

# REYNOLDS

The Catherine B.  
Reynolds Foundation  
Program in Social  
Entrepreneurship

## NYU Reynolds Program in Social Entrepreneurship 2008 – 2009 “Social Entrepreneurship in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” Speaker Series

### Chuck D

Founder, Public Enemy



On or off stage, Chuck D knows how to work his audience. In any venue, this recognized leader and co-founder of legendary rap group Public Enemy covers it all. His lectures go beyond rap music to discuss an astounding diversity of topics, such as electoral politics, internet file-sharing, the representation of urban space and culture, and race in the media, offering his audiences a jolting combination of intelligence and eloquence.

Born Carlton Ridenhour in Roosevelt, Long Island, Chuck D formed Public Enemy in 1982. The group rose to fame with their explosive 1987 debut album *Yo! Bum Rush the Show*, redefining rap music and hip hop culture. The next year, with the release of *It Takes a Nation of Millions*, Public Enemy continued to deliver powerful messages about race, rage, reality, and inequality that reached all segments of the population. Two decades later, after producing 12 more albums, three of which went multi-platinum, Public Enemy remains one of the most critically acclaimed, yet still relevant and highly influential groups in the music industry. Chuck D has collaborated with many artists outside his genre, including Isaac Hayes, Rage Against the Machine, Archie Shepp, John Mellencamp, and U2, and has recorded soundtracks for a number of Spike Lee films.

The critical and commercial success of Public Enemy opened the door for Chuck D to deliver his message of social justice through a number of different mediums. He has been a contributor to CNN, hosted his own segment on Fox News Channel and published two books, a best-selling autobiography, *Fight The Power* (1997); and in 2007, *Lyrics of a Rap Revolutionary*. He has served as a national spokesperson for Rock The Vote, the National Urban League, and the National Alliance of African American Athletes, and appeared in public service announcements for HBO's campaign for national peace and the Partnership for a Drug-Free America. A regular guest on numerous television shows, including *Nightline* and *Politically Incorrect*, he recently became a major proponent of, and spokesperson for, the sharing of music on the Internet.

Public Enemy's incredible legacy and impact on American music is the subject of the documentary *Public Enemy: Welcome to the Terrordome*. *Variety* magazine has called the film “one of the best of its kind – intimate, powerful, politically astute, and absorbing.”

Chuck D is an international innovator. He has created a music legacy that can be held in the same regard as those of such musical originators as Bono, Bob Dylan, and Bob Marley. In 2000, Chuck D launched a

multi-format website at Rapstation.com, a multi-format supersite servicing the global hip hop community. This was a move ahead of its time: it is now home to hip hop's most prominent DJs, celebrities, music downloads, social commentary, and current events, the site is dedicated to empowering rap artists with the knowledge and exposure they need to turn their craft into a viable living.

In 2001, Chuck D created an online, offline, and midline artist distribution channel through his record label SLAMjamz. He went on to launch a radio station on the Internet, Bringthenoise.com. This landmark move made Public Enemy the first multi-platinum-selling act to release their album via the Web before it was available in retail stores. Setting new standards and challenging traditional methods of retail distribution, Chuck D's cutting edge innovation in Internet music culture has landed him on the covers of the tech industry's leading business magazines. He has also been a guest contributor to *Time* magazine, and guest editor of *Red Herring*. His outspoken advocacy of the Web has been profiled in *Forbes*, *Time*, *Fortune*, and *USA Today*; in 1999 he was also named one of *Upside* magazine's "Elite 100" list of Internet leaders, alongside the likes of Bill Gates and Steve Jobs.

Chuck D continues to write his own books and music that highlight social injustice and community empowerment; as such he is called upon to be a spokesperson for hip hop and rap music by television, radio, documentary and book projects. There are few who have transcended music to make an impact as loud as Chuck D.