

Carlton Douglas Ridenhour (born August 1, 1960), known professionally as **Chuck D**, is an American rapper, author, and producer. As the leader of the rap group **Public Enemy**, he helped create politically and socially conscious hip hop music in the mid 1980s. Chuck D has a powerful, resonant voice that is often acclaimed as one of the most distinct and impressive in hip-hop. *About.com* ranked him at No. 9 on their list of the Top 50 MCs of All Time, while *The Source* ranked him at No. 12 on their list of the Top 50 Hip-Hop Lyricists of All Time.

Ridenhour was born in Queens, New York. He began writing rhymes after the New York City blackout of 1977. After graduating from Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School, he went to **Adelphi University** on Long Island to study graphic design, where he met William Drayton (**Flavor Flav**). He received a B.F.A. from Adelphi in 1984 and later received an honorary doctorate from Adelphi in 2013.

While at Adelphi, Ridenhour co-hosted hip hop radio show the *Super Spectrum Mix Hour* as **Chuck D** on Saturday nights at Long Island rock radio station **WLIR**, designed flyers for local hip-hop events, and drew a cartoon called *Tales of the Skind* for Adelphi student newspaper *The Delphian*. Upon hearing Ridenhour's demo track "Public Enemy Number One", fledgling producer/upcoming music-mogul **Rick Rubin** insisted on signing him to his **Def Jam** label.

Public Enemy's major label albums were *Yo! Bum Rush the Show* (1987), *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (1988), *Fear of a Black Planet* (1990), *Apocalypse 91... The Enemy Strikes Black* (1991), *Greatest Misses* (1992), and *Muse Sick-n-Hour Mess Age* (1994). They also released a full-length album soundtrack for the film *He Got Game* in 1998. Ridenhour also contributed (as Chuck D) to several episodes of the PBS documentary series *The Blues*. He has appeared as a featured artist on many other songs and albums, having collaborated with artists such as **Janet Jackson**, **Kool Moe Dee**, **The Dope Poet Society**, **Run D.M.C.**, **Ice Cube**, **Boom Boom Satellites**, **Rage Against the Machine**, **Anthrax**, **John Mellencamp** and many others. In 1990, he appeared on "Kool Thing", a song by the alternative rock band **Sonic Youth**, and along with Flavor Flav, he sang on **George Clinton**'s song "Tweakin'", which appears on his 1989 album *The Cinderella Theory*. In 1993, he executive produced *Got 'Em Running Scared*, an album by Ichiban Records group **Chief Groovy Loo and the Chosen Tribe**.

He loaned his voice to *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* as **DJ Forth Right MC** for the radio station *Playback FM*. In 2000, he collaborated with Public Enemy's **Gary G-Whiz** and **MC Lyte** on the theme music to the television show *Dark Angel*. He appeared with **Henry Rollins** in a cover of **Black Flag**'s "Rise Above" for the album *Rise Above: 24 Black Flag Songs to Benefit the West Memphis Three*. He was also featured on **Z-Trip**'s album *Shifting Gears* on a track called "Shock and Awe"; a 12-inch of the track was released featuring artwork by **Shepard Fairey**. In 2008 he contributed a chapter to *Sound Unbound: Sampling Digital Music and Culture* (The MIT Press, 2008) edited by **Paul D. Miller** a.k.a. **DJ Spooky**, and also turned up on **The Go! Team**'s album *Proof of Youth* on the track "Flashlight Fight." He also fulfilled his childhood dreams of being a sports announcer by performing the play-by-play commentary in the video game *NBA Ballers: Chosen One* on Xbox 360 and PS3.

In 2009, Ridenhour wrote the foreword to the book *The Love Ethic: The Reason Why You Can't Find and Keep Beautiful Black Love* by **Kamau** and **Akilah Butler**. He also appeared on **Brother Ali**'s album, *Us*.

Ridenhour is politically active; he co-hosted *Unfiltered on Air America Radio*, testified before Congress in support of peer-to-peer MP3 sharing, and was involved in a 2004 rap political convention. He continues to be an activist, publisher, lecturer, and producer.

Addressing the negative views associated with rap music, he co-wrote the essay book *Fight the Power: Rap, Race, and Reality*, along with **Yusuf Jah**. He argues that "music and art and culture is escapism, and escapism sometimes is healthy for people to get away from reality", but sometimes the distinction is blurred and that's when "things could lead a young mind in a direction."

He also founded the record company *Slam Jamz* and acted as narrator in **Kareem Adouard's** short film *Bling: Consequences and Repercussions*, which examines the role of conflict diamonds in bling fashion. Despite Chuck D and Public Enemy's success, Ridenhour claims that popularity or public approval was never a driving motivation behind their work. He is admittedly skeptical of celebrity status, revealing in a 1999 interview with *BOMB Magazine* that, "The key for the record companies is to just keep making more and more stars, and make the ones who actually challenge our way of life irrelevant. The creation of celebrity has clouded the minds of most people in America, Europe and Asia. It gets people off the path they need to be on as individuals."

In an interview with *Le Monde* published January 29, 2008, Chuck D stated that rap is devolving so much into a commercial enterprise, that the relationship between the rapper and the record label is that of slave to a master. He believes that nothing has changed for African-Americans since the debut of Public Enemy and, although he thinks that an **Obama-Clinton** alliance is great, he does not feel that the establishment will allow anything of substance to be accomplished. He also stated that French President **Sarkozy** is like any other European elite: he has profited through the murder, rape, and pillaging of those less fortunate and he refuses to allow equal opportunity for those men and women from Africa. In this article, he also defended a comment made by **Professor Griff** in the past that he says was taken out of context by the media. The real statement was a critique of the Israeli government and its treatment of the Palestinian people. Chuck D stated that it is Public Enemy's belief that all human beings are equal.

In an interview with the magazine *N'Digo* published in late June 2008, he spoke of today's mainstream urban music seemingly relishing the addictive euphoria of materialism and sexism, perhaps being the primary cause of many people harboring resentment towards the genre and its future. However he has expressed hope for its resurrection, saying "It's only going to be dead if it doesn't talk about the messages of life as much as the messages of death and non-movement", citing artists such as **NYOil**, **M.I.A.** and **The Roots** as socially conscious artists who push the envelope creatively. "A lot of cats are out there doing it, on the Web and all over. They're just not placing their career in the hands of some major corporation."

Most recently Chuck D became involved in *Let Freedom Sing: The Music of the Civil Rights*, a 3-CD box set from **Time Life**. He wrote the introduction to the liner notes and is visiting colleges across the nation discussing the significance of the set. He's also set to appear in a follow up movie called *Let Freedom Sing: The Music That Inspired the Civil Rights Movement*.

In 2010, Chuck D released a track entitled "Tear Down That Wall". He said, "I talked about the wall not only just dividing the U.S. and Mexico but the states of California, New Mexico and Texas. But Arizona, it's like, come on. Now they're going to enforce a law that talks about basically racial profiling."

He is on the board of the **TransAfrica Forum**, a Pan African organization that is focused on African, Caribbean and Latin American issues.

TV appearances

- Narrated and appeared on-camera for the 2005 PBS documentary *Harlem Globetrotters: The Team That Changed the World*.
- Appeared on-camera for the PBS program *Independent Lens: Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*.
- Appeared in an episode of *News Radio* as himself.
- He appeared on *The Henry Rollins Show*.
- He was a featured panelist (with **Lars Ulrich**) on the May 12, 2000 episode of the *Charlie Rose Show*. Host **Charlie Rose** was discussing the Internet, copyright infringement, *Napster Inc.*, and the future of the music industry.^[23]
- He appeared on an episode of *Space Ghost Coast to Coast* with **Pat Boone**. While there, **Space Ghost** tried (and failed) to show he was "hip" to rap, saying his favorite rapper was **M. C. Escher**.
- He appeared on an episode of *Johnny Bravo*.
- He appeared via satellite to the UK, as a panelist on BBC's *Newsnight* on January 20, 2009, following **Barack Obama's** Inauguration.
- He appeared on a Christmas episode of **Adult Swim's** *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*.
- He Appeared on *VH1 Ultimate Albums Blood Sugar Sex Magik* talking about the Red Hot Chili Peppers.
- He appeared on *Foo Fighters: Sonic Highways* in the New York City episode talking about the beginnings of the NYC Hip-Hop scene

Film appearances

- He is featured in the 1997 documentary *Rhyme & Reason*.
- He appeared in the 1998 comedy film *An Alan Smithee Film: Burn Hollywood Burn*.
- He played a bank robber, Malcolm Y, in an unused plotline for the 2004 comedy film *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy*, which was eventually released straight-to-DVD as *Wake Up, Ron Burgundy: The Lost Movie*.
- He is the narrator of the 2006 documentary *Quilombo Country*, directed by **Leonard Abrams**.
- He is featured in the 2006 documentary *The Rap Report - Part 2*, produced by **Rex Barnett**.
- He is featured in the 2006 documentary *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, directed by **Byron Hurt**.
- He is featured in the 2008 documentary *The Black Candle*, directed by **M.K. Asante, Jr.** and narrated by **Maya Angelou**.
- He is featured in the 2012 documentary *Something from Nothing: The Art of Rap*.
- He has a cameo playing a lawyer, Charles McD, in the 2016 comedy film, *The Bet*.

Music appearances

- He raps on "New Agenda" from **Janet Jackson's** *Janet*. "I loved his work, but I'd never met him..." said Jackson. "I called Chuck up and told him how much I admired their work. When I hear Chuck, it's like I'm hearing someone teaching, talking to a whole bunch of people. And instead of just having the rap in the bridge, as usual, I wanted him to do stuff all the way through. I sent him a tape. He said he loved the song, but he was afraid he was going to mess it up. I said, 'Are you kidding?'"
- In 2001, Chuck D appeared on Japanese electronic duo **Boom Boom Satellites** track "Your Reality's A Fantasy But Your Fantasy Is Killing Me," off the album *Umbral*.
- In 2010, Chuck D made an appearance on the track "Transformação" (Portuguese for "Transformation") from Brazilian rapper **MV Bill's** album *Causa E Efeito* (meaning *Cause And Effect*).
- In 2003 he was featured on the track "Access to the Excess" in **Junkie XL's** album *Radio JXL: A Broadcast from the Computer Hell Cabin*.
- In 2011 Chuck D made an appearance on the track "Blue Sky / Mad Mad World / The Good God Is A Woman And She Don't Like Ugly" from **Meat Loaf's** 2011 album *Hell In A Handbasket*.
- In 2013, he has appeared in **Mat Zo's** single, "Pyramid Scheme."
- In 2013 he performed at the **Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Music Masters** concert tribute to the **Rolling Stones**.
- In 2014 he performed with **Jahi** on "People Get Ready" and "Yo!" from the first album by Public Enemy spin-off project **PE 2.0**
- In 2016 he appeared in **ASAP Ferg's** album "*Always Strive and Prosper*" on the track "Beautiful People".
- In 2017 he was featured on the track "America" on **Logic's** album "*Everybody*".

Discography

with Public Enemy

Studio albums

- *Yo! Bum Rush the Show* (1987)
- *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (1988)
- *Fear of a Black Planet* (1990)
- *Apocalypse 91... The Enemy Strikes Black* (1991)
- *Muse Sick-n-Hour Mess Age* (1994)
- *He Got Game* (1998)
- *There's a Poison Goin' On* (1999)
- *Revolverlution* (2002)
- *New Whirl Odor* (2005)
- *How You Sell Soul to a Soulless People Who Sold Their Soul?* (2007)
- *Most of My Heroes Still Don't Appear on No Stamp* (2012)
- *The Evil Empire of Everything* (2012)
- *Man Plans God Laughs* (2015)

with Confrontation Camp

Studio albums

- *Objects in the Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear* (2000)

with Prophets of Rage

Studio albums

- *Prophets of Rage* (2017)

Studio EPs

- *The Party's Over* (2016)

Solo

Studio albums

- *Autobiography of Mistachuck* (1996)
- *The Black in Man* (2014)
- *If I Can't Change the People Around Me I Change the People Around Me* (2016)

Compilation albums

- *Weird Nightmare: Meditations on Mingus – Gunslinging Bird* (1992)
- *Action* (**DJ Matheos** Worldwide International Remix) - Most*hifi (featuring **Chuck D.** and **Huggy**) (2010)
- *Don't Rhyme for the Sake of Riddlin'* (as **Mistachuck**) (2012)

Exhibitions

- *Behind the Seen*, (March 2018 at **Gallery 30 South**)