

PUBLIC ENEMY

“No one has been able to approach the political power that Public Enemy brought to hip-hop,” Adam Yauch of the Beastie Boys told Rolling Stone in 2004, “I put them on a level with Bob Marley and a handful of other artists – the rare artist who can make great music and also deliver a message.” Public Enemy brought an explosion of sonic invention, rhyming virtuosity and social awareness to hip-hop in the 1980s and 1990s. The group’s high points – 1988’s *It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back* and 1990’s *Fear Of A Black Planet*, stand among the greatest politically-charged albums of all time. Powered by producer Hank Shocklee and his crew the Bomb Squad, *Nation Of Millions* was a layered masterpiece that took the ethic of the hip-hop breakbeat – using only the best parts of any given song – and advanced it geometrically, building new music out of a thicket of samples and beats: tracks like “Rebel Without A Pause,” “Night Of The Living Baseheads” and “Black Steel In The Hour Of Chaos” are triumphs of funk, fury and collage. Chuck D. – routinely rated as one of the greatest rappers of all time – pushed the art of the MC forward with his inimitable, rapid-fire baritone as he connected the culture of hip-hop with Black Nationalism and the ideas of Malcolm X. His counterpart, Flavor Flav, brought humor (in the case of “911 Is A Joke,” pointed humor) and a madcap energy. Along the way, they brought a new level of conceptual sophistication to the hip-hop album, and a new level of intensity and power to live hip-hop, inspiring fans from Jay-Z to Rage Against the Machine to Kurt Cobain. After Public Enemy, hip-hop could never again be dismissed as kids’ music.