



NOMB >> SOAP OPERA

"Basically, that's when I started realizing life is real," says Brian "Nomb" Jackson, recounting being a fatherless and homeless 8-year-old. "I stayed with my mom and my dad until I was about six—me and my brother. Then my dad left. Immediately it seemed like we went from hotel to hotel, eventually ending up at the Salvation Army shelter for women and kids in Charlotte, North Carolina."

Nomb (as in Vietnam), 23, transferred his personal plight to wax as half of the duo Military Soldiers. By 1998, he had a regional hit with "Soldier Love," but even his early radio success is remembered with angst. "The radio shows love me now, but to say they showed me love then, that'd be a lie," scoffs Nomb. "It got a real good buzz going, then they dropped me [from rotation] 'cause I couldn't put it in stores. I was fuckin' sixteen years old!"

Realizing that hip-hop wasn't exactly crackalackin' in North Cackalack, Nomb relocated to California in 2001. "I slept in the car," he reveals, of his

initial LA residency at the corner of Mulholland Drive and Laurel Canyon Blvd. "It's a city view right around that corner. So I was like, Fuck it, if I gotta sleep in the car I might as well sleep where I can see the city." After a few more years of paying dues, Nomb connected with his current manager Drano the Dealmaker, who immediately lived up to his name, scoring the rapper a Geffen Records contract through Goodfellas Entertainment.

Nomb's storm has passed. He now awaits the sunshine via the release of his debut, *Smoke in the City*. "That's the gun smoke, the weed smoke, the car screeching off-smoke—that's every smoke that's lighting the city up," he says. If it's smoke that Nomb will cause then credit the sparks to Scott Storch's production, coupled with hook heat from Anthony Hamilton and Jagged Edge, making his LP a blazing triumph over tribulations. "It was really a long struggle," he says of his tumultuous travels. "I don't know about the rest of these niggas, but I went hard for mine." —PAUL W. ARNOLD