

“Those who do ask questions are automatically branded as terrorist sympathizers, when really the Bush administration are the real terrorists.”

If you look for Paris' latest release, *Sonic Jihad*, on the shelves of almost any major chain store, you will probably find it enclosed in a black slipcover. The artwork is underneath. Underneath the packaging and in the jewel case is an image of a plane flying extremely low and about to crash into the White House, similar to the earth-shattering scenes of 9/11. This uncompromising and sometimes shocking artist is no stranger to controversy. In the past, he's had his radical music pulled off the shelves, and he's been dropped by record labels that could not support his viewpoints. Finally taking matters into his own hands out of necessity, he formed his own record label, Guerrilla Funk Recordings, which was designed to counter the corporate stranglehold of censorship in the entertainment industry and to promote a specific vision.

Paris, aka Gat Turner, came onto the scene in 1990 with his hit single, "The Devil Made me Do It." In 1992, his incendiary song "Bush Killa" got him kicked off his label, and he has been stirring things up ever since with his aggressive "in your face" attitude. Challenging the limitations of censorship, he is a vehement defender of free speech. His music is revolutionary in tone and always subversive, yet meant to inspire and enlighten. In fact he does not agree with the harmful effects of music that espouses misogyny, mindless violence, and drug culture references, and has made his stance widely known. Waging a verbal war on the system, his brand of rap and hip hop is meant to expose some hard truths to a world and public that are in desperate need of social change. Touching on such hot topics as racism, censorship, political injustice, corrupt police officers and global oppression, this urban warrior will not give up the fight. Labeled as dangerous by some, and a public enemy by others, Paris is armed with his rap rage and reality rhymes, and is definitely ready for the battle.

UGLY PLANET: I take it that your latest record is a direct response to the post 9/11 condition.

PARIS: The events of

September 11 kicked in and everything fell apart. Not that it was all that together anyway. But 9/11 did have the effect of pouring gas on the fire in a lot of ways. So the lines were basically drawn at that point, not formally between the U.S. and other people, but between the U.S. and ourselves. A lot of the adverse effects of the Bush administration's policies not only touch people abroad, but affect us negatively here as well. So *Sonic Jihad*, was a way to help us keep focus on the truth, and keep focus on real issues and not just be blind sided by all the propaganda that we get every day.

What's been the reaction to *Sonic Jihad* and its cover depicting a plane flying into the white house?

Some people who see the cover of *Sonic Jihad*, even if they have not listened to the project, are saying I,m trying to profit off of tragedy—as if there's some big windfall to be gotten for saying something like this that's against the current public consciousness that now exists as a result of them being fed all sorts of propaganda... Like it's a big cash cow or there's a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. You're not gonna have a number one record with something like *Sonic Jihad*, unlike Toby Keith, for example, who can have a number one record by writing patriotic pro-U.S. propaganda.

So what were you trying to achieve with *Sonic Jihad*?

Nowadays, there are very few artists who feel compelled to speak out in the hip-hop format (even if they are politically aware), so this record is really a throwback to the era of hip-hop that I loved, that I came up on. This is what made hip-hop relevant to me – it's no longer relevant to me anymore, understand? It has been adopted and co-opted by corporations and used and prostituted. There's very little to be found in hip-hop anymore for somebody who is conscious. For the most part, I don't really feel any major releases. It's all the cookie-cutter approach to music that says the same negative shit over and over again. So I said rather than complain about it, I'll do my own thing.

There's no incentive to make real relevant

Sonic Subversion

music anymore. Used to be that you could make great, creative, innovative music - be it jazz, rock and roll or for that matter, the early days of hip hop... and you could live a decent middle class life. But today, artist don't want that. They want to be all about putting on an outrageous show or video, then go home in a Bentley and the multiple houses... have your own clothing label... be a super star, no talent, no art...

In this day and age there's very few people who really are technically proficient in music or who really put forth a lot of effort, and who exert a lot of effort in quality song-writing. There also aren't too many of them who are rewarded handsomely because it's so easy to make music now. Often times the approach of major labels is to have a handful of "beat-makers" do everybody's music. That's what's prevalent in a lot of music that's produced on a major scale. It's so easy now. It's so accessible that there's less and less of a focus on the value of it. Music has been devalued. Anyone can go in Guitar Center or any of these music places and buy a machine that makes all of your music for you. To look at it realistically from a career perspective as being something that you could make good money off of and still be true to the way you love it and live it, is a real stretch of the imagination.

So where does "conscious" music have to go to have a fighting chance?

I hear a lot of conscious MCs but shitty music. And I hear a lot of good music with a shitty message. So what needs to be found is that good medium, something that can touch down and speak for example on a college campus and directly relate to them on an intellectual level, but then still go to the hood and relate to them because the music is slammin, so the people feel it, while the message is palatable enough so that people can digest it everywhere.

But do you think that today there is even a market for politically minded music?

I knew that there was a market for it because shit, half this country didn't vote for this killer and probably even more people now are in opposition to what's going on and globally

we're hated across the board by everybody but Israel. The global impact that this record is having is pretty strong—it's just about everywhere and licensed in different countries end up putting it out in their respective territories. Here we're now in every major chain except Wal-Mart and Target, but everywhere else. Given the current energy, given what I'm talking about on the record, and given the climate and the propaganda that hits people 24/7 — that's a pretty major feat. It's for you to be able to walk into Borders and buy *Sonic Jihad*.

The one that I got at the store has a black slipcover on it. You can't see the cover art at the store. Do all of them have a slipcover?

All the ones at retail, yeah. But it's like a "Trojan Horse" approach. Once you remove the slipcover, nothing's changed. It's the same. I was going to do it in black shrink-wrap, but it ended up not making a difference. The slip cover makes a difference—it will protect the project over time. And that's an idea that I had. I've been through the song and dance of getting pulled off the shelves and having people bitch about earlier projects. I don't want that to be the reason why this music is not heard.

Getting back to the subject of 9/11. That day I was on 5th avenue as it happened. When I saw the second plane go in it was very clear to me that "we" were being attacked. I also thought that most Americans would ask "why"? That very afternoon I went online to see what kind of information was out there. I ran into many different boards. Most of what I found was people saying things like "kill the foreigners", "kick the towel heads out of the country", "close the borders." And when they say "foreigners" they don't mean Germans, Irish, Austrians, Italians, Swedes... they mean anyone of color that can be a recognized as a "foreigner" from across the street. Then I started to see see all of the flags on cars and in everybody's windows and I just felt pretty much overwhelmed by the whole thing. Are you with us or against us?

Right! No one asked "why"? They just wanted to hit back at anyone who looked like they might be the enemy. Without asking why or who is the real enemy. But quickly I realized that the more you speak out, keep asking why, saying what you really feel - the more people like yourself you'll run into. Instead of just going along with other people - because you don't want to be called unpatriotic

Following this administration's policies without question is what's really unpatriotic. To take a critical viewpoint of everything that's gone wrong and take policy-makers to task and directly talk about how what they do affects us is truly patriotic. The new laws that have come out with 9/11 as an excuse have proven time and time again over the course of this last year that they're really about building their own financial agenda. Their power-hungry agenda. "Love of country" has nothing to

do with it.

The general atmosphere is that you can't ask too many questions, nor can you get any answers from anybody.

And those who do ask questions are automatically branded as terrorist sympathizers, when really the Bush administration are the real terrorists. You know, one man's terrorist is another man's freedom-fighter. They are not fighting for any kind of freedom or against any kind of terrorist. They've been in a bed with people who have been committing terrorist acts for as long as I can remember. And the media's inability or unwillingness to expose the connection between this administration and the people who really commit acts of terrorism pretty much lets you know that the media in general is a propaganda extension of the government. It's not an independent voice. The news outlets do little more than provide a bedrock for fear because as long as there's fear, the populous can be kept in line, kept afraid, and the government can do whatever it wants to do. They can say anything as long as you're afraid. You're kept in compliance with this administration's objectives and support whatever this administration wants to do as long as you remain an unquestioning member of the consumer class.

But then their argument is that we have to support the administration without compromise because these new measures are what's keeping us safe.

Right, they would. But see, this whole climate has allowed people to comfortably take positions and accept choices made by the government without listening to reason, without being objective. And now at this point we believe whatever they want us to believe. We believe whatever they tell us in spite of the truth staring us right in the face. I mean, if they're doing such a great job, where's Osama? Where's the uranium purchase from Africa? Where's the real proof? Where are the Weapons of Mass Destruction? Where's all this shit that they say is a threat to American Liberty? There are dictators all over the world, but we only go to war with countries that have natural resources that we want to exploit and that have a population of people we want to exploit. We have yet to appropriately or honestly address American Imperialism. And so much of it is chronicled in several publications, on Guerrillafunk.com and *Sonic Jihad*. Basically, the plan to lay pipeline to access oil through the Caspian Sea Region, which has roughly 6 trillion dollars in oil reserves, was the objective. But in order to do that and have the US population's blessing, a Pearl Harbor-like event had to take place. And to think that 2,500 people's lives are not expendable for that kind of money, by a government with a rich history of oppression and aggression against its own people and others, is foolish. They'd do whatever it takes. Look at the Northwoods Documents and the plans to

invade and incite conflict with Cuba by America - murdering members of it's own citizenry and blaming Cuba. Remember the Tuskegee experiment when we look at the onset of the AIDS epidemic. When we look at all of these things—these incidences of aggression against other people, not to mention the countless wars, we can more easily see vicious mindset that higher-ups and the corporate elite in this country take when dealing with people and trying to achieve certain financial goals. Is it a conspiracy? Yes! Is it a theory? Well, that depends on your perception of it.

Seems like all these issues don't even matter to the average American...

It really doesn't matter (to some people because) the stage is already set. It wasn't the events of September 11 that were the worse thing. The most devastating thing was our response to it.

Exactly! I run into so many people who are only responding to 2,500 people who died that day on American soil, but what about the 10 thousands plus who died right after that in Afghanistan, in Iraq... are they not people too?

There are a lot of racial lines and class lines that are being drawn right down the middle. Especially by white America. There's this big racial thing going on, but the corporate elite could give a fuck less about white people too. You know? They're a big part of the consumer class that they want to maintain and so they will use anything, racist stereotypical perceptions that people have about peoples coloring, about Arabs and about people who are not like you. Throw gas on a fire to suit their purposes. An analogy can definitely be drawn when talking about the use of fear in particular economic times because right now we're in an economy that's a lot worse than they would have you think. And of course now the media is trying to galvanize the whole country into thinking that this economy is on a rebound and they count this 7% increase over the past...not past year, but fiscal quarter. And it's only 7%. That's like saying your stock that went from \$100.00 to \$1.00 a share has gone up 7%. Who gives a fuck? You know, most people that you know are out of work or underpaid. The cost of housing still hasn't really gone down and most people are living in desperate situations where it's become more and more difficult just to survive, let alone succeed. Unless you've been involved in the defense industry, unless you've been a part of working at Shell or Texaco or something, then you haven't really felt financially safe since this administration has been in power.

They keep saying the economy is getting better. But this whole spending thing right now, it's pretty much people are buying stuff on credit.

Yeah, if we had a a booming economy, a lot of people would be making good money. But

there's always been that constant of the American ideal of living beyond your means. Now people buy shit on credit because they can't afford it otherwise. Many people figure credit is free money so they don't have to have any real money. But now all that's heard is "Save America" campaigns and the kind of shit that we saw after September 11. You could get a car at no money down, 0% financing. Although 0% financing is a really good deal, it's still debt. It's still spending money that you don't have. It just doesn't make sense if it's not going to improve your economic condition. Even low interest rates to purchase real estate at inflated prices is bad economics—we're living in a housing bubble right now. When you become accustomed to wrong as being right...and then are actually faced with right, you reject it. The whole problem of white superiority and America First-ism is most American's lack of exposure to people globally. The best thing that you can do, honestly in this country is get the hell out of it. Travel. So many people here are born and die within the confines of a 30-mile radius. They have very little exposure outside their own neighborhood. It's pretty difficult to have a world-view when you've never been anywhere, especially when people don't even read. And if the only place you get your news is Fox, which 85% of the population does, you see the effects of propaganda and everything they wanna put out to you makes sense. It's all part of creating perceptions for very specific purposes. Perceptions that are in large part created or fostered by the media. The idea that Black people are all thieves, people from Middle East are all terrorists, you know, all of that shit. All the stereotypes that we've been force-fed. I was over in Germany and Holland and saw the TV show *Cops*, with all it's negative imagery. It's world-wide. The stereotypes put forth on that show have a global impact. When you see poor people and people of color in handcuffs being dragged away by the police repeatedly, that has an effect! That has to have an effect on other people's perception of us and even our own perception of ourselves.

I guess we don't need to be watching Cops. People have such a thirst to watch the police chasing people down, they now interrupt regular programs in the middle of the day to show you live police car chases.

A few year ago there were these Mexicans riding on the back of a pick up truck. They were being smuggled illegally across the border, and when these white cops pulled them over they proceeded to beat the shit out of them. I just saw that footage again the other day, and again it gets down to what you want to believe and how you want to think about it, because you'll have a lot of people who watch shows like *Cops* that will say, "hey, they're just doing their jobs and why are we so hard on them? These people are losers anyway." All this is bullshit that's really just thinly - veiled racism. That you

can sit back and still say that these people probably had it coming even when you are face to face with footage pretty much makes it clear where you stand.

Many people would say I would never be in the back of a pick up truck speeding through the border. I would never be speeding away from a police car after I've had a couple of drinks. I would never be driving with my license suspended. I would never be...

Reaching for my wallet.

Exactly! But you know what... I know of so many white people who do all those things but suffer little if any consequences. And I also know so many people of color who because they didn't have their seat belt on, had a screw missing from a license plate, get taken in by the police, and you never know what they will do to you at the station.

The best thing you can do is limit your exposure to police. I talk about this all of the time. There are things that we can do, especially in communities of color, to limit our exposure to police. The police are an occupying force in communities of color and these pigs are really there just to keep order in those communities and keep the status quo intact.

Do you vote?

I vote by virtue of the fact that people died for me to be able vote. Especially being black in this country. I don't take that shit lightly at all. There's a sense of apathy here that benefits the conservative agenda when we don't participate. They keep you disillusioned and unfocused through propaganda, and in doing so, keep you questioning the facts. The people who represent the Right make it a point to vote and participate en masse as a collective to achieve what they want to achieve. When you look at it that way, when you look at the fact that if I don't vote for people who represent progressive ideas, the other side is going to vote anyway, then you realize, it makes more sense to participate.

What if voting is impossible? Some people just can't.

Why can't they? You still have to be involved in the community in some capacity. You still have to find ways to speak out, do all of the things that go along with being a responsible person in this society. You can't just sit back and say that voting is going to solve your problems. The most revolutionary thing you can do is to do everything—use every tool that is available to you, everything that is at your disposal.

I just read an article about the silent minority. How prisoners and people on parole can't vote.

There's the whole thing about removing prisoner's rights. The fact is a lot of people find the truth after they've been to prison. They become politicized. So it's almost as if their potential for effectiveness in the struggle is killed by taking away their right to vote, to be

g a i n f u l l y employed, to bear arms, to think. A lot of the things we take away from people in this society take away the impact that someone may have potentially had. The impact their lives may have had. You know a lot of people make mistakes when they were young. Many people are paying for mistakes now that they made as teenagers. Now they know a lot of what they probably should have known beforehand. But then they get out of prison and they're rendered ineffective because they can't participate.

Imagine if prisoners could vote. They would all vote. 100% of them. Because they now know what it's like not to have that right, that control...

We take for granted being able to eat. We take for granted a lot of shit that people in other countries and situations don't take for granted. They don't take for granted that they can go get some bread whenever they are hungry—shit like that! I don't think we would be such a nation of sloths if we had to experience what other people have to experience. We would take things a lot more seriously. It all has to do with your world-view—the shit you're exposed to and your perception of how things are everywhere. If you don't have the ability to see beyond your immediate inner circle, then you're going to be closed-minded and you're not going to be in a position where you can make a rational decision or make a rational judgment about anything.

Do you think music and art can help people see beyond their "inner circle"?

When I make hip-hop music, I just do my own thing and let the public decide what they think. I think that the more people become exposed to alternatives the more their minds will move toward making the right decisions. They will see that there are instances and opportunities to find information and even entertainment that makes much more sense than what is currently being presented to them. ☺