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Digital Underground: Raw Uncut

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In 1989, the face of hip-hop was changed forever," the narrator boldly proclaims in the very first frame of *Digital Underground: Raw Uncut*, an unabashed salutation to the rap group that pop culture pupils may consider a one-hit wonder (for their irresistible dance floor favorite "The Humpty Dance"). Still, the vanity of the film's tone doesn't deplete from its entertainment value. Besides, if there's one thing D-U taught to the hip-hop world, it's to not take ourselves so seriously.

Like a VHI "Behind the Music" special randomly splattered with footage from "Unplugged" and "Girls Gone Wild," there's an incoherent flow to this documentary that can be both refreshingly intrepid and dreadfully frustrating. It doesn't stick to a timeline, which can be nice. But when we catch an on-stage glimpse of Tupac Shakur — who got his start with D-U as a backup dancer, hype man and, ultimately, a guest rapper — it takes a peculiarly long time for the film to explain the connection (a fitting tribute does ensue, however).

With its prime constituency of Humpty-Hump (the "original big-nose rapper"), Money B, Shock G and DJ Fuse, D-U blew up in no time, going from an underground Oakland rap outfit to international stars in a matter of months, with singles like "Underwater Rhymes" and "Dooowatchyalike." In between "getting their tourism on" in Europe and making a name for themselves as live performers, the group recorded the gold album *Sex Packets*, with the hit single "The Humpty Dance."

The sometimes laughable, self-

righteous narration rarely ceases: "Digital Underground's fan base began to broaden as people of all ethnicities, religious preferences and economic backgrounds forgot about the world and for a moment shared in what became the melting pot of hip-hop in pop culture." In other words, the white kids were showing up in droves at their Indiana shows.

Unfortunately for D-U, things couldn't possibly get better, but *Raw Uncut* progresses through the group's career and side projects as if its steady and then rapid decline was a natural part of the biz. Barely any attention is paid to the departure of class clown Humpty-Hump ("he took off on some ego shit," Shock G said during a radio interview). Soon enough, a couple of the posse's members had begun financing adult video magazines and DVDs featuring "rappers and porno stars in hot and steamy situations."

D-U did take pride in its energetic performances, and undoubtedly the best aspect of *Raw Uncut* is how much of the special is devoted to footage from their shows. Whether inviting the hoochies on stage for some dancing or getting clever with the props, these guys made an effort to give fans their money's worth.

SELLING POINTS: The D-U faithful should eat up the film's glorification of a group that probably got too big for its own good way too quickly. And while the film's opening statement may be an embellishment, they certainly have a place within the (big-nosed) face of hip-hop.

— Kevin Polowy

