



MistaChuck Goes to Washington

napster hadn't even been officially launched when horizon first talked community with rap god chuck d in a denver hotel room. a mere 18 months later, it's the hot topic of the day, and the leader of public enemy has gained new fame as 'star witness' for the software service.

by cicely bland

Hooking up with Chuck D is hard work nowadays. Although the rapper/entrepreneur/Internet biz wiz has long been an advocate of the Web's benefits to artists, the industry's recent backlash against Napster has made him its ardent defender.

But MistaChuck took some time out just days before Napster's showdown in federal court last month to tell *horizon* why he had vigorously defended the file-swapping software company at congressional hearings and in guest newspaper columns. "The thing that got me into the MP3 technology was necessity," he explains. "In the mid-nineties, when I tried to put out a record, the corporate executives that dictate the rap game told me I couldn't deliver a \$15,000 video to BET. They said that videos had to cost at least \$100,000 to get into rotation."

Napster's lawyer won an emergency stay of a district court's order to shut down. The case, and separate suits filed against Napster by the heavy-metal band Metallica and Dr. Dre, are being closely watched because of their implications for future copyright disputes involving the Internet.

Chuck D's mantra is profit over cost. "Traditionally, even if you make your music using inexpensive means, it takes \$700,000 to promote a record across the country and that means that many artists who produce quality music can't get on radio." Thus, the Internet became his saving grace, enabling him to produce his music in an inexpensive way and still tap into a global market. By late 1998, Chuck D and Public Enemy had split from longtime label Def Jam in a dispute over music downloads; the band then signed with Internet label Atomic Pop to release the successful album *There's A Poison Going On*.

"The Internet and the digital space is now neck-and-neck with the traditional music industry," he says. "The technology that was used in the last century may not necessarily apply to this century."

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With technology on his side, Chuck D has turned the need to get his music to the masses into a mini e-empire. To date his bringthenoise.com, publicenemy.com and rapstation.com have turned out to be highly successful for the rap artist. His Webcast studio, nestled in suburban Atlanta, is one of many that Chuck D uses to bring new music and information to his worldwide fan base.

And about the lawsuit that could shut Napster Down? Chuck D dismisses the challenge by recording industry executives as nothing more than "cases used to support yet another lawyer looking to preserve the prehistoric existence of contracts past."

U.S. District Judge Marilyn Hall Patel begs to differ. Siding with the Recording Industry of America, she said she found "overwhelming" evidence that the Web site was created to allow music lovers to duplicate copyrighted works. "That was the whole reason for Napster's existence," she said after about three hours of arguments. Russell Frackman, attorney for the industry executives, called it "the most egregious case of massive copyright infringement that has ever existed."

A recently formed group, Artists Against Piracy, had taken the industry's message of copyright infringement to the global masses as well as the courts. Headed by Metallica and Dr. Dre, the group boasts a laundry list of music celebs opposed to Napster and its practices. Jazz legend Herbie Hancock, R&B sensation Sisqo, and rapper DMX are just a few who would like to see the fall of Napster.

To show his confidence in Napster, Chuck D's rapstation.com had teamed with the embattled company to offer fans a unique contest opportunity. Visitors to the site could download the instrumental "Power To The People and The Beats" – based on Public Enemy's "Power To The People" – and add their own Napster-themed lyrics to the track.

Even if Napster were forced to go out of business, people could use other programs to find and share music files. "Companies like Napster are creating new fan interest in the acquisition of music, as well as establishing an infrastructure that previously was non-existent for unknown artists," Chuck D says. "This is a prime opportunity for artists to understand that they can operate beyond the naive slave or limited employment positions of the old music

business templates."

Music is not all Chuck D feels passionately about, as you'll see in this February 1999 replay.

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