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Public Enemy – *It Takes A Nation: The First London Invasion Tour 1987* DVD Review

Posted By Michael Melchor on 06.08.05

When Armageddon came into effect.

*Peace!
Armageddon – had been in effect, go get a late pass.
Step!
This time around, the revolution will not be televised!
Step!
London, England...
Consider yourselves...
WARNED!*

Many a hip-hop fan will recognize that as Professor Griff's opening barrage on Public Enemy's groundbreaking 1988 attack, *It Takes A Nation of Millions To Hold us Back*. That battle cry became the opening salvo not only for a revolutionary album, but for a movement in Hip Hop that prided knowledge and consciousness over boasting and what we know today as "bling".

Nowadays, those days are all but gone in modern Rap. However, with the release of *It Takes A Nation: The First London Invasion Tour 1987*, they can be relived by a presentation of the full concert that the above soundbite came from, plus other bonus features that make one long for the days when Hip Hop actually had something to say.

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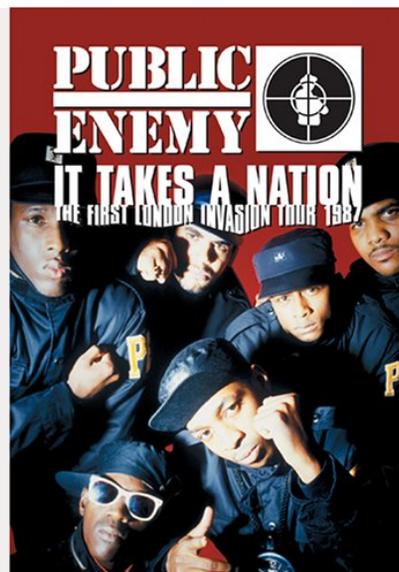
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// Public Enemy – *It
Takes A Nation: The
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The main attraction here is the first Public Enemy concert in London. As we learn in the audio commentary by PE frontman Chuck D, the show was actually the Def Jam Tour featuring Eric B & Rakim and LL Cool J, with Public Enemy opening the bill. It was a time when Chuck, Flavor Flav, then-DJ Terminator X, Professor Griff, and the S1Ws (Security of the First World back-up dancers/"troopers") were turning the thought process of both blacks and whites upside-down with their words and music, and they had no qualms about doing the same overseas.

The performance shows a young and hungry PE making their mark to a rabid audience starving for something new. Chuck and Flavor, for the kids who may not have been around then, show why they were one of the hottest rap acts not only on wax, but on the stage as well. Even before the band employed such conceits as having their with a KKK leader that made his way on to the wrong stage, the S1Ws, with their weapons and moves, painted the urgent picture of needed change that Public Enemy and the Bomb Squad production crew pioneered and cornered the market on.

The main detraction is both the video and sound quality of the footage in question. The concert itself looks like it came from a 2nd or 3rd-generation VHS recording of a show originally captured on SLP. The sharpness is completely missing and the sound is good so long as you're paying close attention and know half of the songs already.

To have the centerpiece of a DVD presentation look in such rough shape makes me wish they could have cleaned it up before the release, but then who's to say there would have been a way to do so? Suspending disbelief, it's good to at least see the show as a "bootleg" performance, knowing history was made here.

Listening to the performance with Chuck D's audio commentary, however, is a treat in and of itself. While offering nothing truly shocking in the way of the inner-workings of the band

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then or now (i.e. don't look for any comment on Flavor's relationship with Brigitte Nielsen), Chuck focuses on the ways of the world, both in the past and the present. It's fascinating to hear him recount the history of the band and compare how the message got across then to the way it *needs* to get across now.

Also featured with the DVD is a live performance of "She Watch Channel Zero?" done 3 years ago in Australia. More of this concert should have been presented, but as another DVD is out there of a show that recent, it would have been redundant. As it is, the performance accentuates Chuck D's commentary in comparing the past to the present.

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Overlooking the less-than-desirable video quality of the footage itself, *It Takes A Nation: The First London Invasion Tour 1987* comes off as a success in both eras. Then, it was a rap group making an indelible mark on the international market. Now, it's a display of how incendiary rap was back then – and, should someone step up to the plate that Public Enemy called home, could be again.

Final Score:7.5

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