge as thought-provoking as it was controversial. However, this year Nas might outdo himself. *Nigger*, set to drop in early July, will no doubt be packed with even more controversy as artists and political figures alike have already sounded off on the album's tendentious title. "The title using the N-word is morally offensive and socially distasteful," says Rev. Jesse Jackson in a recent Yahoo interview.

One track off the new release, "Be a Nigger Too," leaked onto the Internet in April. The song boasts the triumphant march of orchestral punches and bursting cymbals over Nas' surprisingly inclusive rhymes about racial boundaries. While "Be a Nigger Too" features production by Salaam Remi, other beat makers rumored to be in attendance on the new effort include Just Blaze, Polow Da Don, Jermaine Dupri and No ID.

Nasir Jones has come a long way since the unprecedented/disputable five-mic-



Nas
with Cool Nuts,
M.E.L.T. and DJ Tekneek
9 pm Wednesday, May 14
McDonald Theatre
\$33 adv., \$35 door

earning release of *Illmatic* in 1994, but while other talented and tenured artists have found inspiration through comfortable financial success, Nas is able to keep you on your toes. I don't know if it's just me, but every time I hear Jay-Z, I can't help

but picture him in the back of a Maybach on his way to a 40/40 Club opening. With Nas, it's different. His lyrics are always able to take me back to Queensbridge during a time when hip hop was a little different than what it is today. **EW**

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