

## Public Enemy

### Most of My Heroes Still Don't Appear on No Stamp

review

**[-]** by Stephen Thomas Erlewine

Its title hearkens back to a line in **Public Enemy**'s incendiary 1989 anthem "Fight the Power," recalling the band's glory days but cutting deeper, exposing an ugly truth: 20-plus years and a black president in the White House later, things still haven't changed all that much in America. That lingering inequality nags at **Chuck D** throughout **Most of My Heroes Still Don't Appear On No Stamp**, **PE**'s twelfth album and their first released after the election of Barack Obama, a development that would perhaps seem to the casual observer a vindication of everything **Public Enemy** represents -- famously, the Obamas' first date was at a showing of Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* where "Fight the Power" plays a crucial role -- but **Public Enemy** seems angrier than ever here. And deservedly so, as so much of what **PE** stands for -- sonically, politically, culturally -- is submerged in 2012, obscured by a marginalization of radicalization and imagination. **Public Enemy** fights against the dying light of Black Power and counterculture throughout **Most of My Heroes Still Don't Appear On No Stamp**, the phrase not only providing a title but a motif (it appears repeatedly throughout the record's 11 songs), the band deliberately evoking their past by sampling earlier records and tossing off allusions to older lyrics, staying true to the template created by the Bomb Squad in the late '80s yet avoiding a meticulous re-creation of that sonic onslaught. The music here isn't as dense as **It Takes a Nation of Millions** or **Fear of a Black Planet** -- it's nimble and spare, a steely reduction of **the J.B.**'s relentless groove, augmented by cacophonous flourishes of guitar and white noise. It's all the better to push the spotlight onto **Chuck D**, who is in full-blown preacher/teacher mode here, intent on tying the past into the present and doing a pretty effective job, too. **Chuck** doesn't much care if he comes across as an indignant professor here, and that's part of the charm of not just this, but all latter-day **Public Enemy**: this is the sound of true believers who give not a damn about fashion, they remain true to the sounds and sensibilities they laid out back in the late '80s. And the music remains vital and vibrant, possibly because, despite some progress, things still haven't changed all that much and, in some respects, have gotten worse...and as long as **Public Enemy**'s heroes remain consigned to the margins, they'll still make music as dynamic as this.