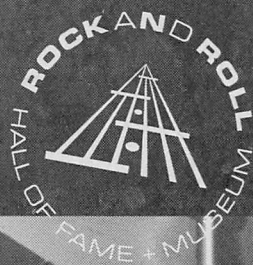


PUBLIC ENEMY



By Peter Lindblad

CHUCK D AND PUBLIC ENEMY

were itching to unleash “Yo! Bum Rush the Show” on a world that wasn’t at all prepared for its incendiary political and social commentary or its revolutionary

sound collages. In 1986, however, the group’s record company had different priorities.

While working at college radio station WBAU, the emcee with the powerful, hard-hitting delivery and a keen intellect had already rapped on

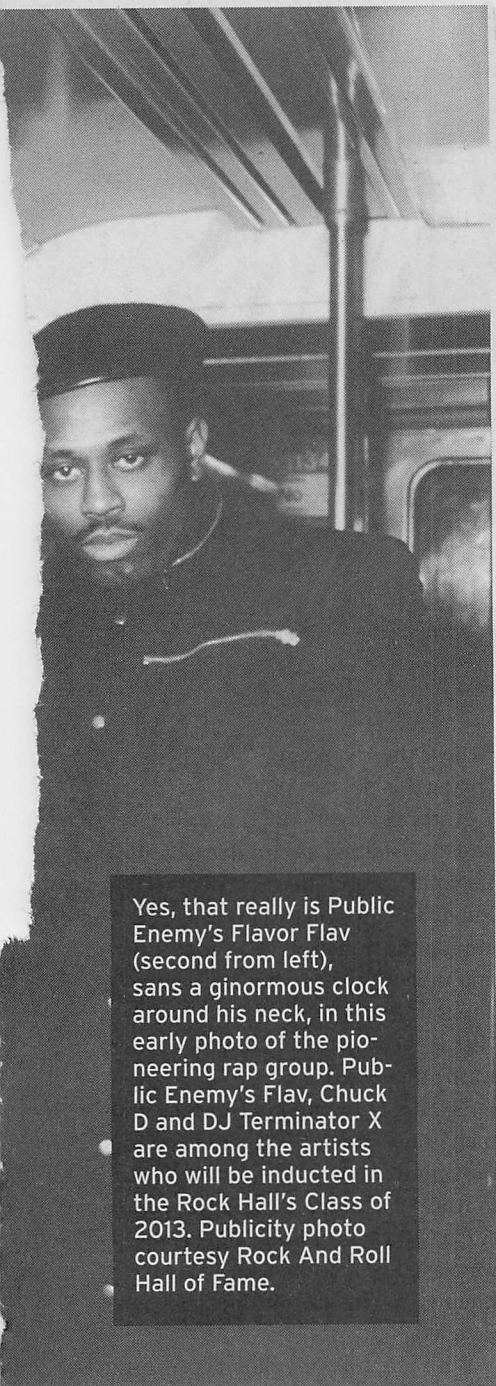
the “Public Enemy No. 1” tape put together by PE’s sonic mastermind, Hank Shocklee.

“It actually was a demo for radio promo in 1984 that created a lot of havoc,” Chuck D recalls.

The tape made the rounds from

“Yo! MTV Raps” host Dr. Dre to Run DMC’s Jam Master Jay to Def Jam Recordings founder Rick Rubin and even to The Beastie Boys.

But that didn’t help the record make it out to the masses any faster. Hip-hop



Yes, that really is Public Enemy’s Flavor Flav (second from left), sans a ginormous clock around his neck, in this early photo of the pioneering rap group. Public Enemy’s Flav, Chuck D and DJ Terminator X are among the artists who will be inducted in the Rock Hall’s Class of 2013. Publicity photo courtesy Rock And Roll Hall of Fame.

was not yet a proven cash cow, and Public Enemy was put on the back burner in favor of Bruce Springsteen’s box set “Live/1975-1985,” released on the heels of The Boss’ massively successful “Born in the U.S.A.” album.

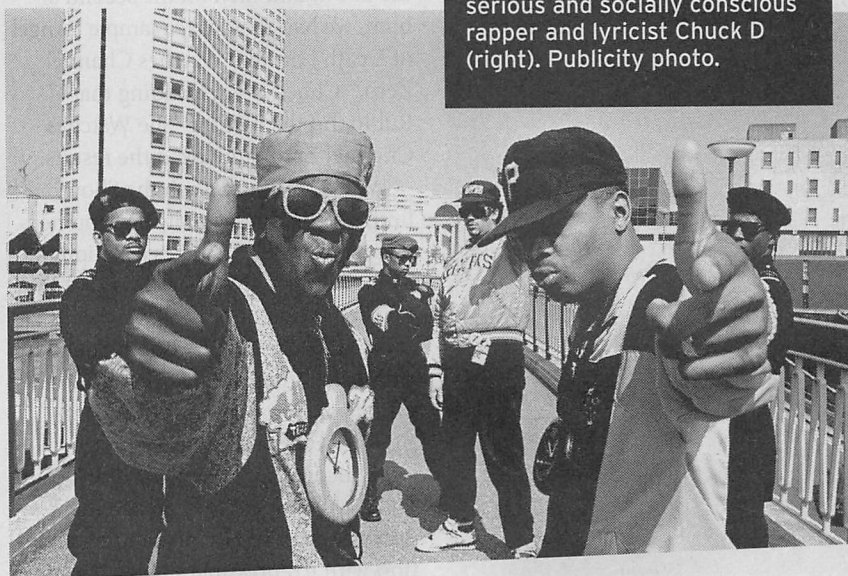
“It was my first record, and it was

actually supposed to come out in ’86, but because it was in the CBS system ... Springsteen pushed back, and the Beastie Boys pushed us back, so we got caught up into releasing our first record in ’87 instead of ’86,” D says. “By that time, a lot of the terrain of hip-hop and rap music had changed, and [‘Public Enemy No. 1’] would have been groundbreaking if it had come out in ’86. But it’s interesting, at least.”

But the rap group’s day in sun finally arrived, and emcee Chuck D, hype man Flavor Flav, the Bomb Squad production team, DJ Terminator X and the Professor Griff-led, fake Uzi-toting Security of the First World dance team turned hip-hop — and popular music, as well — on its collective ear. Touted as the “Black CNN,” Public Enemy addressed subjects important to African-Americans that white America was too scared, too apathetic or too bigoted to confront.

Against a backdrop of sirens, a crazy mix of samples, hard funk rhythms and minimalist beats, Chuck D voiced his truth with all the subtlety of a howitzer, while Flavor Flav — sporting his trademark big clocks — played the court jester. What Flavor Flav and Chuck D had to say was vitally important — as was how the 2013 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees said it.

Born Carlton Ridenhour, Chuck D attended Long Island’s Adelphi University in the early 1980s. While studying graphic design, Ridenhour worked



Yeah, boyeee! Replete with shades and a giant clock around his neck, Flavor Flav looks every bit the clown prince he played to Public Enemy’s serious and socially conscious rapper and lyricist Chuck D (right). Publicity photo.

as a DJ at the school’s radio station, WBAU, where he met Shocklee and Bill Stephney. Sharing an interest in politics and hip-hop, the three bonded, and Ridenhour began appearing on Stephney’s radio show as Chuck D.

As for Flav, he grew up as a self-trained musical prodigy in Roosevelt, N.Y., playing multiple instruments. His teenage years were troubled ones; he found himself in hot water with the law on numerous occasions and eventually dropped out of high school. Around that time, Flav and Chuck D began hosting a college radio show while also working for Chuck D’s father’s delivery service.

Soon, the various components that made up Public Enemy coalesced, with Chuck D and Flavor Flav out in front. Featuring Hank and Keith Shocklee, Eric “Vietnam” Sadler, Gary G-Wiz and Kerwin Young, the Bomb Squad was assembled, stacking a wide-ranging variety of samples on top of one another in a single track with an innovative cut-and-paste approach and avant-garde sensibilities. Whipping up a frenzied racket, with the noisy scratchings of Terminator X adding to the sonic mix, Public Enemy drew the attention of Rubin, who wanted them for his Def Jam label.

PUBLIC ENEMY



Formed: 1982

Status: Active

Key Members: DJ Terminator X (Norman Lee Rogers); Professor Griff (Richard Griffin); Chuck D (Carlton Ridenhour) and Flavor Flav (William Drayton)

Selected Discography:

"Yo! Bum Rush The Show" (1987)

"It Takes A Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back" (1988)

"Fear of a Black Planet" (1990)

"Apocalypse 91 ... The Enemy Strikes Black" (1991)

"Muse Sick-N-Hour Mess Age" (1994)

"There's A Poison Goin' On" (1999)

"Revolverlution" (2002)

"New Whirl Odor" (2005)

"Rebirth of a Nation" (2006)

"How Do You Sell Soul to a Soulless People Who Sold Their Soul???" (2007)

"Most of My Heroes Still Don't Appear on No Stamp" (2012)

"The Evil Empire of Everything" (2012)

Of Interest: Professor Griff was minister of information and choreographer for The Security of The First World, aka Public Enemy's backup dancers. He later left the group to form Asiatic Disciples. A new generation of fans discovered clock-wearing rapper Flavor Flav thanks to reality TV shows, including "The Surreal Life," "Strange Love" and "Flavor of Love."

— Sources: *Rock and Roll Hall of Fame*; *allmusic.com*

Although he was known for his production work with the likes of thrash-metal titans Slayer, Rubin took a hands-off approach with Public Enemy.

"Truthfully speaking, we never really worked hand in hand with Rick," says Chuck D. "It was probably the first time he let something be autonomous, and we wanted to be autonomous. But at the same time, we welcomed Rick to add in whatever he wanted to add in. And I think he's proud of that fact."

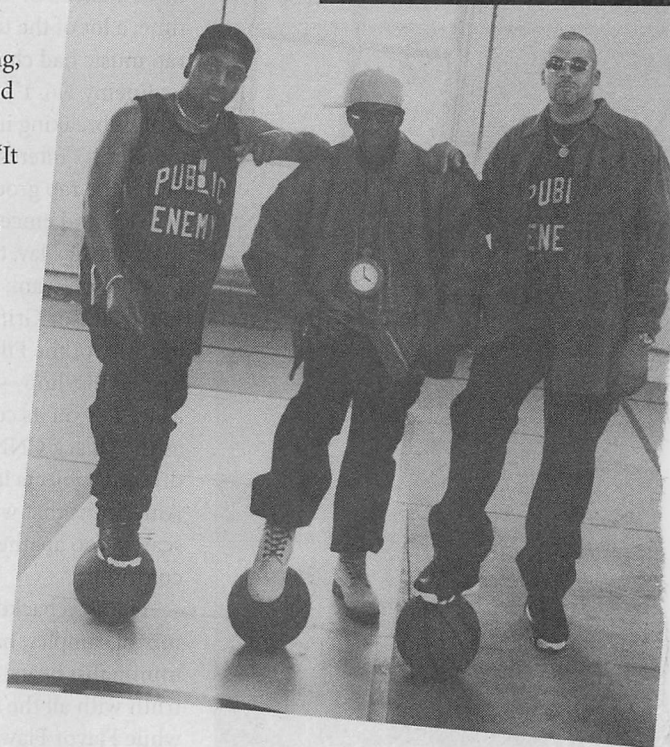
Still, with Rubin around, the Run DMC-influenced Public Enemy assimilated elements of heavy rock, pushing guitars to the fore on their raw debut "Yo! Bum Rush the Show" in startlingly original fashion. Further on down the road, Public Enemy would take it to another level.

"I should say the first time we went into a rock-rap was Vernon Reid [Living Color guitarist] playing on 'Sophisticated Bitch' on 'Yo, Bum Rush the Show,' and then on the second album, we had that Slayer sample [Angel of Death] on 'She Watches Channel Zero,'" Chuck D says, adding that Rubin did the mix for "She Watches Channel Zero" and loved the results.

While "Yo! Bum Rush the Show" finds Public Enemy in its developmental phase, 1988's "It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back" was a fully realized vision of radical sociopolitical diatribes set to The Bomb Squad's game-changing, wildly original aural murals of stomping funk, free-jazz insanity and slamming hard rock.

Public Enemy's members didn't wait for doors to open; they kicked them down and rushed in, demanding attention with irrepressible singles "Don't

The Big Three of Public Enemy: Rapper Chuck D, rapper Flavor Flav and DJ Terminator X. The group's production team, The Bomb Squad, created complex backdrops for the group's lyrics. Publicity photo.



Believe the Hype" and "Bring the Noise."

Anthrax was among those who were already listening. Drummer Charlie Benante and guitarist Scott Ian were Public Enemy's biggest ambassadors among the thrash-metal community, and in 1991, they asked Chuck D. about doing a thrash-metal remake "Bring the Noise." Initially, the rapper wasn't interested.

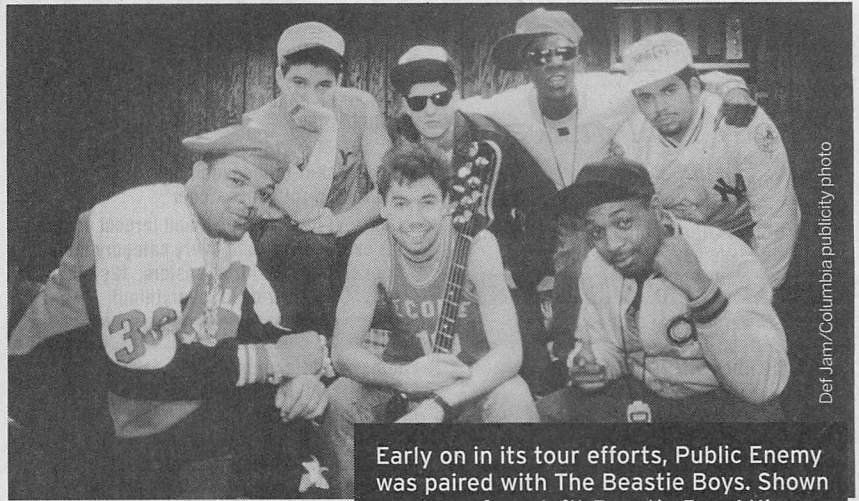
"Scottie Ian was a fan from the jump, man," says Chuck D. "Charlie and him thought it was cool to wear our T-shirts in front of a hundred thousand people at the Monsters of Rock gig. People were asking, 'Ooooh, who's Public Enemy?' So, he was our first guy, man (laughs)."

With Ian in Public Enemy's corner, the group suddenly had crossover potential. To show how much he thought of Anthrax, Chuck D invoked the name of New York City's most aggressive thrash-metal street gang in the fiery original version of "Bring the Noise."

"That was what made me name check them in the song, 'Bring the

Noise,” Chuck D says. “I was telling ‘em that music is all the same — ‘Wax is for Anthrax.’ And so I’m name checking everybody from Eric B. to Sonny Bono and Yoko Ono and Anthrax — imagine (laughs). So Charlie and Scott came back and said, ‘Look, we want to do a thrash version, Chuck. Let’s get on it.’ And I was like, at that time, ‘Well, I mean, I already did the song. You guys cover it.’ They said, ‘But we want you on it.’ And they just went ahead and did it, and I got on and, we did the video, and we did the tour, and Charlie and Scott made history.”

So did Public Enemy. It released a series of powerful and often controversial records, like 1990’s “Fear of a Black Planet,” the group’s most successful with the singles “911 Is a Joke” and the anthemic “Fight The Power,” which figured prominently into the Spike Lee film “Do the Right Thing.” “Apocalypse 91 ... The Enemy Strikes Black” followed the same path. Even as Public Enemy endured Flav’s drug problems and the media firestorm that accompanied Griff’s alleged anti-Semitic remarks in the press, Public Enemy pushed the envelope with each LP.



Def Jam/Columbia publicity photo

Early on in its tour efforts, Public Enemy was paired with The Beastie Boys. Shown are (rear, from left) Beastie Boys’ King Ad Rock and Mike D, Public Enemy’s Flavor Flav and DJ Terminator X and (front, from left) Beastie Boys’ DJ Hurricane and MCA, and Public Enemy’s Chuck D.

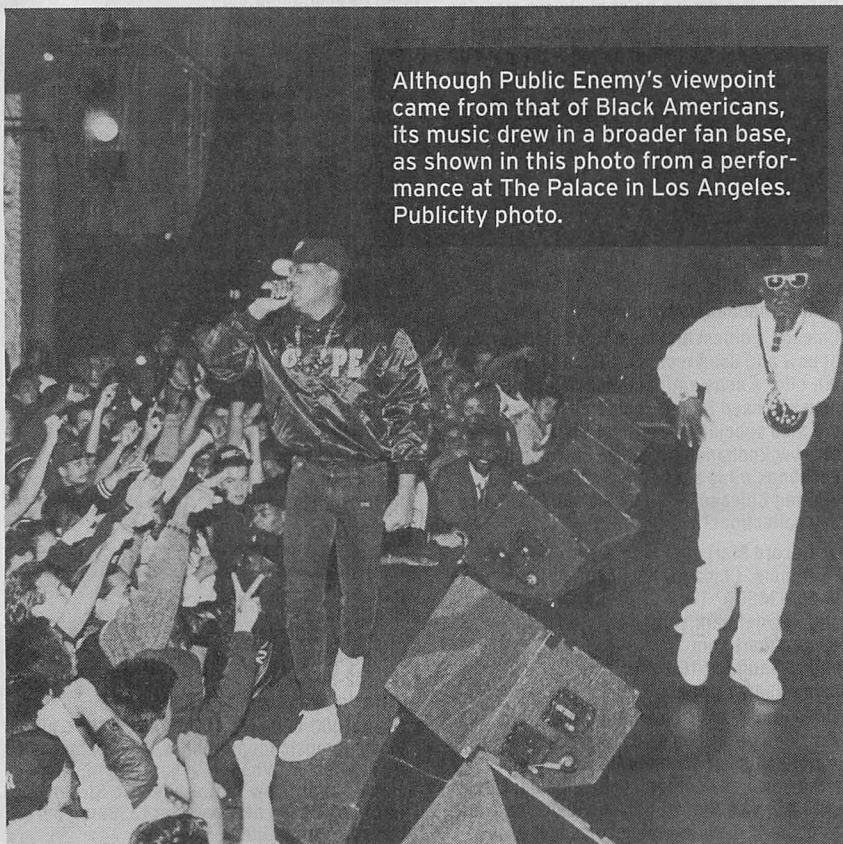
“The whole key was to make them totally different,” Chuck D explains. “The whole thing about rock is to never repeat yourself ... over the course of a catalog, you should be able to say, ‘OK, wow! Now there’s something different,’ but you’re not going to not sound like yourself. But you can actually say that we went over here, and we knew that people wanted this particular sound, and we went the opposite way.”

Eventually, Public Enemy, hugely influential in bringing about a golden

age of rap during the 1980s and 1990s, left Def Jam to go independent. In the years since, Public Enemy has resurfaced numerous times to challenge the status quo, experiencing a surprise revival in England with the hit “Harder Than You Think” off 2007’s 20th anniversary LP “How Do You Sell Soul to a Soulless People Who Sold Their Soul?” It was PE’s highest-charting single ever in the country. The group even returned to tour in 2012 and 2013 on the strength of two 2012 albums — “Most of My Heroes Don’t Appear on No Stamp” and “Evil Empire of Everything,” which was made with full instrumental bands and Terminator X’s late 1990s replacement, DJ Lord.

The tech-savvy Chuck D was quick to embrace the possibilities of digitization and the Internet, and he’s been instrumental in establishing the first-ever HipHopGods.com Classic Tourfest Revue, featuring Public Enemy and a revolving lineup of rap artists from the golden age of hip-hop.

“I was really impressed with what they did, over the years, with classic rock, how they separated classic rock from the mainstream,” Chuck D says, adding that he wanted to do the same for the pioneering, golden era and spirit of rap and what was happening in the mainstream, contemporary, major record industry. “We need to take care of it.” **GM**



Although Public Enemy’s viewpoint came from that of Black Americans, its music drew in a broader fan base, as shown in this photo from a performance at The Palace in Los Angeles. Publicity photo.