

# Swagg

Canada's #1 Urban Newsmag

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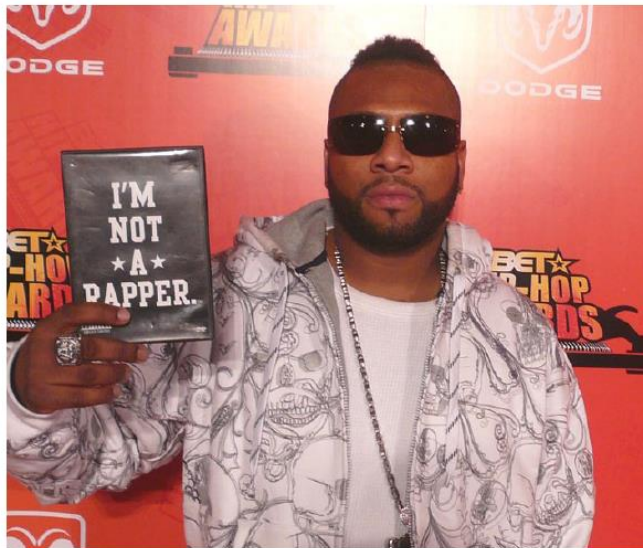
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## Publisher's Note



## NEW YEAR, NEW SWAGG

Hi haters,

Happy 2007, sorry for the delay but we're back to spread more Swagg. I just returned from a nationwide tour of Canada with Snoop Dogg, Ice Cube and Belly - definitely an artist to look out for this year. The support for rap music across the country is phenomenal and it's only growing. From Vancouver to Halifax, let's make hip-hop the new rock'n'roll.

Shout out to the new journalists, photographers, street teamers and all the other vital staff members who make Swagg Newsmag one of the finest information resources this genre has to offer. 2007 is sure to be another great year for both hip-hop and this publication. Look out for more exclusive interviews with your favourite rappers, singers and DJs.

As for February's edition: Malice of Clipse speaks on the group's continued problems with record labels, we take a ride with Freekey Zekey to discuss his plans for the future, Nas' baby mama Carmen Bryan fires back at her detractors and Kaymaria Daskarolis kicks knowledge on the CIA, the Contras and inner-city crack dealing.

February is also Black History Month, so please don't forget to read up on the contributions and accomplishments of black people worldwide. Stay involved and stay informed.

Keep your eyes on [www.swaggnews.com](http://www.swaggnews.com) New design, new attitude - and we're starting it off big in conjunction with Aquaswiss, Universal Urban and EA Games for some huge giveaways.

Hold ya head for J Dilla and Big L, both anniversaries are this month and their respective deaths are still huge losses for the hip-hop community.

Enjoy and keep Swagg in ya life. I'll see y'all next month as we continue on with the exclusives, this time from the Las Vegas Magic Show and the NBA All-Star Weekend.

Now that's Ballin'.

Big Apple







The shocking accusations of the CIA bringing crack into urban neighbourhoods and the systematic racial profiling by police were among other head-turning developments documented and investigated by a man who unspectacularly dropped out of journalism school at Northern Kentucky University early in his career. However, time would prove that he would show a flair for blowing open and writing about what some intellectuals call the most vivid and spectacular investigative articles of the 1990s. His name conjures up opinions among many who are still wondering what happened to him.

Gary Webb was an aggressive and controversial investigative journalist. His work documented the CIA's injustices and forced readers to look at commonplace conspiracy theories as realities: Both elected government officials, who vowed to represent and protect their constituents, and hired police officers, who had sworn to serve and protect, deliberately and systematically brought pain and destruction to members of urban communities throughout the United States.

There are dozens of web pages, newspaper articles, magazine articles, and radio shows that have devoted themselves to writing and speaking about Gary Webb and, in the past 20 months, more specifically about his death. The authors of these pieces range from government officials and hip-hop radio DJs, to narcotics watch groups and cultural historians. What is it about Webb that has inspired such a diverse array of writers and commentators to spend countless hours researching and discussing the circumstances behind the suppression of his work, his final days and his death?

One of Webb's most prominent contributions came exactly one decade ago in the form of a series of articles entitled Dark Alliance. These articles, originally published in the San Jose Mercury News, revealed that the CIA had been funding the rebel-led, 5,000-strong Contra army in its often-violent opposition to Nicaragua's Sandinista government and its terrorization of the Nicaraguan people through profits from crack cocaine sales. They detailed what Webb referred to in the opening of his first Dark Alliance piece as, "The union of a U.S.-backed army attempting to overthrow a revolutionary socialist government and the Uzi-toting 'gangstas' of Compton and South-Central Los Angeles."

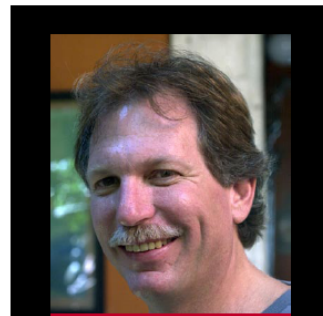
Most people in the United States' urban communities had long suspected, and known in many cases, that crack cocaine had not been created in labs in South Central Los Angeles. This was such common knowledge among urban residents that John Singleton even wove it into the 1991 screenplay of his cinematic success, *Boyz n The Hood*, by having Laurence Fishburne's character Furious deliver a speech

about it to Tré, Doughboy and other young residents of his neighbourhood.

It was not so much that the story itself was news, but that there were individuals within the scandal who were specifically identified. On August 18, 1996, in the very first article of the Dark Alliance series, Webb identified Ricky Donnell Ross as the crack dealer responsible for purchasing "cut-rate cocaine" from Contra army financiers, turning the cocaine powder into crack, and selling it wholesale to gangs throughout the country, predominantly in South Central Los Angeles. Oscar Danilo Blandon Reyes, former leader of the Fuerza Democrática Nicaragüense (Nicaraguan Democratic Force or FDN), and one of the most prominent anti-communist guerilla armies commonly referred to as the Contras, was named as being Ross' and other Southern California drug dealers' main distributor. According to George Washington University's online National Security Archive, a Drug Enforcement Administration report from February 6, 1984, supported Webb's claims that law enforcement officials had tracked Juan Norwin Meneses Cantarero, Blandon's boss in the FDN, since 1976. However, 20 years later, Meneses had yet to spend one day in jail. Peter Kornbluh explained in the January/February 1997 edition of the Columbia Journalism Review that although Webb's articles were not the first to report a link between the Contra war and drug smuggling, they were in fact the first to suggest that "a cocaine-for-weapons trade [had] supported U.S. policy and undermined black America."

Webb's page-turning Alliance articles exposed exactly how the connections between the Nicaraguan drug dealing Contras and the South Central drug dealers were made, supporting his claims with extensive evidence. Initially, according to NarcoNews.com, the public responded with great interest and concern. Webb and his colleagues at the Mercury News developed a Dark Alliance website to share Webb's thorough investigation and evidence with the public. Millions of people from all over the world visited the site. On September 21, 1996, Steven Lee Myers reported in The New York Times that Senator Maxine Waters, representing the Los Angeles community ravaged by the crack epidemic, had cited Webb's articles in demanding from then Attorney General Janet Reno an independent investigation into the CIA's alleged role in cocaine trafficking. Former CIA Director John Deutch even held a town meeting in Watts, covered by Jeffrey Kaye for PBS' *News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, in an attempt to assuage community members' growing concerns about the dangers to which their government was knowingly subjecting them to. His efforts, however, could not prevent the CIA from ultimately being pressured into launching an internal investigation, which confirmed most of what Webb's articles had claimed.

Then there was silence.



Gary Webb: The Journalist



Ricky Ross: The Drug Dealer



Ronald Reagan: The President

Presumably, because of the intense criticism of major players like The Washington Post (which broke the story about the Watergate scandal back in 1972), The New York Times, the Los Angeles Times and the Mercury News recanted its support of Webb and his Dark Alliance exposé. Where disclosing the Watergate scandal to the public shook mainstream America's faith in its government to the core—at a time when it was already torn over the war in Vietnam—

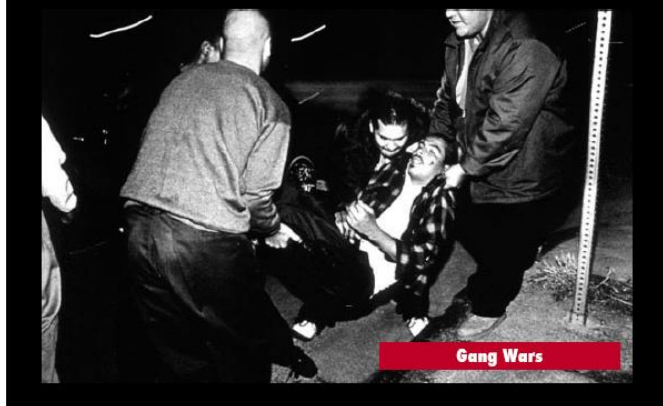
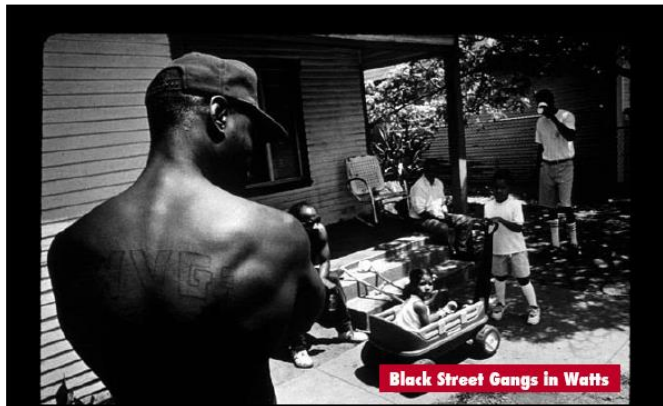


# A WEBB OF CONTROVERSY

## THE CONTRAS, CRACK AND THE CIA

confirming the accusations and implications made in Webb's articles might have been considered a threat to national security, and certainly would have fanned the flames of racial injustice in America. The Alliance series was, after all, referring to activities allegedly taking place throughout the 1980s when Ronald Reagan's "War on drugs" was resulting in greater numbers of urban residents finding themselves or their family members serving lengthy prison sentences. According to *The First Step is a Permanent Cease Fire*, written by Margo Pierce and published in the Cincinnati City Beat in late 2005, whites in the United States chiefly consume powder cocaine while blacks primarily consume crack cocaine, the significantly less expensive version. Not surprisingly, crack cocaine users are more harshly treated by the legal system than powder cocaine users: A person convicted of attempting to sell five grams of crack cocaine can be sentenced up to five years in prison, while powder cocaine dealers would receive the same sentence if attempting to sell 500 grams. The website of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) indicates that in cities throughout the United States, as recently as June of this year, the ACLU and a number of criminal law and sentencing experts have been filing "friend-of-the-court briefs . . . supporting judges' right to depart from the notorious 100-to-1 crack/powder cocaine sentencing disparity imposed by Congress."

In fact, the Reagan administration, already the source of devastation on many levels throughout urban America, was responsible for silencing earlier attempts to provoke and disclose investigations into whether or not the U.S. government knew of and thereby tolerated drug smuggling under the guise of protecting national security. In December 1985, the Associated Press attempted to bring this relationship between the U.S. government and drug smuggling to light. As the years pressed on, few newspapers picked up or expanded on this story and those that did relegated it to one of their back pages, even when, on April 13, 1989, the Senator Kerry-chaired Senate subcommittee on Terrorism, Narcotics, and International Operations released its lengthy report, not only indicting the United States government for its clandestine Contra operations in Nicaragua, but also detailing its relationship with other countries involved in the drug trade. Coverage was minimal. The report stated that, "In the name of supporting the Contras," United States officials had "abandoned the responsibility our government has for protecting our citizens from all threats to their security and well-being." Yet, there were no ripples in the pond of mainstream United States media. Anyone who has ever stood on either side of the integrity line knows that no matter how scathing a written, verbal or photographic testimony is to a person or organization, our collective societal memory is very short: Consider the corrupt political lives of Senator Joseph McCarthy and Richard Nixon.







If an inconvenient story can simply be silenced or another story brought to the forefront to replace it, no irreparable harm will be done. We saw this brilliantly demonstrated in David Mamet's 1998 film *Wag the Dog*, when the government hired Stanley Motts, Dustin Hoffman's character, to make up a fictional war. The considerable amount of fiction resonates with our current political reality, replete with a current \$64,000 question of questions: When was Osama Bin Laden captured? Does anyone even remember that capturing him and "finding justice" for those killed in the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States were the originally stated principal reasons for America's military aggression in Afghanistan? It would seem once again, in the case of the Alliance series, endeavors to impose silence were intended to make the media storm disappear. Perhaps the heads of the Mercury News assumed the millions of citizens throughout our global village would simply stop caring, stop paying attention and being concerned if the story was forced out of the limelight. Perhaps their operations started with a belief in the truth of Doughboy's comment that resonated with nearly every urbanite who watched the end of *Boyz n The Hood*: "Either they don't know, they don't show or they don't care about what's going on in the hood." The Dark Alliance website was ultimately shut down despite having won a CNET Best of the Web award in 1996, the year it was established.

Pia Hinckle reported in her July/August Columbia Journalism Review piece, *Soul Searching in San Jose*, that while most of the other people involved in bringing Dark Alliance to press kept their positions or received promotions, Webb was removed from the Mercury News' investigative reporting team and re-assigned to cover a dead-end story in Cupertino, 150 miles from his home. Webb was essentially blacklisted in the world of the dominant mainstream media as a result of this. This move may have been a big mistake for the Mercury News as supporters of Webb and his work continue a decade later to bash the newspaper's integrity and courage under fire. It is, after all, a newspaper that claims on its accompanying website, "While best known as the newspaper of Silicon Valley, the San Jose Mercury News enjoys the ranking of one of the top ten newspapers in the country by the Columbia Journalism Review and was named the boldest American newspaper by the Society for Newspaper Design." Is there room

for boldness at the top newspapers of the United States anymore? Gary Webb's case suggests that there is not.

Conceivably, the Mercury News', the CIA's and South Central's drug dealers collective wish came true. People began to pay less attention to whether or not the Alliance series accurately reported a despicable chapter of a branch of the United States government's criminal and illegal activities both overseas and at home in its urban neighbourhoods. It is debatable whether the waning public interest resulted from the newspaper's and its allies' efforts to source the silence. Quite possibly, it came as a result of a new scandal, unquestionably one much more influential on the lives of most Americans than a little thing like rampant crack addiction in predominantly poor, disenfranchised neighbourhoods or a United States government-funded war on a vulnerable community. In the United States, sex scandals, especially adulterous sex scandals involving a Democratic president, always trump scandals impacting poor, primarily black and Latino people, hence the pulse-inducing statement, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Ms. Lewinsky."

In the January/February issue of the Columbia Journalism Review, Peter Kornbluh opened his piece, *The Storm Over Dark Alliance*, with these words: "After Gary Webb spent more than a year of intense investigative reporting and weeks of drafting, his editors at the San Jose Mercury News decided to run his three-part series late last August, when the nation's focus was divided between politics and vacation...[Webb's] story subsequently became the most talked-about piece of journalism in 1996 and arguably the most famous—some would say infamous—set of articles of the decade. Indeed, in the five months since its publication, Dark Alliance has been transformed into what New York Times reporter Tim Weiner calls a 'metastory'—a phenomenon of public outcry, conspiracy theory, and media reaction that has transcended the original series itself." Not surprisingly, Webb's very death has generated the same kind of metastory. Although he died 20 months ago, there are new blogs and articles, this one among them, examining his life and contributions. This time around, conspiracy theorists are asking whether Webb really committed suicide at all.

On December 10, 2004, Gary Webb was found in

his apartment with two fatal gunshot wounds to the head. While the coroner surmised the death as suicide, controversy remains due to the fact that not only was Webb shot twice to the face, which is almost unheard of in cases of suicide, but was also working on a follow up to Dark Alliance at the time. Close friends spoke of his claims that he was under surveillance and that his house had been broken into on numerous occasions. Weeks before his death, Webb claimed to have seen two men he described as "government people" scaling the pipes on the side of his house, who when disturbed, took off before he could pursue.

Of all the theories, interpretations, beliefs, and "fact-based" articles circulating in at least three languages on the Internet pertaining to Gary Webb's death, the following excerpt from a piece Al Giordano wrote on December 15, 2004 in *The NarcoNews Bulletin*, may best explain the circumstances surrounding his friend and colleague's death: "The hand on the trigger at that moment – his – is not the first, nor is he acting alone. Gary had to wait in line and take a number behind all those who set his suicide in motion years ago. It was a miracle he didn't do this back when San Jose Mercury News editor Jerry Ceppos . . . cocked the shotgun and pulled the trigger on the most authentic journalistic career of the late 20th Century. That was the day that the bullet flew out of the cartridge and, as if in very slow motion, took years to reach Gary's head. . . . In the immortal words of Jonathan Swift, 'When a true genius appears in the world, you may know him by this sign, that all the dunces are in confederacy against him.' In our own network of Authentic Journalists Gary was the leader of a certain tendency: those who believe that a journalist reports the facts, only the facts, and lets the chips fall where they may. The last time I saw him face-to-face, alive, was on a rooftop in Isla Mujeres, Mexico, in February 2003, when he held the late (and also suicided) Abbie Hoffman's cane in hand and his words rang out over the Caribbean and into the ears of our original group of 50 journalists. His voice thundered: "A journalist is, by definition, a revolutionary." I know something about suicide. It is never a solitary crime. As Antonin Artaud once wrote about Vincent Van Gogh taking his own life: "Van Gogh was suicided by society."

Rest in peace.

Kaymaria Daskarolis

**"[WEBB'S] STORY SUBSEQUENTLY BECAME THE MOST TALKED-ABOUT PIECE OF JOURNALISM IN 1996 AND ARGUABLY THE MOST FAMOUS—SOME WOULD SAY INFAMOUS—SET OF ARTICLES OF THE DECADE."**

- Peter Kornbluh, Columbia Journalism Review







# DJ Premier

## Take it Personal

**"It's all part of hip-hop because hip-hop borrows from everything to make a new sound. If it's rebellious and hardcore, we embrace it."**

DJ Premier is hip-hop. He is one of a rare breed: highly-respected for his contributions to old school, original, pioneering hip-hop music, and simultaneously in high demand as a modern, ground-breaking, hit-making DJ and producer. The man is great and is one of the originators of this thing we call hip-hop music. Although he has been in the game for years, he is still coming with brand new music. Innovation seems to be in DJ Premier's blood; his creativity does not cease. Few people in the music industry take risks like DJ Premier does, but those who do are among the most successful and ultimately most respected, like Primo himself. He knows he's bringing the hardcore hip-hop—whether it's laced with jazz loops featuring an emcee no one but he has ever heard of before, or highlighting the vocal skills of a songstress best known for her pop music—so he's really not concerned with commentary.

**Some people were surprised by your collaboration with Christina Aguilera. What led you to decide to work with her?**

We got a call at the office sayin' she wanted to work with us. I thought, 'Yeah, right, that's not gonna happen.' I don't really do that type of stuff. I've done Janet Jackson remixes, Madonna remixes, but that's just vocals and putting a beat around it. To make a song from scratch—and everything we did was straight from scratch—that's what made the song dope. She got on the phone with me and said, 'This is what I want to do,' and she explained it, and then we went to fly out to meet her and I was like, 'Okay, yeah, we can do this.' It's not like Britney Spears who has a lot of money and turns out hits but doesn't have a good voice. I already could tell with Christina that she could really sing. She wanted scratching and all that: she wanted everything, so that also made me want to work with her. I really haven't gotten a negative comment about it yet. So far, everybody's been like, 'It sounds dope.' Because I kept the hip-hop element in it, I didn't cross the line, you know what I'm sayin'? I went up to the

line, but I didn't cross it. I'm satisfied with everything we did. I'm happy with it. Anybody who has a problem with it, they're not listening to it correctly. Everything matched. I listened to her, I listened to her old albums—I like "Beautiful," that was a good record—but I'm not into her old pop stuff just because it's not my thing. She's big time into Etta James, and Etta James is hip-hop.

**Do you worry at all about the growing number of hip-hop artists—DJs, producers, and emcees—working with R&B or pop artists?**

I think it's cool if you mix hip-hop with pop or R&B as long as you still do your hip-hop on the side. Like Pharell will do a Justin Timberlake record, but then he has a new record he did with The Clipse called "A New World" and that's a hip-hop record. We know how to separate ourselves from what we do with hip-hop records and what we do with pop records. If we started just doing pop and left hip-hop alone then that would be bad for hip-hop, but we all are still addicted to it. Plus, we live the lifestyle, so it's all gravy. I love making hot hip-hop records. It's fun and I'm still a fan; I still like to buy hip-hop. I buy everything. I'll buy Defari and I'll buy Ludacris. I'll buy Jedi Mind Tricks and then I'll buy Kanye West. And I listen to everything I buy—E-40, Too Short, Dogg Pound, Daz. I still go digging; just went digging two weeks ago. I got some Danish breaks in Copenhagen. DJ Noize in Copenhagen just gave me a whole bunch of Danish breaks and old records.

**You are known to go from "Brick House" by The Commodores to "Shout" by Tears for Fears and then to "Stop Pushin'" by M.O.P. Is this all hip-hop to you?**

The Commodores, Earth, Wind, and Fire, Aretha Franklin, even Jimi Hendrix and Red Hot Chili Peppers, all that stuff, that's all relevant to hip-hop. Nirvana is hip-hop. They may not think so, they be like, 'Ah, nah, that's rock.' It's all part of hip-hop because hip-hop borrows from everything to make a new sound. If it's rebellious and hardcore, we embrace it. Nirvana is hardcore and rebellious.

**Besides working with people who are already famous, you're really well known for working with people who aren't highly recognized yet, like Byata and Termanology. How do you decide who you are going to work with? What do you hear and what do you listen for that makes you decide?**

Dang, you know about the Byata record? Wow. With Byata, that's Marley Marl's artist. Marley Marl asked me for a favour—he got it. That's how the Byata record came out. There are a lot of underground people who can't afford to pay me the money to do the songs, but I recognize their talent to where I know they deserve to be where I am, so even if they have a little money and I think it's worth doing it, I'll do it. And I always tell them, 'Now don't tell the other people how much I let you off the hook.' But say if they get a million dollar deal after that and they want me again, they gotta pay, I'm gonna charge them. That's how it was with Biggie. I did "Unbelievable" for five thousand. He went platinum. When he did *Life After Death*, I charged him the rate. And he couldn't complain because he knew I looked out for him. Same thing with Jay-Z. I looked out for him when he was doing *Reasonable Doubt*, you know, so, it changes when you start to make millions. But it has to be recognizing and knowing if it's a hip-hop artist that deserves a shot, and if I have time. You're supposed to do that.

**Do you ever feel like imitation is not the greatest form of flattery but just plain stealing, like when DJs out there try to replicate your innovative sound by using the same riffs and samples you used a decade ago?**

All you do is come back with your stuff. They can't compare to my stuff. I'm as raw as they come, so it's all good.

Kaymaria Daskarolis

# MIXTAPE REVIEWS



## Saigon *The Return of the Yardfather*

Heralded over the past few years as the great New York hope, Sai has been hit with his fair share of label politricks causing his debut album to remain shelved for the foreseeable future. Aiming to build some buzz in the meantime, *The Return of the Yardfather* is stacked with possible album tracks such as "Don't Do That," "Change the Game" and the already well received single "Pain in my Life." New songs like "Desperado" and "Dreams" demonstrate that despite the album delay, Sai still has that hunger. Providing he doesn't get Ras Kass-ed out of the game, he has enough material to drop one of the best LPs hip-hop has heard since the turn of the century.

Chris Cromie



## Mick Boogie Presents Nas And AZ *Executive Decisions*

Ever since the two paired up on Nas's debut opus, hip-hop heads have dreamt of a full length collaboration album between the duo. 13 years later, the often rumored project seems unlikely, however Mick Boogie has compiled a mixtape weaving classic Nas and AZ collabo joints and some interesting blends together. "The Essence," "Phone Tap" and "How Ya Livin'?" will both fondly remind you of the intrinsic chemistry they shared and have you pining for more. With both artists enjoying fourth quarter critical success in '06, *Executive Decisions* is a great follow-up for those who enjoy *Hip-hop is Dead* and *The Format*. A Nas and AZ collaboration album in '07? Hey, we can still dream.

Chris Cromie



## Chamillionaire *Mixtape Messiah 2*

Ending 2006 with one of the highest grossing debut albums of the year and two Grammy nominations, Chamillionaire returns with *The Mixtape Messiah 2*. The tape boasts highlights such as Chamilitary's rendition of "Hip-hop Is Dead" and the Akon featured "Ridin' Overseas" - the official remix to his smash hit single "Ridin' Dirty." Not just a good promotional joint for Cham's next album due in March, the mixtape is evidence that lyrically, he can bang with any of his counterparts from the north-east. Available for free online, *The Mixtape Messiah 2* is the perfect potion for those still recovering from the holidays.

Gerald Adams



## DJ Premier *No Talent Required*

*No Talent Required* is a welcomed respite from the many DJs throwing some CD singles together and calling it a mixtape. In addition to the fact that he actually mixes and scratches real vinyl on *No Talent Required*, Primo also brings together some of hip-hop's best rebel music. Featured songs include a remix of Termanology's "Watch How It Go Down" featuring Lil Fame and Papoose, KRS-One's "My Life," Defari's "Peace and Gangsta," Planet Asia's "On Your Way 93708," and Talib Kweli's "Cuntry Cuzins" featuring UGK. *No Talent Required* reminds listeners who the man is: Primo.

Kaymaria Daskarolis