

Public Enemy Rap Activist Talks Revolution with FTP

Written by Kalonji Jama Changa ID2690
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Interview with Professor Griff by Kalonji Jama Changa

In 1987 when Public Enemy stepped on the scene with their debut album, "Yo! Bumrush The Show", they shocked the world. No one knew they would be recognized as one of the most controversial groups in the history of rap. Now 12 albums later, millions of records sold and performances in over 40 countries, the group is still doing their thing with their latest release, Rebirth of a Nation, featuring West Coast rebel rap artist, Paris.

The group started out with the front man Chuck D, the side-show Flava Flav, Terminator X (DJ) and the Minister of Information and leader of the S1W's (Security of the First World), Professor Griff. Years before Flava Flav's infamous VH1 television stunts, another member of Public Enemy was at the center of controversy. In 1989, based on an interview with The Washington Post, Professor Griff, who was misquoted, was accused of anti-semitism and faced a barrage of attacks from the Jewish Community. During this time period, Professor Griff made headlines around the country and had several attempts on his life including a sniper attack and poisoning.

I first met Professor Griff in Atlanta after a lecture I gave. He then invited me to open up for his now classic discourse, "Strange Love, has Public Enemy lost its Flava". Since that particular engagement, we have shared the stage on several different panel discussions and lectures. A strong community activist, he has supported different programs that we have launched in Atlanta, including the Feed The People program and a joint benefit effort for Bernard Burden, a victim of a lynching that took place a year and a half ago in the State of Georgia.

On Friday June 2, 2006, I caught up with Professor Griff at Lush Life Cafe in the West End of Atlanta and what followed was this interview. Brace Yo" self!

Kalonji: In your words, what is revolution?

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Professor Griff: When the term revolution is mentioned, nowadays a lot of people look at it as a passe term. They only think of the "negro" revolution that we had here in America. Although, some Brothers, Sisters and a lot of organizations during the 60's, did bring about change, it wasn't a complete, total, constructive, conscious change. So when defining revolution, revolution is complete, total, constructive, conscious change. When we look back on different revolutions around the globe, for instance the Cuban Revolution what kind of change did that bring about? It brought about a complete, total, constructive, conscious change for the people in Cuba - with Fidel Castro, Raul Castro and Che Guevara. When you talk about Revolution, you're not talking about necessarily overthrowing the physical government in the land in which we live in, but overthrowing the government of your mind- so it has to be a complete, constructive, conscious change. In a nutshell, that's what revolution means to me. Every step you take towards that particular goal is revolution, long as it's about change. The clinical definition for insanity or insane is when you constantly do the same thing over and over again and expect a different result. That's not gonna happen, that's counter revolutionary...I think a lot of the things that we're doing, such as what Tavis Smiley is doing with The Covenant is counter revolutionary. Actually trying to take steps backwards in order to go forward.

Kalonji: Do you feel we have effective Black Leadership in America today, and if so who would you consider leadership?

Professor Griff: When you say effective leadership, I think Al Sharpton put it best. He said, "We have those who call themselves Black Leadership, or we could reverse that and say those who call themselves leading Blacks". We have a lot of negroes that like to lead Blacks. They don't necessarily know where they're going but they wanna lead. So, if youre talking about using this system to lead Black People, then I think that's sad because this system is not designed to lead Black People anywhere. This system was constructed to keep Black People in a box and a certain place and those handpicked Black leaders are put in place to do just that. So when we talk about effective Black Leadership, what kind of change do they effect? Do they put policies in place that reach as high as the government and as low as the projects, that can effect Pookie, Man-man, Tay-Tay and Peanut? I don't think this is true. Other than the leadership of The Most Honorable Louis Farrakhan, I can't see anyone else being too effective. Theres a Brother Ray Hagin (pastor), in St. Louis. Theres a couple of other Brothers that have different organizations on a small scale they're reaching Grassroots people. But, you have 40 to 70 million Black People in America that need to be effected. So we need something broad across the board. A lot of us still believe in the exoteric, where we are waiting for someone to come save us, this whole Messiah concept, and that's played out. It's not gonna happen.

Kalonji: Earlier you mentioned the whole 60's Movement, Do you feel there is a Movement right now and if there is what is that Movement missing in 2006?

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Professor Griff: Yes, I think there are different Movements that are going on. Things are moving and things are changing, but I don't think there is a common thread - I don't think we are moving as a whole. I think Chuck D said it better, he said, "We move as a team, we never move alone /the posse is ready and we operating in our zone". So were moving, you're moving. There are different organizations across the globe that are moving. Different Revolutionary Organizations are moving a lot of people. Is there a common thread there? Do we have the basics of economics - which is Land? No. We don't feed ourselves, someone else feeds us. We don't clothe ourselves. We don't educate ourselves. We get these things from someone else. Therefore that leadership we talked about is ineffective. That Movement and that change that we need, that so called moving the masses of our people, will not be successful if the basics are not taken care of. The basic things that our people should do for themselves.

Kalonji: What's your take on Voting? About two years ago cats like Puff and Russell were pushing this whole Vote or Die thing. What do you think about that, are we gonna Vote and still Die or what's the deal?

Professor Griff: I think Malcolm said it best when he gave us the analogy of "The Ballot or The Bullet". I think we should look at the whole Vote or Die as being some kind of scheme using negroes like Puffy to come lock down that whole demographic from 18 to 35. Even if you did vote, who would you vote for? Do those particular candidates come to the hood to speak to us? Number 2, if you are going to register people to vote, why not have a voter education to educate the people on the policies and the agendas of the candidates. Then we need to look at the long term effects of what voting does, where do those registration cards go? I know for a fact that the Selective Draft Services of the United States Government uses those cards to chose who is selected for the draft from the voter registration cards. That's very important. That's something we need to know and we don't know that. What has voting ever done for us? Vote or Die? No. That's a charade, that's a trick. You got imps like Chuck D to fall into things like that, because he the main one on t.v., talkin" bout, we need to vote. MTV Rock The Vote, with that kind of madness! That vote is a scam Bro, and you and I know it and they should know it also.

Kalonji: You know I agree with that...You mentioned some Hip Hop artists, you're coming from Public Enemy, one of the most popular groups in the History of Hip Hop. Do you think Hip Hop artists should be held accountable for their music and do they have a responsibility to help build the Black community?

Professor Griff: In dealing with Hip Hop and lyrical content, there definitely comes a social

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responsibility along with that. This question and this answer may not fit every artist in every genre in music. But, it does with Black People simply because there are no other people on the face of the Earth in the particular situation we're in. I can't even include the Brothers and Sisters on the Continent. They are not in the situation we're in. They did not lose they're Name, Culture, God. They probably lost a few other things, but we were the ones that were knocked over the head and dragged to America and lost everything. So we do have a social responsibility along with the lyrical content. I can't go out here and make a shoot'em up bang-bang kind of video. Shoot'em up bang-bang kind of songs, the rims are spinnin", I'm bling-blingin" and these kind of songs and not be held accountable for the effect that it has on the hood. A lot of times we come up outta these situations and we talk about those same situations "about keepin" it real" at the age of 17 - 18 years old. How come 10-15 years will go by and we 30 still talkin" about the same situation. Especially those that are in Hip Hop that are millionaires. You wearing a \$100,000 in each ear, you got a \$200,000 grill, a million dollar pinky ring and about \$400,000 on ya wrist and you still talkin" bout what Pookie, Man-man and Tay-Tay are doing in the projects? Naw, something is wrong with that man. You should be the one comin" out of the projects and now that you are quote- unquote successful, you should be going back laying out some kind of economic game plan because someone did it for you.

Kalonji: Bubba Sparxxx has a video for a song called "Ms. New Booty", with a lot of Sistahs "shakin" what they mama gave "em"...Do you feel it's artistry or exploitation? Do you feel the people should support someone like Bubba Sparxxx or do you feel that he is capitalizing off of the Sistahs?

Professor Griff: Most definitely he's capitalizing off of the ignorance of the people. But, ignorant is not a bad word, ignorant just means you choose to ignore, so it's not like these people don't know. We can go back in history and look at that same kind of scene being played out. The white rap artist talking about the Ma, The Mother and even with Black rap artists who constantly attack the womb. The micro-womb not the macro-womb. The smaller womb because they don't respect the macro-womb of the Universe. We attack the Womb as if we didn't come from the Womb like we came from somewhere else, so we attack the Ma, which is the Great Mother. Not only that, in us attacking the Womb, we allow our open enemy to attack the Womb. Because his woman is not full figured and shaped like a real woman should, we allow these people to come over the fence and snatch our women. A lot of these women gladly go, as you seen in the video. That scene was played out with Janet Jackson allowing Justin Timberlake to rip her clothing off, exposing her breast. For some strange reason (some) Black Women feel that they have to please the slave masters children. Then us as Black Men sit on the sideline and allow it to go down. We don't chastise the woman, nor deal with the white man. Then again we on the world stage, like punks once again. Unable to protect our women, unable to protect our children and until we stand up and do so....Probably at the detriment of being cursed out by the woman, but so-damn what! We have to take our rightful place. We can't do that with his woman. Imagine you going across the fence and snatching up a Jewish woman, calling her all kinds of bitches and hoes on t.v., you know Jewish people ain't having that. Imagine you snatching up a

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Jewish woman and calling her a kike, they will string yo" Black ass up downtown somewhere and tar and feather you. Right or wrong? So why should we allow it? In a minute some of us are going to get together and visit people like Bubba Sparxxx and we are going to talk to him. Talk to him (laughs)....

Kalonji: I hope you call me when it's time to talk (laughs). During the early 90's the Jewish community was upset about something you supposedly said. I heard that there was supposedly a hit out on you and there was actually a sniper from one particular Jewish organization on the roof at The Def Jam Building. Can you touch on that?

Professor Griff: I think just like any other Revolutionary trying to bring about a change with the people, especially a mental revolution, your own people are gonna want to fight you. Then you are going to get those who want to keep this thing on a hush, keep this thing as business as usual. Yeah, we gotta fight them also. There was an article in the paper (I still have the article) about how there was a Jewish gentlemen from the ADL across from RUSH Management company, on Elizabeth Street, Downtown Manhattan, shooting at the building. Thinking I was in there. They arrested him, and he did time. But you don't hear this stuff in the news, because our lives are not worth that much to people. This is not news worthy. So what another rapper dies. So they don't get it out to the masses of our people to the point where it hits us in the heart and we respond. We have been desensitized. That's just another nigga dead for them and for us it's business as usual, and we just push right along.

Kalonji: I heard you speak about our open enemy who would you say is our "open enemy"?

Professor Griff: When I say open enemy, Ava Muhammad taught us that everything in nature has an open enemy, a natural enemy. If we just stop and watch the Discovery Channel tonight, you can tell who is the enemy of the rat? It's the cat. Who is the open enemy of the cat? It's the dog. The open enemy of the chicken is the chicken hawk. So, if we look at white people's history and Black people's history and put them side by side, who is the open enemy of the Black Man and Woman? Who is the open enemy of God, it's the devil. That's easy to tell! But, you will get some negro, babblin' on t.v., like Michael Eric Dyson or "Corny" West or one of them, who will try to intellectualize this. Rather than come out and say, because they're scared, they're punks. They fear the open enemy. But you can't tell that to Amilcar Cabral, you can't tell that to different revolutionaries, because we know the enemy. You can't say that to Steve Biko, Che Guevara, we know and understand who the enemy is. You can't tell that to Kalonji Jama Changa. You can't tell that to Fred Hampton Jr., you know what I'm saying? I had the pleasure of doing a lecture in New Jersey and guess who walked in the door? Dr. Leonard Jefferies. I was like Wow! One of the Elders sitting in my lecture! I felt honored. You can't tell that to a

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Brother like that, who knows who the open enemy is, who goes back to Egypt every year and tells us who the open enemy is. It wasn't no secret then, and it ain't no secret now.

Kalonji: In your lectures you often talk about the "scared to death negro". What is a scared to death negro?

Professor Griff: Let's define negro as a human being who has been written off as being dead. Negro coming from the Latin word meaning, black, dead, lifeless. A black shoe, a black board, a black tire, dead, lifeless. Let's see who some of the scared to death negroes are. Let's look at all the Black Mayors without even naming names. Let's roll off the idea of you being a Black Mayor in a "Black city". As many Mayors as we ran through in the past 10 years you would think we own or runnin' something, you would think we coming up. Not the case. We not runnin' anything in America, but our mouths. So, when I say scared to death negroes, not those brave men and women that are in Congress, that's working in cities I go to, that help Black people raise their conscious level to help Black people do something for the masses of our people. Not them. The ones that wanna take the lead and have no platform, that wanna take the lead and lead us right back to the slave masters plantation. We got some scared to death negroes that are rappers, that are really sitting comfortable. I heard recently that cats like Nelly are vegetarians, so why not make a song and help the masses of the people get up off this swine, this pork, this pig? No you would rather keep making these kind of songs to keep the people in the same wretched condition there in? That's sad, somebody need to come see you. Harriet Tubman dealt with that scared to death negro, like we dealing with that scared to death negro today. There's a railroad of bones that you can trace back and follow right back to the Continent of Africa. There's dead dry bones here in America, all throughout the 9,000 miles it took us to get here and there are dead dry bones there of our Ancestors. So for you not to remember this and not stand on the shoulders of those who came before us, you a scared to death negro! But, I say scared of what? You gonna die of something someday. I always tell people, I'm not gonna die on my knees, I am gonna die on my feet like a real man, standing up fighting this enemy.

Kalonji: The 1 Million Dollar Question....If I don't ask you this question we didn't do an interview...

Professor Griff: Let me answer it without you even asking. You about to ask me something about Flava?

Kalonji: You are absolutely correct.

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Professor Griff: First of all we need to start the answer off like this, every Black Man in America needs to eat, whether you are in the rap game or not. We not gonna knock the next man's hustle on how you gotta eat. But dude, you're Public Enemy! We were the same one's talking about Bring The Noise, Don't Believe The Hype, Fight The Power. We were the same ones to talk about a Mind Revolution. Riot Starter, Public Enemy ..1, Can't Trust It, Prophets of Rage! How could you now turn around and sweetheart the devil on t.v.? Lickin' and kissing on this white woman. There is a new generation that's coming up that never heard anything about Public Enemy. They heard glimpses about what Public Enemy was about, but in full they don't know what Public Enemy was about. These young people are coming up and seeing what Public Enemy is about thru the eyes of a cat like Flava Flav. Through madness of what he is doing on t.v. We love the Brotha, very brilliant Brotha, very talented Brotha. But will he use his awareness to raise the masses of our people. Flava gotta eat, but it's just that we need to put some conscious thinking into what we do before we allow our open enemy to put this before the world. To continue to destroy us as a people. You know how many people watched one episode, of those 10 episodes that Flava did with Bridgette Nielsen on Strange Love? How many people it reached that's looking at Public Enemy like them cats sold out? Millions! That's a reality. If Flava Flav don't know it by now, and I'm sure this message will get to him, I did a 2 hour lecture, "Strange Love, has Public Enemy lost it's Flava". Trying to lay it out and lay my position out, that we are not tolerating that. We need to stop sweethearting the slave masters children. Now, I'm gonna put something out there that may be detrimental to a lot of people. Back in the days, I think all of us have had encounters with white women and white men. But, see we dealt with them in a different kind of way. I know when I was growing up, we did. If we ever dealt with a cracker, we were using her or getting something else. We don't deal with them like that now. We having children with them, we even marrying these devils, man. Which is Ridiculous! No, we should never, love the devil. Under no circumstance, he is not to be trusted especially with weakening your Melanin. You giving that Chemical Blackness, that life force away. This is what they live for. They trying to sneak into Heaven and we ain't allowing it.

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