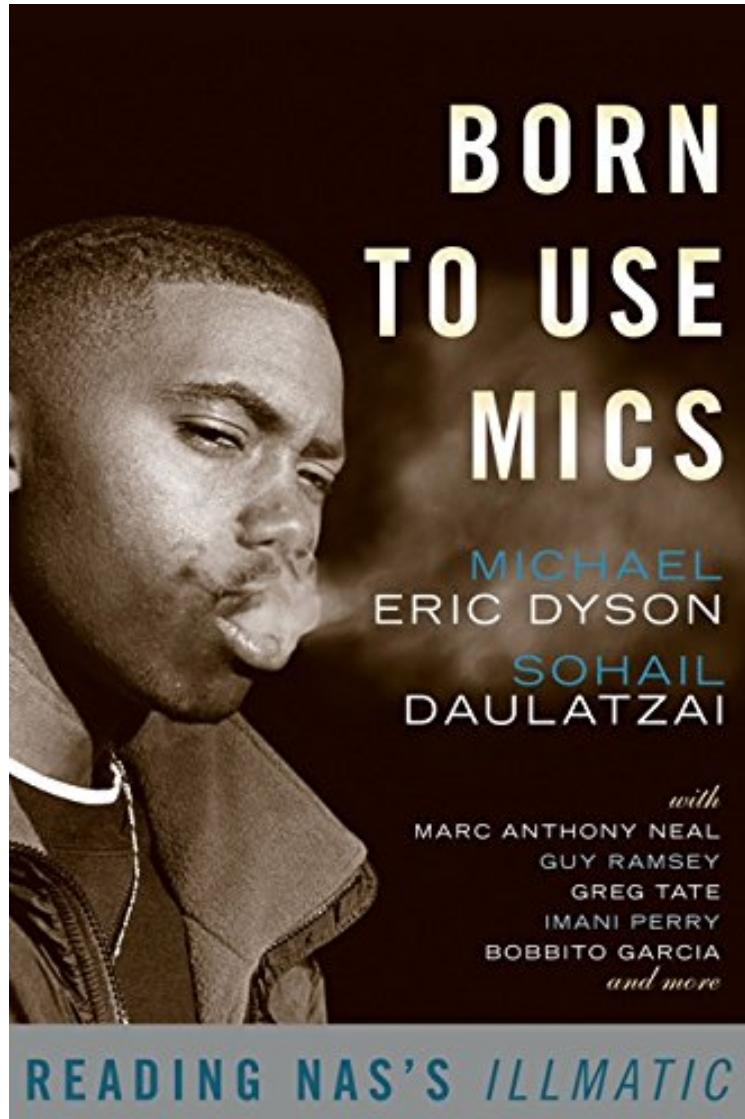


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Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas's Illmatic

Michael Eric Dyson, Sohail Daulatzai
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At the age of nineteen, Nasir Nas Jones began recording tracks for his debut album and changed the music world

forever. Released in 1994, *Illmatic* was hailed as an instant masterpiece and has proven one of the most influential albums in hip-hop history. With its close attention to beats and lyricism, and riveting first-person explorations of the isolation and desolation of urban poverty, *Illmatic* was pivotal in the evolution of the genre. In *Born to Use Mics*, Michael Eric Dyson and Sohail Daulatzai have brought together renowned writers and critics including Mark Anthony Neal, Marc Lamont Hill, Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., and many others to confront *Illmatic* song by song, with each scholar assessing an individual track from the album. The result is a brilliant engagement with and commentary upon one of the most incisive sets of songs ever laid down on wax.

From Booklist Though not an overwhelming chart success when released in 1994, Nas album *Illmatic* has long been hailed as a hip-hop masterpiece, whose sales steadily climbed until in 2001 it attained platinum status (i.e., one million-copy U.S. sales). Editors Dyson and Daulatzai corral a team of all-star commentators, including themselves, to assess the album's merits and its place in the larger cultural context. Arriving at the very end of hip-hop's Golden Age, *Illmatic* pointed the way for hip-hop's post-gangsta crossover into and alteration of the pop-music mainstream. The essays aren't easy reading, but they constitute a vital book for readers eager to understand the history of the genre. As Daulatzai observes, There is something about *Illmatic* that transcends the categories of hip-hop, though at the bottom line, *Illmatic* is just a dope album, embodying everything that is hip-hop while mastering what matters most: beats and rhymes. An absolute must for serious pop-music collections. --Mike Tribby Booklist A vital book for readers eager to understand the history of the genre.