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Public Enemy - It Takes A Nation: The First London Invasion Tour 1987 (DVD)

Back in the late 80's, Public Enemy became one of the most influential and well-known rap groups of all-time. Chuck D, Flavor Flav and Terminator X brought politics and social consciousness to their music while still retaining danceable beats and clever rhymes. They also shocked many early concert goers with their stage show that included S1W (Security of the First World) members wearing military fatigues and carrying machine guns. But despite the controversy, they were pioneers in many ways and Chuck D in particular remains an active and important music personality today. (Flavor Flav, on the other hand, recently appeared on the reality show The Surreal Life... 'nuff said.)

"It Takes A Nation" is a DVD release that covers the band's first visit to the U.K. as part of the Def Jam tour, headlined by L.L. Cool J and Eric B and Rakim. An entire concert from London is included on the disc, as well as a "movie" that features interview footage mixed with clips from the live performance. The show took place in 1987, just prior to the release of their groundbreaking album "It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back". As a result, the majority of the songs are culled from their first record, "Yo! Bum Rush The Show". Songs like "Too Much Posse" and "Public Enemy No. 1" are still classics, and it's interesting to note the song "Raise The Roof", which was very ahead of its time. Perhaps the most interesting performance is an early rendition of "Bring The Noise", which clearly set the crowd off despite the fact that the song had yet to be released.

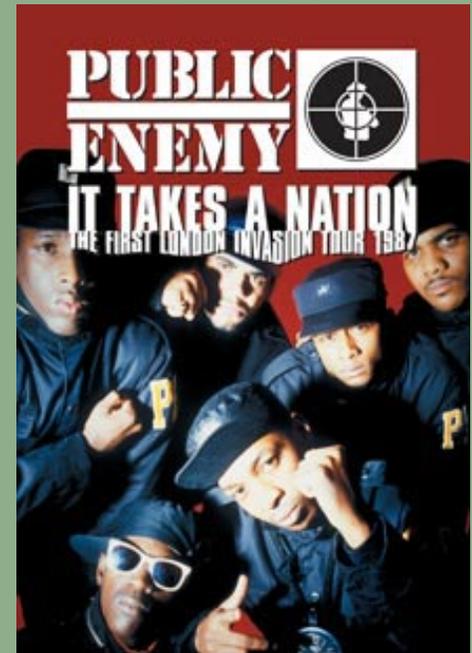
The video quality is not that great, and looks like it was a direct dub of an old VHS tape, often with fuzzy lines cutting across the screen. The interview stuff is not as interesting as it should have been either, as most of it seems to be goofy backstage footage of Flava Flav being his usually lunatic self. Thankfully, the DVD does have an audio commentary track with Chuck D, which gives more of a rational explanation of the history of that tour and perceptions of the band at that time. I would have much preferred an actual documentary about the band, but at least this has a fair bit more content than your average live music DVD.

Strangely, the band seemed to be lip synching on some songs, and later on we see an argument between Flavor Flav and Terminator X about that very issue.

For Public Enemy fans this is a must-buy, although for casual P.E. listeners it may not have much resonance -- especially considering the fact that their most well-known songs from Fear Of A Black Planet and later albums are not here. (There are however a couple extra songs included in bonus footage from a more recent show in Australia, including "Can't Truss It".) Public Enemy are an interesting band that deserve to be more fully documented at some point. This is by no means a definitive look, but at least it's a start. -- Sean

SCORE: 3 out of 4 stars

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