

# Public Enemy's Tour de Force

## Rolling Stone column profile

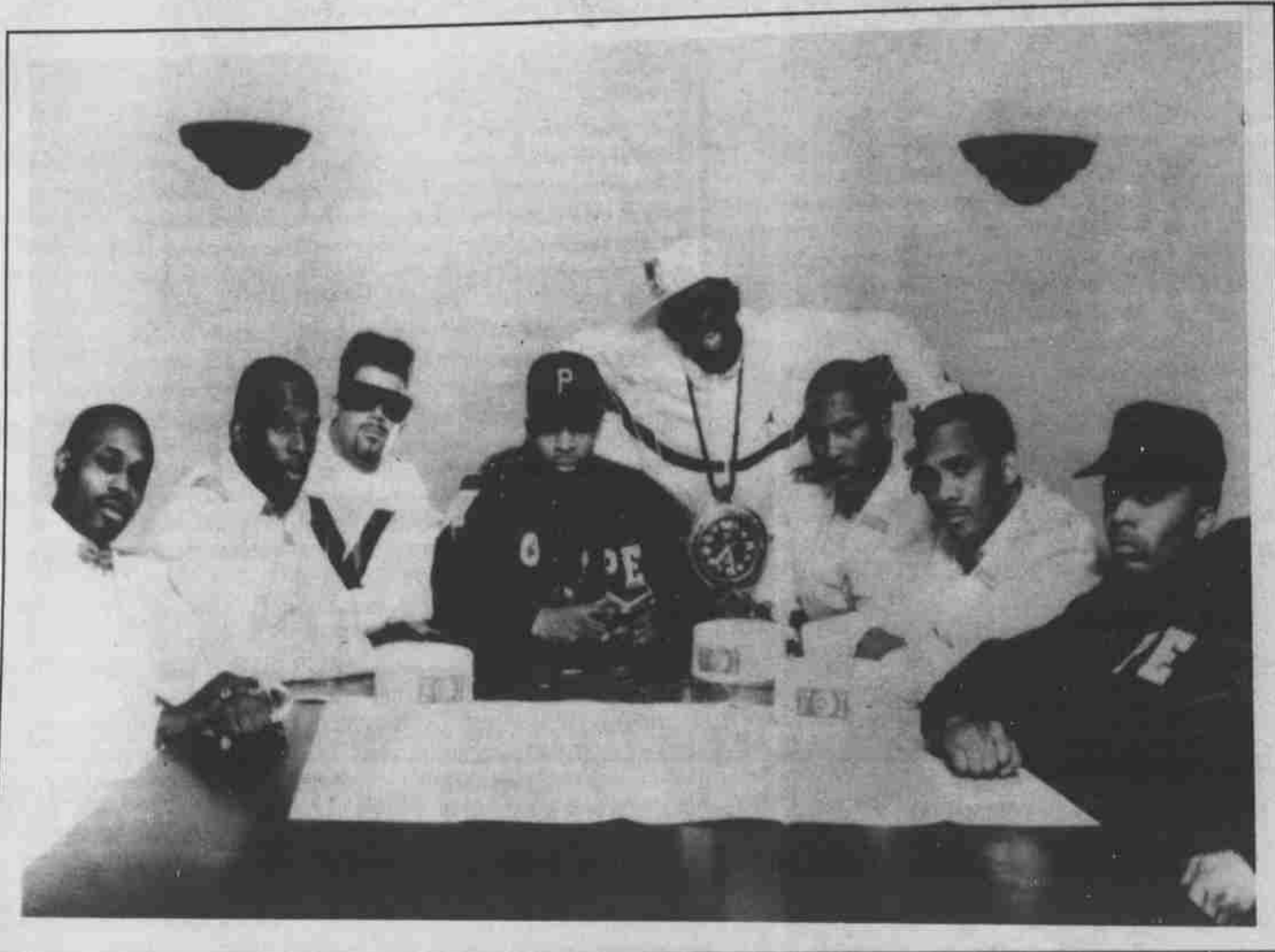
By Alan Light

"I ain't gonna talk for long. I'm just gonna make a lot of sense." It was a passing remark by lead rapper Chuck D at Public Enemy's July 6 concert at the Philadelphia Spectrum, but it neatly summarized the fierce concision marks pop music's most consistently controversial, confusing and exciting group at its best. The Tour of a Black Planet, Public Enemy's first U.S. tour in almost two years—hitting 50 cities in two months—is one of the biggest and highest-profile rap ventures ever. PE has risen to this challenge with an incendiary 70-minute set, as furious as the best live rock & roll, that should lay to rest any lingering suspicion that rappers just can't cut it live.

The Spectrum date was emotional as well, for the New York-based Public Enemy has proclaimed Philly its second home.

Before the Philadelphia show, Chuck sat alone, surrounded by 18,000 empty seats bouncing a basketball and quietly discussing his hometown's (New York) lingering resistance to rap. "It's paranoia based on a lack of education about the black community," Chuck said. "It's also based on lack of care—It's a black thing, it's not our concern."

The supporting acts joining the Black Planet tour represent rap's most accessible edge. Half-hour sets have contributed by Kid'n Play and Heavy D and the Boyz. Digital Underground ("The Humpty Dance") and Chill Rob G ("The Power") have also done quick run-throughs of their hits on some dates. It's the package that makes a tour sell and move, "according to Chuck. "You grab people that can cover your weaknesses. The combination of Heavy D and Kid'n Play—the sex symbols, the movie stars—they'll bring a lot more females into the audience." Unfortunately, the opening acts in Philadelphia were hindered by muffled sound, and their juvenile stage antics made it clear that they are not ready for larger



venues. Only Kid 'n Play's charm and flashy dance steps left any lasting impression, and even they participated in the monotonous stage humping that marred the opening sets. Like most rappers, these groups are still unable to capture the force of their recordings in concert.

But as soon as Chuck and Flavor Flav—the latter in Afro wig and Groucho Nose—bounded on stage flanked by their "security force," the SIW's, and leapt into "Welcome to the Terrordome," it was clear that Public Enemy is the exception that proves rap's live potential. "Rebel Without a Pause" and "Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos" set a menacing tone for the set. Stalking the Spectrum stage, Chuck stared down the crowd and shadowboxed as his booming, crushing voice cut through the noise.

A brutal "Bring the Noise" demonstrated the telepathy between Chuck and Terminator X, as the DJ introduced a new guitar-chord scratch into the mix and the rapper stayed right with him. Off stage, Chuck later described the group's performance structure: "The whole Public Enemy show works on hand-eye coordination between me and Terminator X. Then the SIW's feed off of Terminator, and Flavor feeds off of all of us and freestyles."

After the show, the group was gleeful when basketball legend Julius Erving ("Doctor J") brought his son backstage, which is down the hall from his old locker room. While Flavor ran around, collecting 76er paraphernalia for Erving to autograph, Chuck and Erving

reminded about their hometown of Roosevelt, Long, Island. "Doc came to my house in 1976," Chuck said. "My mom used to throw a parade, and he came around—that was the last time I shook hands with him."

Watching a baseball game on TV after the show, Chuck—much smaller, quieter and more guarded than his stage presence might indicate—calmly discussed some of Public Enemy's long-standing struggles. Despite Flavor's on stage diatribe against the media, Chuck seems to have made an uneasy peace with the press. "There's two sides, people that's pro and people that's con," he said. "The con is gonna know very little about you or think they got you figured out. Then you got people that know what you're about or just getting to know what you're about."

There may have been little formal protest of Public Enemy's politics, but as live rap moves into the spotlight, many listeners still can't accept a music made without instruments. Chuck asserts that "you can only judge rap shows as compared to other rap shows. We get down with records and turntables and that's how it's going to be—that's the rules rap exists on."

But by any standard, PE is as powerful on stage as any group today. And after surviving all the furor that has plagued the group, Chuck D sounded relieved to be on the road again. "It's easy," he said. "It's a daily regimen and schedule. It's less hectic that it is when I'm around home."

### College Albums

- 1 Sonic Youth  
Goo-Geffen
- 2 Concrete Blonde  
Bloodletting-I.R.S.
- 3 Hothouse Flowers  
Home-Polygram
- 4 The Breeders  
Pod-Rough Trade
- 5 Ultra Vivid Scene  
Joy 1967-1990-4AD/Columbia
- 6 Adrian Belew  
Young Lions-Atlantic
- 7 Jesus Jones  
Liquidizer-Food/SBK
- 8 John Doe  
Meet John Doe-Geffen
- 9 World Party  
Goodbye Jumbo-Ensign/Chrysalis
- 10 The Sundays  
Reading, Writing and Arithmetic-Geffen

### TOP 10 OR SO

#### Videos

- 1 Billy Idol  
"Cradle of Love"-Chrysalis
- 2 Johnny Gill  
"Rub You the Right Way"-Motown
- 3 Motley Crue  
"Don't Go Away Mad (Just Go Away)"-Elektra
- 4 Janet Jackson  
"Come Back to Me"-A&M
- 5 Glenn Medeiros and Bobby Brown  
"She Ain't Worth it"-Amherst/MCA

### Dance Tracks

- 1 Depeche Mode  
"The policy of Truth"-Sire/Reprise
- 2 Snap  
"The Power"-Arista
- 3 Nine Inch Nails  
"Head Like a Hole"-TVT
- 4 Die Warzau  
"Strike to the Body"-Fiction/Polygram
- 5 Revenge  
"Pineapple Face"-Capitol
- 6 The Stone Roses  
"Fool's Gold"-Silvertone/RCA
- 7 Nitzer Ebb  
"Lightning Man"-Geffen
- 8 Depeche Mode  
"Enjoy the Silence"-Sire/Reprise
- 9 Candy Flip  
"Strawberry Fields Forever"-Debut UK
- 10 BlackBox  
"Everybody Everybody"-D. Construction/RCA

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