

Chuck D Speaks on Hip-Hop and Rap

Written by Robert ID1483

Sunday, 05 June 2005 03:28 -

When renowned hip-hop rap artist and DJ: Chuck D first became known, he was too Black and too strong But now Chuck D of the legendary hip-hop rap group Public Enemy considers himself a cultural ambassador. He brings his flavor of hip hop music to the world, when he is on tour and through the impact of the Internet and technology.

“When I travel to Eastern Europe in countries such as the former Yugoslavia and Lithuania, they know who Public Enemy is,” said Chuck D. “They are big into rap, as they have had it hard and they use rap,” to convey their messages.

As the founder of Public Enemy, Chuck D is a colossal figure in the history of hip hop and one of its most respected intellectual voices. He was in San Francisco recently, speaking on the future of the entertainment industry at the Commonwealth Club.

In an hour and a half talk with CNN TV personality Carlos Watson at the Commonwealth Club, Chuck D talked about the direction of hip hop, technology and the future of entertainment.

He began by talking about how Public Enemy got started. While a student at Adelphi University, Chuck D was a radio personality on college radio. He, along with a collection of DJs, including Flavor Flav, Terminator X and others, used the radio waves as a sounding board to communicate to the people. This would be the start of Public Enemy.

“When we first got to records, people did not think it was going to work,” said Chuck D. But it did, to huge success.

Public Enemy became one of the biggest and most critically acclaimed rap groups of its era. The group influenced change and helped to create a political awakening of activists who grew up in the 1990s. He said that today’s DJs could do this, but they don’t.

“Today, the DJs on radio are wack,” continued Chuck D.

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He did say that one of his favorite DJs is KPFA's Davey D. He recalled DJs such as Frankie Crocket, Gary Byrd and others using the microphone as an empowering tool, to move the community. He cited Sly Stone as a DJ in the Bay Area who did this.

Chuck D said that massive media conglomerates are now controlling what goes on the radio. The DJ for the most part has been rendered useless.

The give and take between Watson and Chuck D was lively. Watson, an up and coming broadcaster in the mold of Tavis Smiley, asked interesting questions, trying to pin Chuck D down to a particular theme. But he couldn't. Chuck D bobbed and weaved like a boxer, jumping from topic to topic in an entertaining way.

When asked about today's hip hop artists, he said, "Jay Z is the Michael Jordan of hip hop today." While Jay Z is on top of the rap world, he wished that Jay Z would take more leadership. The rap world, he says, resembles the "Wild Wild West" at times.

On 50 Cents: "He is part of Jimmy Iovine's (head of Interscope Records) musical empire. Fifty cents is selling a lot of units, and he is very sharp. But there needs to be a balance."

On Queen Latifah: "She has found all other routes to make it big in hip hop and the entertainment industry without degrading herself and other Black women in the process."

On Eminem: "He has tried to escape the cult of commodification. I think he is a hard worker when it comes to rap, but the pathway for him was paved by other white rappers such as the Beastie Boys, Third Base and Vanilla Ice, who were the Jackie Robinsons of hip hop for whites."

Chuck D said that Public Enemy will be releasing another two albums in the next few months. There will be a store release, as well as a release over the Internet. He said that he wants to keep quality and consciousness going on in hip hop.

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“Ultimately it comes down to quality,” continued Chuck D. “I would rather listen to and support a Roots record that sold 300,000 copies, rather than a Lil Wayne record that sells 1.3 million. Nothing against Lil Wayne, but is it good to you or not good to you is the question.”