

= Fear of a Black Planet =

Fear of a Black Planet is the third studio album by American hip hop group Public Enemy , released on April 10 , 1990 , by Def Jam Recordings and Columbia Records . It was produced by the group 's production team The Bomb Squad , who sought to expand on the dense , sample @-@ layered sound of Public Enemy 's previous album , It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back (1988) . Having fulfilled their initial creative ambitions with that album , Public Enemy pursued a different direction and aspired to create what the group 's lead rapper Chuck D called " a deep , complex album " . Their songwriting was partly inspired by the controversy with member Professor Griff and his dismissal from the group in 1989 .

Fear of a Black Planet features elaborate sound collages that incorporate varying rhythms , numerous samples , media sound bites , and eccentric loops , reflecting the songs ' confrontational tone . Recorded during the golden age of hip hop , its assemblage of reconfigured and recontextualized aural sources preceded the sample clearance system that later emerged in the music industry . Fear of a Black Planet explores themes about organization and empowerment within the black community , social issues affecting African Americans , and race relations at the time . The record 's criticism of institutional racism , White supremacy , and the power elite were partly inspired by Dr. Frances Cress Welsing 's views on color .

A critical and commercial success in 1990 , Fear of a Black Planet sold two million copies in the United States and received rave reviews from critics , many of whom named it one the year 's best albums . Its immediate success contributed significantly to the popularity of Afrocentric and political subject matter in hip hop and the genre 's mainstream resurgence at the time . Since then , it has been viewed as one of hip hop 's greatest and most important records , as well as being musically and culturally significant . In 2003 , Fear of a Black Planet was ranked number 300 on Rolling Stone 's list of the 500 greatest albums of all time , and in 2005 , the Library of Congress added it to the National Recording Registry .

= = Background = =

In 1988 , Public Enemy released their second album It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back to critical and commercial success . Their music 's dense textures , provided by the group 's production team The Bomb Squad , exemplified a new production aesthetic in hip hop at the time . The controversial , politically charged lyrics by the group 's lead rapper Chuck D , whose braggadocio raps contained references to political figures such as Assata Shakur and Nelson Mandela , as well as endorsements of Nation of Islam @-@ leader Louis Farrakhan , intensified the group 's affiliation with black nationalism and Farrakhan . It Takes a Nation 's success helped raise hip hop 's profile as both art and sociopolitical statement , amid media criticism of the genre . It helped give hip hop a critical credibility and standing in the popular music community after it had been largely dismissed as a fad since its introduction at the turn of the 1980s . In promoting the record , Public Enemy expanded their live shows and performing dynamic . With the album 's content and the group 's rage @-@ filled showmanship in concert , they became the vanguard of a movement in hip hop that reflected a new black consciousness and sociopolitical dynamic that were taking shape in America at the time .

In May 1989 , Chuck D , Bomb Squad producer Hank Shocklee , and publicist Bill Stephey were negotiating with several labels for a production deal from a major record company , their goal since starting Public Enemy in the early 1980s . As they were in negotiations , group member Professor Griff made anti @-@ Semitic remarks in an interview for The Washington Times , in which he said that Jews were the cause of " the majority of the wickedness " in the world . Public Enemy received media scrutiny and criticism from religious organizations and liberal rock critics , which added to charges against the group 's politics being racist , homophobic , and misogynistic . Amid controversy , Chuck D was given an ultimatum by Schocklee and Stephey to dismiss Griff from the group or the production deal would fall through . He fired Griff in June , but he later rejoined and has since denied holding anti @-@ Semitic views and apologized for the remarks . Several people who had worked

with Public Enemy expressed concern about Chuck D 's leadership abilities and role as a social spokesman . Def Jam director of publicity Bill Adler later said that the controversy " partly ... fueled the writing of [the album] " .

To follow @-@ up It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back , the group pursued a different direction , content @-@ wise . According to Chuck D , they sought to make a more thematically focused work and to condense Dr. Frances Cress Welsing 's theory of " Color Confrontation and Racism (White Supremacy) " into an album @-@ length recording , " telling people , well , color 's an issue created and concocted to take advantage of people of various characteristics with the benefit of a few " . He recalled their concept for the album in an interview for Billboard , " We wanted really to go with a deep , complex album ... more conducive to the high and lows of great stage @-@ performance " . Chuck D also cited in their creative vision the commercial circumstances for hip hop at the time , having quickly transitioned from a singles to an album medium in the music industry during the 1980s . In an interview for Westword , he later said , " We understood the magnitude of what an album was , so we set out to make something that not only epitomized the standard of an album , but would stand the test of time by being diverse with sounds and textures , and also being able to home in on the aspect of peaks and valleys " .

The album 's artwork followed Chuck D 's concept of two planets , the " Black " planet and Earth , eclipsing . The group enlisted B.E. Johnson , a NASA illustrator , to create the cover . Cey Adams , creative director for Def Jam at the time , later said of the creative decision for the artwork , " It was so interesting to me that a black hip @-@ hop act did an illustration for their album cover . At that time black hip @-@ hop artists , for the most part , had photos of themselves on their covers . But this was the first time someone took a chance to do something in the rock 'n'roll vein " .

= = Recording and production = =

Fear of a Black Planet was recorded in sessions held during June to October 1989 at Greene St. Recording in New York City , The Music Palace in West Hempstead , and Spectrum City Studios in Hempstead . It was produced entirely by The Bomb Squad , which included Chuck D , Eric " Vietnam " Sadler , and brothers Hank and Keith Shocklee . The sessions marked the first time that Keith was credited as a member of the team , playing a significant role in composing the main tracks and music for the album . Hank Shocklee directed them and was referred to by Chuck D as " the Phil Spector of hip @-@ hop " . For Fear of a Black Planet , they sought to expand on the dense , sample @-@ layered " wall of noise " sound of It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back .

The Bomb Squad worked out an elaborate method that involved the members assembling different types of sounds in the studio . They proceeded to reconfigure and recontextualize fragments from various sources into their own compositions . Each member brought a different philosophy to composing music , arranging sounds , and working with technology , while sampled material was taken from singles , LP albums , and radio , among other sources . Hank Shocklee called the group " a production assembly line where each person had their own particular specialty . " In his words , he came " from a DJ 's perspective . Eric [Sadler] is coming from a musician 's perspective . So together , you know , we started working out different ideas . " Sadler advocated a more traditional , structured approach to songwriting , while Shocklee 's approach was more experimental . As the main lyricist , Chuck D wanted to recontextualize the sampled material into his lyrics and create a theme for the album .

The Bomb Squad listened to various music records and used devices such as the E @-@ mu SP @-@ 1200 drum machine and sampler , the Akai S900 sampler , and a Macintosh computer to arrange samples and sequence tracks . The sessions , which were recorded by Shocklee for future reference , had the group playing beats and records , while collecting potential sample material . Chuck D has said that " 95 percent of the time it sounded like mess . But there was 5 percent of magic that would happen . " Shocklee compared their production to that of filmmaking , " with different lighting effects , or film speeds , or whatever " , while Chuck D found their intention to " blend sound " similar to a visual artist " tak [ing] yellow and blue and come up with green " . He said of their approach in a 1990 interview for Keyboard Magazine , " We approach every record like

it was a painting . Sometimes , on the sound sheet , we have to have a separate sheet just to list the samples for each track . We used about 150 , maybe 200 samples on Fear of a Black Planet . "

Instead of selecting from the numerous , basic backing tracks Sadler had collected before the sessions , Chuck D wanted for the production team to improvise beats in the studio . This led to much of Fear of a Black Planet 's music being composed on the spot . Chuck D said he spent numerous hours listening to various tapes , music records , and other audio sources in search of samples for the album . Of their search for samples , Hank Shocklee said , " When you ? re talking about the kind of sampling that Public Enemy did , we had to comb through thousands of records to come up with maybe five good pieces . And as we started putting together those pieces , the sound got a lot more dense . "

In order to synchronize the samples , The Bomb Squad used SMPTE timecodes and arranged and overdubbed particular bits of backing tracks , which had been inspected by the members for snare , bass , and hi @-@ hat sounds . Chuck D said of their production and sampling , " Our music is all about samples in the right area , layers that pile on each other . We put loops on top of loops on top of loops , but then in the mix we cut things away " . Their production was innovative , according to journalist Jeff Chang . " They 're figuring out how to jam with the samples and to create these layers of sound " , Chang said . " I don 't think it ? s been matched since then . " After the tracks were completed , The Bomb Squad began sequencing what was at first a seemingly discontinuous album , amid internal disputes among its members . The final mixing took place at Greene St. Recording and lasted into February 1990 . According to Sadler , " a lot of people were like , ' Wow , it 's a brilliant album ' . But it really shoulda been much better . If we had more time and we didn 't have to deal with the situation of nobody talking " .

Fear of Black Planet was conceived during the golden age of hip hop , a period roughly between 1987 and 1992 when artists took advantage of newly emerging sampling technology , before record labels and lawyers took notice . Accordingly , Public Enemy were not compelled to obtain sample clearance for the album . This preceded the legal limits and clearance costs later placed on sampling , which effectively limited hip hop production and the complexity of its musical arrangements . In an interview with Stay Free ! , Chuck D said of their use of sampling , " Public Enemy 's music was affected more than anybody 's because we were taking thousands of sounds . If you separated the sounds , they wouldn 't have been anything--they were unrecognizable . The sounds were all collaged together to make a sonic wall " . An analysis by law professors Peter DiCola and Kembrew McLeod estimated that under the sample clearance system that had emerged in the music industry since the album 's release , Public Enemy were to lose at least five dollars per copy if they were to clear the album 's samples at 2010 rates ; McLeod commented , " a loss of five million dollars on a platinum record " .

For the track " Burn Hollywood Burn " , Chuck D dealt with clearance issues from different record labels in order to collaborate with rappers Big Daddy Kane and Ice Cube , who had been pursuing the Bomb Squad to produce his debut album . The recording marked one of the first times in which MCs from different rap crews collaborated , and it led to the Bomb Squad working with Ice Cube on his 1990 debut album AmeriKKKa 's Most Wanted .

= = Music and lyrics = =

Fear of a Black Planet 's music features assemblage compositions that draw on numerous aural sources . The production 's musique concrète @-@ influenced approach reflects the political and confrontational tones of the group 's lyrics , with sound collages that feature varying rhythms , aliased or scratchy samples , media sound bites , and eccentric music loops . Recordings sampled for Fear of a Black Planet include those from funk , soul , rock , and hip hop genres . Elements such as choruses , guitar sounds , or vocals from sampled recordings are reappropriated as riffs in songs on the album , while sampled dialogue from speeches are incorporated to support Chuck D 's arguments and commentary on certain songs . The Bomb Squad 's Hank Shocklee compared their produced sounds , surrounding Chuck D 's rhythmic , exhortative baritone voice , to putting " the voice of God in a storm " .

According to The Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Folklore (2006) , Fear of a Black Planet introduced a production style that " borrowed elements from jazz , especially that of John Coltrane , to craft a soundscape that was more challenging than that of their previous two albums , but still complemented the complex social commentary " . Journalist Kembre McLeod called the music " both agitprop and pop , mixing politics with the live @-@ wire thrill of the popular music experience " , adding that the Bomb Squad " took sampling to the level of high art while keeping intact hip @-@ hop 's populist heart . They would graft together dozens of fragmentary samples to create a single song collage . " Simon Reynolds said it was " a work of unprecedented density for hip hop , its claustrophobic , backs @-@ against @-@ the @-@ wall feel harking back to Sly Stone 's There 's a Riot Goin ' On or even Miles Davis ' On the Corner " .

Some tracks used elements from Public Enemy 's previous material , which Pete Watrous of The New York Times interpreted as a dual reference to hip hop tradition and the history of the group . Watrous described the music as " the sound of urban alienation , where silence doesn 't exist and sensory stimulation is oppressive and predatory " , and writes that its dense textures " envelop Chuck D 's voice and make his rapping sound as if it is under duress , as if he were fighting against a background intent on taking him over ... Layer after layer of sounds are placed on top of each other until the music becomes nearly tactile " . Chuck D called Fear of a Black Planet a record entirely of " found sounds ... probably the most elaborate smorgasbord of sound that we did ... When we put together our music , we try to put together layers that complement each other , and then the voice tries to complement that , and the theme tries to complement that , and then the song itself tries to complement the album as a whole , fitting into the overall context . " In his essay on hip hop aesthetics , Richard Schur interpreted such layering as a motif in hip hop and as " the process by which ... new meanings are created and communicated , primarily to an equally knowledgeable audience " , concluding that " Public Enemy probably took the ideal of layering to its farthest point " .

Fear of a Black Planet contains themes of organization and empowerment within the African @-@ American community , and of confrontation . Chuck D 's critical lyrics on the album , interspersed with the surrealism of Flavor Flav , also concern contemporary black life , the state of race relations , and criticisms of institutional racism , White supremacy , and the power elite . Greg Sadow called Chuck D 's language " strong and elusive , often fragmentary " and " embedded [with] critical , sometimes brutal thoughts " . Although he viewed that " some people might disagree with some of these ideas " , Sadow wrote that " it 's hard to dispute the lyrics ' assertion that many Whites are afraid of blacks " , adding that the album " touches on " the idea of " an age when whites understand that they 're a minority in the world " . Robert Hilburn believed that the songs " decried what Chuck D. saw as the consequences of white , European cultural domination in the United States and throughout much of the world " . Sputnikmusic 's Nick Butler observed " two recurring themes ? inter @-@ racial relationships ... and the racism inherent in the American media " .

In his book Somebody Scream ! : Rap Music 's Rise to Prominence in the Aftershock of Black Power , Marcus Reeves said that Fear of a Black Planet " was as much a musical assault on America 's racism as it was a call to blacks to effectively react to it " . According to Greg Kot , the album was " hardly a black power manifesto for world domination , but a statement about racial paranoia . Though he spares virtually no one with his withering raps , Public Enemy 's Chuck D is harshest of all on his fellow blacks , expounding on everything from history to fashion : Use your brain instead of a gun . Drugs are death . Know your past so you won 't screw up the future . Gold chains worn around the neck demean the brotherhood in South Africa . " Kot wrote of Chuck D 's perspective and the theme of fear , " It 's fear that divides us , he says ; understand me better and you won 't run . Fear of a Black Planet is about achieving that understanding , but on Public Enemy 's terms . In presenting their view of life from an Afro @-@ centric , as opposed to Euro @-@ centric , perspective , P.E. challenges listeners to step into their world . "

== = Songs == =

The opening track , " Contract on the World Love Jam " , is a sound collage made up of samples ,

scratch cuts , and snippets recorded by Chuck D from radio stations and sound bites of interviews and commercials . The tension @-@ building track introduces the album 's dense , sample @-@ based production . According to Chuck D , the song features " about forty @-@ five to fifty [sampled] voices " that interweave as part of an assertive sonic collage and underscore the album 's themes . " Incident at 66 @. @ 6 FM " , another collage that segues into " Welcome to the Terrordome " , contains snippets from a radio call @-@ in show interview of Chuck D and alludes to the media persecution perceived by Public Enemy . " Burn Hollywood Burn " assails the use of black stereotypes in movies , and " Who Stole the Soul ? " condemns the record industry 's exploitation of black recording artists and calls for reparations . " Revolutionary Generation " celebrates the strength and endurance of black women with lyrics related to black feminism , an unfamiliar topic in hip hop . It also addresses sexism within the black community and misogyny in hip hop culture .

The title track discusses racial classification and the root of White fear of African Americans , particularly racist concerns by some Whites over the effect of miscegenation . In the song , Chuck D argues that they should not worry as the original man was black and " white comes from black / No need to be confused " . The song features a vocal sample of comedian and activist Dick Gregory : " Black man , black woman , black baby / white man , black woman , black baby ? " . " Pollywanacraka " also concerns interracial relations , including Blacks who leave their communities to marry wealthy Whites , and societal views of the matter : " This system had no wisdom / The devil split us in pairs / and taught us white is good , black is bad / and black and white is still too bad " . " Meet the G That Killed Me " features homophobic etiology and condemns homosexuality : " Man to man / I don 't know if they can / From what I know / The parts don 't fit " . Written by hypeman Flavor Flav and Bomb Squad @-@ producers Keith Shocklee and Eric " Vietnam " Sadler , " 911 Is a Joke " features Flav as the main vocalist and criticizes the inadequacy of 9 @-@ 1 @-@ 1 , the emergency telephone number used in the United States , and the lack of police response to emergency calls in predominantly African @-@ American neighborhoods .

Songs such as " Fight the Power " , " Power to the People " , and " Brothers Gonna Work It Out " propose a response for African Americans to the issues criticized throughout the album . " Power to the People " has a tempo of approximately 125 beats per minute and elements of Miami bass , electro @-@ boogie , and fast @-@ paced Roland TR @-@ 808 . Addressing their plight at the turn of the 1990s , " Brothers Gonna Work It Out " features cacophonous sound textures and a theme of unity among African Americans , with Chuck D preaching " Brothers that try to work it out / They get mad , revolt , revise , realize / They 're superbad / Small chance a smart brother 's gonna be a victim of his own circumstance " . Richard Harrington of The Washington Post writes that songs such as " War at 33 ? " and " Fight the Power " " may sound like a call to arms and arms , but they are really a call to action (' turn us loose and we shall overcome ') , a message to conscience and a plea for unity (' move as team , never move alone , ' both cautionary advice and game plan) " . " War at 33 ? " has a theme of resistance and a 128 bpm @-@ tempo , cited by Chuck D as " the fastest thing I 've ever rapped to , rapping right on top of the beat " .

The lead single " Fight the Power " features revolutionary rhetoric by Chuck D and was used by director Spike Lee as a leitmotif in his acclaimed 1989 film Do the Right Thing , a film about racial tension in a Brooklyn neighborhood . Lee approached the group in 1988 after the release of It Takes a Nation with the proposition of making a song for his movie . Chuck D wrote most of the song trying to adapt The Isley Brothers ' " Fight the Power " to a modernist perspective . The song 's third verse contains disparaging lyrics about popular American icons Elvis Presley and John Wayne , as Chuck D rhymes " Elvis was a hero to most / But he never meant shit to me ' / Straight up , racist the sucker was / Simple and plain " , with Flavor Flav following , " Muthafuck him and John Wayne ! " . The lyrics were shocking and offensive to many listeners upon the single 's release . Chuck D 's lyrics express the identification of Presley with racism ? either personally or symbolically ? and the largely held notion among Blacks that Presley , whose musical and visual performances owed much to African @-@ American sources , unfairly achieved the cultural acknowledgment and commercial success largely denied his black peers in rock and roll . The line regarding John Wayne refers to his controversial personal views , including racist remarks made in his 1971 interview for Playboy . " Fight the Power " has since become the group 's best @-@ known song and has been named one

of the best songs of all time by numerous publications .

The controversial single " Welcome to the Terrordome " references the murder of Yusef Hawkins and the 1989 riots in Virginia Beach , and it has Chuck D criticizing Jewish leaders who protested Public Enemy in response to Professor Griff 's anti @-@ Semitic remarks . He addresses the controversy as being in the center of political turmoil , with criticisms of the media and references to the Crucifixion of Jesus : " Crucifixion ain 't no fiction / So called chosen frozen / Apology made to who ever pleases / Still they got me like Jesus " . He is also critical of Blacks and those who " blame somebody else when you destroy yourself " : " Every brother ain 't a brother / ' cause a Black hand squeezed on Malcolm X the man / the shootin of Huey Newton / from the hand of Nig who pulled the trigger " . His lyricism features dizzying raps and internal rhyme : " Lazer , anastasia , maze ya / Ways to blaze your brain and train ya [...] Sad to say I got sold down the river / Still some quiver when I deliver / Never to say I never knew or had a clue / Word was heard , plus hard on the boulevard / Lies , scandalizin ' , basin ' / Traits of hate who 's celebratin ' wit Satan ? " . Its dense production incorporates numerous samples , including several James Brown tracks and the guitar line from The Temptations ' " Psychedelic Shack " . Several other samples are heard amid Chuck D 's rapping , such as the line " come on , you can get it @-@ get it @-@ get it " from Instant Funk 's " I Got My Mind Made Up (You Can Get It Girl) " . AllMusic 's John Bush cites the track as " the production peak of the Bomb Squad and one of Chuck D. ' s best rapping performances ever ... [N] one of their tracks were more musically incendiary " .

The third single " 911 Is a Joke " features Flavor Flav as the lead MC . He was given the idea by Chuck D to write the song . As Flav recalled , " I went and got high and wrote the record . I went and got ripped , I went and got out of my mind , and I started speaking all kinds of crazy shit ' cos usually back in the days when I used to smoke , it used to broaden my ideas and everything " . Its humorous and satirical subject matter is reflected in its music video , which featured a severely injured Flav being mistreated by a remiss , overdue ambulance staff . Another Flavor Flav @-@ solo track , fifth single " Can 't Do Nuttin ' for Ya Man " , has lyrics advocating African @-@ American self @-@ reliance and denouncing welfare dependence . It also reflects on Flav 's experiences with acquaintances from poor neighborhoods . He said of his inspiration for the song , " I was in my Corvette riding from Long Island going to The Bronx . I was slipping . I was roasting . I mean I was smoked @-@ out crazy . And everybody kept asking me for stuff and yet nobody wanted to give me stuff . So then if anybody ever asked me for something I would be like , ' Yo , I can 't do nothing for ya man . ' Next thing you know I started to vibe on it : ' I can 't do nothing for ya man , ' um ahh um um ahh . So I went and told that to Chuck . Chuck was like , ' Record that shit man ' " . Writing of both tracks , music critic Tom Moon comments that Flav " affects a tone of gimme @-@ a @-@ break sarcasm that is crucial to both tracks , and is welcome respite from Chuck D. ' s assault " . " Can 't Do Nuttin ' for Ya Man " was featured in the 1990 comedy film House Party .

= = Release and reception = =

Originally intended for an October 1989 release date , Fear of a Black Planet was released on April 10 , 1990 by Def Jam Recordings and Columbia Records . Although It Takes a Nation garnered Public Enemy more exposure with black audiences and music journalists , urban radio outlets had mostly rejected Def Jam 's requests to include the group 's singles in their regular rotation . This incited Def Jam co @-@ founder Russell Simmons to attempt grassroots promotional tactics from his earlier years of promoting hip hop shows . In promoting Fear of a Black Planet , he recruited young street crews to put up posters , billboards , and stickers on public surfaces , while Simmons himself met with nightclub DJs and college radio program directors to persuade them to add albums tracks such as " Fight the Power " , " 911 is a Joke " , and " Welcome to the Terrordome " to their playlists .

Fear of a Black Planet debuted at number 40 on the Billboard Top Pop Albums chart , with first @-@ week sales of one million copies in the United States . It also charted for 10 weeks and reached number four in the United Kingdom , while in Canada , it charted for 28 weeks and reached number 15 . By July 1990 , it had sold 1 @. @ 5 million copies in the US , where it ultimately peaked

at number 10 and charted for 27 weeks on the Top Pop Albums . After 1991 , when the tracking system Nielsen SoundScan began tracking domestic sales data , Fear of a Black Planet sold 561 @, @ 000 additional copies by 2010 .

The controversy surrounding the group and their exposure through the singles " Fight the Power " and " Welcome to the Terrordome " helped Fear of a Black Planet exceed the sales of their previous two albums , Yo ! Bum Rush the Show and It Takes a Nation of Million to Hold Us Back at the time , 500 @, @ 000 and 1 @. @ 1 million copies , respectively . The latter single 's lyrics were initially viewed by religious groups and the media as anti @-@ semitic upon its release . The album contributed to hip hop 's commercial breakthrough at the beginning of the 1990s , despite its limited radio airplay . Its success made Public Enemy the top @-@ selling act , both domestically and internationally , for Def Jam Recordings at the time . Ruben Rodriguez , Columbia 's senior vice president at the time , said in one of the label 's press releases , " What 's happening with Public Enemy is unbelievable . The album is selling across the board to all demographics and nationalities " . In a December 1990 article , Chicago Sun @-@ Times writer Michael Corcoran discussed Public Enemy 's commercial success with the album and remarked that " more than half of the 2 million fans who bought [Fear of a Black Planet] are white " .

Fear of a Black Planet received rave reviews from contemporary critics . After asserting prior to its release that it was " bound to be one of the most dissected pop collections in years " , Robert Hilburn of the Los Angeles Times wrote that the album " rivals the force and the power of It Takes a Nation " while " maintaining commercial and artistic credibility in the fast @-@ changing rap world " with original music . USA Today 's Edna Gundersen called it " a masterpiece of innovation [and] challenging music " that makes the group 's pro @-@ black lyrics more interesting and plausible . Rolling Stone magazine 's Alan Light praised Public Enemy 's self @-@ assured and realistic lyrics , and viewed the album as a deeper , more focused version of " the careening rage of Nation of Millions " . Greg Sadow of Entertainment Weekly found it powerfully relevant to contemporary American culture and unparalleled by anything in popular music : " It sounds like a partly African , partly postmodern collage , stitched together on tumultuous urban streets . " Tom Moon of The Philadelphia Inquirer observed " some of the genre 's most sophisticated sound designs and unconventionally agile rapping " on the album and called it " a major piece of work , the first hard evidence of rap 's maturity and a measure of its continuing relevance " .

In The Washington Post , Richard Harrington said because Feat of a Black Planet is a challenging listen , " How it 's met depends on how it 's understood . " Robert Christgau , writing for The Village Voice , felt that its " brutal pace " ultimately loses momentum and that the group 's lyrics are still ideologically flawed , but wrote that although their " rebel music " is gimmicky , " this is show business , and they still think harder than anybody else working their beat . " Peter Watrous of The New York Times called it " an essential pop album " and stated , " On their own , the lyrics seen [sic] functional . Taken with the music , they bloom with meaning . " Simon Reynolds of Melody Maker remarked that the content epitomizes the group 's significance at the time : " Public Enemy are important ... because of the angry questions that seethe in their music , in the very fabric of their sound ; the bewilderment and rage that , in this case , have made for one hell of strong , scary album " . Chicago Tribune critic Greg Kot felt that with the album , " Public Enemy affirms that it is not just a great rap group , but one of the best rock bands on the planet @-@ black or otherwise " .

At the end of 1990 , Fear of a Black Planet appeared in the top @-@ 10 of several critics ' lists of the year 's best albums . It was voted the third best record of 1990 in The Village Voice 's annual Pazz & Jop critics ' poll , and the publication 's Robert Christgau ranked it number 10 on his own " Dean 's list " . It was named the second best album of the year by The Boston Globe , the third best by USA Today , and fifth best by the Los Angeles Times 's Robert Hilburn , who wrote that it " dissects aspects of the black experience with an energy and vision that illustrates why rap continues to be the most creative genre in pop " . The State named it one of the year 's best albums and hailed it as " possibly the boldest and most important rap record ever made . A sonic tour de force " . Fear of a Black Planet was nominated for a Grammy Award for Best Rap Performance by a Duo or Group , presented at the 33rd Grammy Awards in 1991 .

= = Legacy and influence = =

Fear of a Black Planet 's success with critics and consumers was viewed as a significant factor to hip hop 's mainstream emergence in 1990 , which Billboard editor Paul Grein said was " the year that rap exploded " . In a July 1990 article , Kot compared Public Enemy 's influence with the album on hip hop at the start of the 1990s to the impact of Bob Dylan , George Clinton , and Bob Marley on each of their respective genres and eras , having " given it legitimacy and authority far beyond its core following " . Chuck D later said of the album in retrospect , " If It Takes a Nation was our ' nation ' record , Fear of a Black Planet was our ' world ' record " . With respect to hip hop , the album was important in the field of sampling , as copyright lawyers took notice of The Bomb Squad 's production and such a sample @-@ heavy work would not be cost effective in the future . Chuck D later said of its sampling issues , " We got sued for everything . We knew that the door on sampling was gonna close " . Subsequent use of sampled material , particularly the use of whole songs on top of a beat , by other hip hop artists prompted stricter sampling laws . Fear of a Black Planet was the group 's commercial apex , with sales dropping off for their subsequent albums . Chuck D said it was their most successful record , " not because of all the hype and hysteria . It was a world record . Because of all the different feels and the different textures and the flow it had " .

Fear of a Black Planet also helped popularize political subject matter in hip hop music , as it epitomized the resurgence in black consciousness among African @-@ American youths at the turn of the 1990s , amid a turbulent social and political zeitgeist during the Bush administration and South African apartheid . Black consciousness became the prevailing subject matter of many hip hop acts , exemplified by X @-@ Clan 's cultural nationalism on their debut album To the East , Blackwards , the revolutionary , Black Panther @-@ minded The Devil Made Me Do It by Paris , and the Five Percenter religious nationalism of Poor Righteous Teachers ' debut Holy Intellect . Christgau wrote in 1990 that Public Enemy had become not only " the most innovative popular musicians in America if not the world " but also " the most politically ambitious . Not even in the heyday of [the] Clash has any group come so close to the elusive and perhaps ridiculous ' 60s rock ideal of raising political consciousness with music . " Their music on the album inspired leftist and Afrocentric ideals among rap listeners who were previously exposed to more materialist themes in the music . Reeves said it introduced black consciousness to the " hip @-@ hop youth " of the " post @-@ black power generation " , " as leather African medallions made popular by rappers like P.E. replaced thick gold chains as the ultimate fashion statement ... P.E. ' s million seller sat at the front of a full @-@ blown black pride resurgence within rap " .

However , this resurgence soon became commodified as a trend , while actual awareness within the African @-@ American community was limited and ineffectual to issues such as drug dealing and the prevalence of liquor stores in such neighborhoods . Public Enemy responded to this and other deep @-@ rooted problems of Black America on their following album , Apocalypse 91 ... The Enemy Strikes Black (1991) , which featured more critical assessments of African @-@ Americans , denouncing Black drug dealers who donned Afrocentric merchandise , hip hop artists who promoted malt liquor , black radio stations for lacking significant airplay to hip hop , and even the Africans at the onset of the Atlantic slave trade for lacking unity .

Since Fear of a Black Planet was first released , it has been viewed by critics as one of the greatest and most important hip hop albums of all time , as well as a culturally significant work . Stephen Thomas Erlewine from AllMusic believed that " as a piece of music , this is the best hip @-@ hop has ever had to offer " , calling it " a remarkable piece of modern art , a record that ushered in the ' 90s in a hail of multi @-@ culturalism and kaleidoscopic confusion " . Alex Ross cited it as one of " the most densely packed sonic assemblages in musical history " , while Q said it " achieved the near impossible by being every bit as good as its predecessor " . In the opinion of Kembrew McLeod , Public Enemy had worked with production equipment that would seem primitive decades later but still managed to invent new " techniques and workarounds that electronics manufacturers never imagined " . Sputnikmusic staff writer Nick Butler said the album remained an enduring and vital work in a genre that " has a habit of moving at such a pace that records date in a matter of years " .

According to Acclaimed Music , Fear of a Black Planet is the 126th most ranked album on critics '

lists of the all @-@ time greatest records . In 1997 , The Guardian ranked it number 50 in their 100 Best Albums Ever list , which was voted on by a panel of various artists , critics , and DJs . The following year , it was selected as one of The Source 's 100 Best Rap Albums . The record was ranked number 21 in Spin 's " 100 Greatest Albums , 1985 ? 2005 " publication . Pitchfork Media named it the 17th @-@ best album of the 1990s . Rolling Stone included Fear of a Black Planet on their " Essential Recording of the ' 90s " list , and in 2003 , the magazine ranked it number 300 on their list of the 500 greatest albums of all time . In 2004 , it was one of 50 recordings chosen by the Library of Congress to be added to the National Recording Registry , which selects recordings annually that are " culturally , historically , or aesthetically significant " . According to a press release for the registry , " ' Fear of a Black Planet ' brought hip @-@ hop respect from critics , millions of new fans and passionate debate over its political content . The album signaled the coupling of a strongly political message with hip @-@ hop music " . In 2013 , NME named it the 96th best record ever in their all @-@ time list .

= = Track listing = =

All tracks were produced by The Bomb Squad .

= = Personnel = =

Credits are adapted from the album 's liner notes .

= = Charts = =

= = = Album = = =

= = = Singles = = =

= = Certifications = =