

# “Apology Made to Whoever Pleases”: Cultural Discipline and the Grounds of Interpretation

John M. Sloop

*After reviewing contemporary cultural and media scholarship that emphasizes the role of audiences in creating resistant readings of texts, this essay suggests that such audience-oriented theories should be re-supplemented with a concern for the ways in which texts, the grounds of interpretation, are constrained by cultural forces. Through a critical analysis of the controversy that ensued after Public Enemy's Professor Griff made universalizing claims about Jews, the essay investigates the economic, political, and ideological mechanisms that encouraged the band to withdraw the text (Griff's comments) and replace it with a text more consistent with the dominant cultural ideology of liberalism.*

**KEY CONCEPTS** Audience, cultural studies, discipline, hegemony, ideology, interpretation, media studies, race, rap, therapeutic discourse

**JOHN M. SLOOP** (Ph.D., University of Iowa, 1992) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Speech Communication, Drake University, Des Moines, IA 50311. A different version of this essay was presented at the 1991 SCA Convention in Atlanta, GA. The author would like to thank Kent A. Ono, Dana Cloud, Christopher Kamrath, Robert Hariman, Todd Boyd, and Jennifer Gunn for their comments on earlier drafts of the essay.

In late May 1989, Professor Griff, then a member of the rap group Public Enemy, asserted that Jews should be held accountable for “the majority of wickedness that goes on across the globe.”<sup>1</sup> In providing examples of this wickedness, Griff claimed that Jews were responsible for funding P. W. Botha in South Africa, the Tuskegee syphilis experiments, and AIDS experiments on blacks in South Africa. “Jews have power,” Griff noted, “The Jews have their hands right around Bush’s throat” (Smith, 1989, pp. 102–03). As these statements circulated in print, on radio, and on television over the next several months, representatives of various interests, from the Jewish Defense Organization to CBS Records, spoke through popular media outlets, calling for the group to dismiss Professor Griff and apologize to the Jewish community.<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously, however, “pro-African-American” media and spokespersons warned that any move taken by Chuck D, the band’s leader, to punish Griff would be interpreted as a sign that the band had given in to whites in order to secure financial gains. Over a period of months, Professor Griff was suspended, fired, and later reinstated as a member of the band; Chuck D offered an apology of sorts to the Jewish community; and the controversy over Griff’s comments, while continuing to have some influence over how the band was represented, ceased to dominate media coverage of the group.

Professor Griff’s statements demanded (and demand) a great deal of attention because they created a situation in which a voice from the “margins” of American culture, that of an

African-American rapper, challenged one of the foundations of liberalism (i.e., equal opportunity, equal access) through the assertion that an elite group was able to practice ethnic genocide by manipulating economic power.<sup>3</sup> More interesting than Griff's claims, however, is the public response to his statements and the influence of that response on how the members of Public Enemy re-presented and reproduced Griff's statement. In a broad sense, the social positioning of Public Enemy as "black radical, anti-authoritarian" spokespersons (Miley, 1987; Nash, 1988) and the subject position prefigured for "African-Americans" in dominant cultural discourses, combined with the significance of Professor Griff's attack on Jews, placed the group in a rhetorical position in which their discourse could no longer be defined as advancing positive social change. Rather, it was repositioned as a challenge to the fundamental codes of contemporary social and economic order. Hence, Griff's statements triggered a number of responses—ideological, economic, and political—that in the end challenged the legitimacy of his rhetoric and prodded both Griff and Chuck D to change the "text" of Griff's comments. Indeed, the general response to Griff's statements appears to have encouraged the band to offer a different, less threatening set of claims for public consumption.

When placed in the context of recent discussions within cultural and media studies concerning the ability of audiences to decode and interpret popular texts according to their own, often resistant, interests, this case is a significant one. In effect, this controversy offers a case study of the ways in which challenges to the dominant cultural ideology are "disciplined." That is, when a public text challenges dominant cultural ideology, this text and its producers are "disciplined" through economic, political, and ideological means, until the text can no longer be easily read as a challenge and until it reifies rather than confronts dominant ideology. In this essay, I will suggest that the recent discussion of the audience's role in the appropriation of texts should be re-supplemented with a concern for the ways in which texts are shaped or constrained by cultural forces. I will begin with a brief outline of recent discussions of audience reception studies, offering a supplemental concern for the role of media representations and other factors in "disciplining" challenges to the dominant cultural ideology. Through a case study of the multiple reactions to Griff's assertion about Jews, I will illustrate the usefulness of this supplemental concern. My critique will primarily draw upon discursive representations of Public Enemy before, during, and after the publications of Griff's statements.<sup>4</sup> The study will include both Public Enemy's activities and statements as well as mass mediated interpretations and responses to these words and actions. By highlighting the collective criticisms and discourse surrounding the group and the group's reactions, I will illustrate how, through a culmination of various representations and critiques, a text can be withdrawn or restructured such that it offers fewer possibilities for a challenge to the existing social and/or economic orders.

As a final but necessary introductory comment, I wish to make it clear that I am not justifying or praising Griff's claims. While I am investigating the ways in which a specific challenge to liberalism was treated culturally in order to more fully understand how text availability is necessarily limited on a mass cultural level, this is a case in which I find myself somewhat appreciative of the disciplinary mechanisms of mass culture.

## **Ideological Challenges and Cultural Discipline**

Within cultural and media studies, the meaning of "texts" has been itself a site of theoretical battle. Arguments over "meaning" have ranged from focuses on the ways in which ideological and repressive apparatuses stringently shape texts to focuses on the ways in which audiences have a seemingly limitless and autonomous range of interpretation as readers of texts.<sup>5</sup> Recently, the discussion has leaned in the direction of a focus on the

audience's ability to receive and reappropriate texts. Journals in communication studies serve nicely as a barometer for the general tenor of the discussion concerning audience reception and the meaning of texts.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Dana Cloud has recently reviewed this line of argument, showing its movements from Fiske's "polysemy" to Condit's "polyvalence" and then to her own "ambivalence" (1992, pp. 313–14). To review, Fiske's assertion of "polysemy" offers an optimistic openness to texts, a theoretical world in which readers have a limited power and ability to resist dominant encodings of popular texts in order to render not only their value, but also their meaning, more in line with the reader's own interests and positions with regard to race, class and gender. Condit's critique of Fiske exchanges the concept of polysemy with that of polyvalence. For Condit (1989), texts are not completely open with regard to meaning (polysemy) but are open with regard to the value the audience places on the text (polyvalence). In effect, Condit suggests that the codes shared by members of a culture are coherent enough to provide a loose stability and hence a shared understanding of how a text is "supposed" to be read. However, audiences do have the ability to place different values on that reading (e.g., racist, sexist, liberatory) based on their own interests.

While agreeing with Condit's general critique of the theory of polysemy in her reading of *Spenser: For Hire*, Cloud suggests that rather than being completely open to interpretation based on either meaning or value, texts are "ambivalent": "Popular texts offer viewers a multiplicitous but structured meaning system in which instances of multivocality are complementary parts of the system's overall hegemonic design" (1992, p. 314). Hence, Cloud suggests that if those who watch *Spenser: For Hire* read the African-American character Hawk as an ally of white culture, they participate in a rhetoric of assimilation. Alternatively, if Hawk is read as an antagonist, the audience participates in a rhetoric of difference that, "when read within the dominant culture, can be deployed for racist goals" (1992, p. 314).<sup>7</sup>

Cloud is suggesting that texts must be understood on the macro level (i.e., binarisms constrain textual readings on a culture wide level) as well as on the micro level of the ability of individual audience members to "reappropriate" meaning or value.<sup>8</sup> While the audience's reading and evaluation of a text might serve its interests on one level, the text is also structured culturally to serve the needs of the dominant culture: "We cannot simply assume that ambivalent or contradictory articulations of racial difference are in and of themselves subversive of [dominant] structures" (Cloud, 1992, p. 322). Cloud is interested, then, as her title suggests, in the "limits of interpretation," the limited degree to which audience interpretations of value or meaning are ultimately resistant. While I agree with the general direction that Cloud takes us, I wish to suggest that we must not only pay attention to the "ambivalence" of a text or the limits of audience interpretation, but in extending the exploration of macro concerns, we must also focus attention on ways in which the very production of texts, the "grounds of interpretation," are themselves shaped and limited culturally. That is, those critics who focus on the reading of a text must concern themselves with how ideological, political, and economic factors encourage a text's producers to re-structure and re-present the text in such a way that it more easily lends itself to a dominant reading. This is especially true if the text and its producers are initially offering a challenge to the dominant cultural ideology. Hence, we should place our concern not only on the limits of an audience's meaning or evaluation of a text but on the ways the grounds of interpretation limit the readings open to the audience.

On a general level, all popular "public" texts are limited initially by the economic interests of their media outlets. Condit suggests as much in her discussion of polyvalence when she asserts that meaning results from interactions between audience members and

media outlets rather than at either location alone. Indeed, in her initial response to Fiske's emphasis on the power of audiences to control their interpretations of mass mediated discourses, Condit suggests that the audience's ability to shape their own readings is limited by factors such as the "audience member's access to oppositional codes, the ratio between the work required and pleasure produced in decoding a text, the repertoire of available texts, and the historical occasion" (1989, p. 104). Further, Condit notes that because television and other mass media address viewers for the purpose of attracting advertisers, these media are constraining simply because their economic interests encourage them to address dominant audiences and promote their interests to the widest possible audience (1989, p. 112). The audience has the power to interpret, but it is a power limited both by its own characteristics and by the economic interests of the media.

While Condit explains how all texts are shaped by economic interests, I wish to push a little further by investigating other factors involved in the production of texts and hence of the grounds of interpretation. Useful to such a discussion is Goran Therborn's delineation of three different mechanisms by which cultural ideology is reproduced: "economic constraint, violence, and ideological excommunication" (1980, p. 174).<sup>9</sup> Together, these mechanisms create what I will call "cultural discipline." In 1979, Paul Willis noted that culture "is the very material of our daily lives, the bricks and mortar of our most commonplace understandings" (pp. 184–85). Willis was here giving culture a double edge, much in the same way that Foucault plays with the valence of power: while it was positive in the sense that life could not be experienced without the bricks and mortar, it was constraining in the sense that bricks and mortar have a discursive materiality that privileges existing discourses, existing ideology. While Fiske's focus is on the malleability of culture, the focus here is on the constraints of its materiality. Hence, "cultural discipline" includes all of those forces that shape texts (and thereby limit their readings) within the parameters of that culture's dominant ideology; cultural discipline denotes the ways in which the "material" meanings of the past constrain texts and subjects from transition in the lived experience of the present.

Taking Therborn's mechanisms in turn, we can see how each works independently to contribute to the maintenance of the dominant cultural ideology. Take the case, for example, of a young man who converts to the teachings of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon and makes this conversion known to his neighbors and the surrounding community. Economically, his conversion can have a number of effects: the community, if it sees his beliefs as detrimental to its own belief structure, may refuse to buy goods from the store he works for, and his employer may fire or fail to promote him. Physically, as he sells roses on a street corner, he may have rocks hurled at him or be confronted with violence by pedestrians and drivers. But more importantly, and perhaps more effectively (as well as more commonly), he will be excommunicated ideologically. In ideological excommunication, the young man's discourse would be taken as abnormal, neither sane nor intelligible by community standards. Hence, the gestures, stares, and sounds of the "looking glass self" inform him that his behavior and discourse are signifying to his community that he is intellectually and morally bankrupt.

"Ideological excommunication" is similar to Berger and Luckmann's (1967) description of "nihilation," a procedure by which interpretations of phenomena that do not fit the existing symbolic universe are denied legitimacy (p. 114). In nihilation, an argument that challenges the accepted symbolic reality is depicted as "nonsensical"; those holding this alternative viewpoint are then either placed into "therapy," making them reframe their worldview until it comes into line with the dominant discourse, or is given a lower ontological status (i.e., defined as "mad") (1967, p. 115). Hence, after his conversion, the

young man may find himself not only economically and physically threatened but also forced by law to make his own body a signifier of abnormality (e.g., he is legally required to stand in clearly identified booths when distributing religious information in airports). Such a location provides other members of the culture with a shared code that allows them to immediately know that his discourse is “nonsensical.” Without an adequate support system of other believers, he may well give in to cultural therapy or discipline, recognize the faults and failings of his discourse and return to the culture at large; he may indeed later express public gratitude for his “deprogramming.”<sup>10</sup> In effect, cultural mechanisms will have encouraged him to change his public discourse. While initially offering a challenge to the cultural ideology, if the therapy is complete, he becomes instead a sign of its strength.

To that end, I am suggesting that when an individual or text offers a challenge to the dominant ideology via mass media outlets, economic, physical, and ideological mechanisms will come into play and encourage a change in the challenging text. Indeed, such forces will encourage a withdrawal of the challenging text and the submission of one that is either simply in line with the dominant ideology or is overtly a reification of it. This is not to say that outlets for challenges do not exist. Indeed, this would be a ridiculous claim in an age with hundreds of cable television options and endless numbers of special interest magazines. It is to argue, however, that even these voices are mediated, filtered, and diluted by the discourse of the dominant culture. As Condit (1987) notes, public argument has a “universalizing influence.” As topics and themes are argued about publicly, the options of what may be uttered publicly change. As African-Americans were slowly brought under the banner of civil rights on a cultural level, it became more and more difficult for individuals to utter racist comments publicly even if in their individual circles they continued to do so (1987, p. 15). Large pockets of various discourses may exist, but there is less room for them in public forums. This “universalizing influence” of public argument also affects the structuring of laws and public policy: “Laws were made in the new vocabulary rather than in the old; public policies were framed in the new vocabulary rather than in the old, and social practices were experienced by many through the new vocabulary as well” (1987, p. 15). As one aspect of a more general “cultural discipline,” the “universalizing influence” limits the effect of private or marginalized voices and makes the public forum the arena for ideological struggle over the meaning of who we, as a people, will be.

In the case investigated here, Griff's claims about Jews act as a general attack on liberalism and the American cultural belief in equality and fairness. Had Griff attacked the practices of a particular individual (e.g., a particular employer who hires on the basis of race), his claims would most likely not have met with the response they did. Instead, in attacking a cultural belief that “all men are created equal” and have equal opportunities and access to success, his argument attacks an assumption of dominant ideological beliefs and cultural discourses. That is, Griff's statements portray an unjust and unfair system that rewards or punishes individuals systematically on the basis of race rather than on the basis of individual character. His assertion points to the existing system as one with an unfair and unequal balance of power, one needing replacement. As culture always leans toward reproduction and stability rather than destruction, the mechanisms of cultural discipline encourage Griff and the band as a whole to change the text being offered for interpretation, to become supportive of dominant ideology and of culture at large.

## Representing Public Enemy

Before the media coverage of Griff's statements concerning Jews became prominent, two distinct representations of Public Enemy were evident, one emerging from the group itself and one from those commenting on the band in mass mediated reports and reviews.<sup>11</sup>

The band, primarily through interviews with band leader Chuck D, claimed to have positioned itself as a creator and conveyor of a positive image for blacks. The message was necessary, Chuck D noted, because "at the moment, we've got to hold onto our blackness out of self-defense" (Owen, 1990, p. 57). Chuck D also observed that this image "is aimed at black youth and at the same time, it's aimed at the black bourgeoisie because basically, they really don't give a damn about the black youth" (Bendinger, 1988, p. 65). In essence, Chuck D saw the need for the promotion of a positive image of African-Americans because the economic interests of all media, regardless of ownership, do not encourage such an image.

Further, Chuck D represented the group as serving as an alternative news source for the black community, a "black CNN," since news of the activities of black youth was ignored by both white and black operated media outlets (Owen, 1990, p. 58).<sup>12</sup> In order to survive, Chuck D asserted, blacks "must know how the white structure operates, and we must know how our own structure operates. We have to know the white thing, because we're getting it pumped into us daily—in the schools, on TV, and in the newspapers" (Owen, 1990, p. 60). As a result of communicating with and about black youth, Chuck D wished to address and change the realities of white youth, especially those already somewhat aware of the contradictions in the power structures that "their forefathers have created for the benefit of themselves and at the expense of others" (Owen, 1990, p. 57). Public Enemy's lyrics necessarily upset white middle-class Americans, Chuck D observed, because whites cannot understand the codes operating within the black community (Leland, 1988, p. 49). By pointing out to whites both their inability to understand black codes and their unwillingness to do so, Chuck D hoped to force them to begin dialogues with the black community.

The second primary representation of the group, its articulation by observers within the mass media industry (e.g., music critics, social observers), differed somewhat from that offered by Chuck D. Although Chuck D's statements are undeniably one element of the band's overall persona, observers of the band depicted Public Enemy as intentionally polemical, often dogmatically so. In short, descriptions of the band ran from their being "anti-establishmentarians" (Nash, 1988) to black militants (Miley, 1987) to scoutmasters of a militant movement (Boyd, 1988, p. 85).<sup>13</sup> With the band established as dangerous, promoting itself through "anti-establishment positions," and "weighted by 1960's black militancy," the potential for an eruption of violence at any of their shows was said to be high (Nash, 1988). Indeed, when Public Enemy played at Riker's Island Prison Facility, one reporter observed that many of the inmates were already familiar with the group's lyrics, and as such, she feared that "such anti-authoritarian sentiments might be enough of a spark to inflame the detainees" (Nash, 1988). Furthermore, in the *Indianapolis Star*, the band was described as holding the "same naive angst that put the Clash above other punkers," an angst which could lead to the violence and problems that followed the Clash (Miley, 1987).

Simultaneous with their articulation as a dangerous and militant group was the perhaps more pronounced representation of the group as a harmless form of entertainment. It was rare early in the band's career, for instance, to find Public Enemy charged with overt racism. The promotion of "blacks" in and of itself did little more than draw the attention of the media toward the group; it did not draw censure. In *Mother Jones*, for instance, the question of whether or not Public Enemy was racist was responded to in strongly negative terms (DiLeo, 1989, p. 10). Indeed, while one reviewer might assert that while Public Enemy had taken the torch of black militancy and decided to "ram it down the throats of everyone from the government to black radio" or that their militancy was a sign that "the time has come to take rap seriously as an art form" (Boyd, 1988, p. 49), others jettisoned the issue altogether and discussed only the "dance potential" of the music (Leland, 1987, p. 40). Furthermore,

a second reporter in attendance at the Riker's Island concert claimed that Public Enemy's black militancy could do little more than put the inmates through a tortuous afternoon of preaching; their message was simply not one that could, or would, be taken seriously (McNeil, 1988, p. 36).

The cultural representation of Public Enemy before Griff's inflammatory comments, then, was a mixed one, with voices of various strengths offering different frames for the band. On the one hand, the band attempted to articulate itself as a purveyor of a positive image for blacks. However, reviews and music critics gave them a different, and somewhat contradictory, reading. While represented as black militants and challenging on the one hand, they were represented as "only music" on the other. In short, Chuck D's claims to provide a positive image for blacks in and of itself did not bring a backlash of disciplinary rhetoric. In effect, the text that Public Enemy presented was not taken as a strong challenge to the dominant ideology.<sup>14</sup> It is only when the group's aesthetic is one that attacks a foundation of liberalism, the myth of equality, through a systematic attack on an identified and generalized "empirical referent" (i.e., Jews) that ideological depictions work to discipline the group, protecting the current articulations of social positions and equality. In short, "Black is beautiful" is not challenging to American ideology in quite the same way that "Judaism is wicked" is. That is, while a pro-black message or an anti "individual" message (i.e., a critique of a single person rather than of a group) falls within the boundaries of popular liberalism and hence does not bring about discipline or critique, an anti-Jewish message is one of anti-equality and therefore does require explanation. As long as Public Enemy presented itself as only pro-black, it could be constructed as primarily a form of entertainment, although a potentially dangerous one. A "pro-black," "anti-authoritarian" message is more easily shrugged off than an "anti-Jewish" and conspiratorial one. Griff's claims about Jews, as will be indicated, led to a much stronger and immediate reaction than did anything the band had ever said before.

### **The Cultural Disciplining of Public Enemy**

Although Professor Griff's original commentary was published in the *Washington Times* in May 1989, the majority of responses came only after the interview was reprinted in *The Village Voice* shortly thereafter (Smith, 1989, pp. 102–03). It is in these responses that we may witness the workings of cultural discipline and the ways in which producers of texts that challenge the dominant ideology are "encouraged" to transform their claims until they are more in line with dominant ideology. In his commentary on the interview, *Village Voice* writer R. J. Smith berated Public Enemy for not having acted quickly to clarify their position and to remove Professor Griff from the band (1989, p. 103). This response proved characteristic of other immediate commentary. While the pro-black, anti-establishment views of the band had rarely brought out more than cautious fear, the response to Griff's comments was swift, censorious, and relatively voluminous. Almost universally, critics attacked Griff's comments and called for the group's apology and the elimination of Griff from the band's line-up. The only press coverage openly supportive of Griff's right to make these statements and to remain in the group was that directed toward improving the image of blacks; indeed, such papers demanded that Public Enemy support Griff even if its members disagreed with his claims (Leland, 1989, p. 100). Hence, as leader of the band, Chuck D was faced with dominant media outlets that demanded an apology regardless of his feelings about the claim and marginal ones that demanded his support of Griff.

In the dominant media, the specter of ideological excommunication or nihilation came quickly. Griff's claims were represented with a number of descriptive labels: "from the foolish to the stupendously stupid" (Cole, October 19, 1989, p. 54), "uneducated"

(Pareles, 1989, p. C15) and “bizarre” (Robins, 1989). An essay in rock magazine *Spin* observed that “Griff turned isolated incidents into evidence of a gross Jewish conspiracy—a deluded fantasy that has been a staple of the *loony* right for decades” (Pearlman, 1990, p. 95). While Griff was formerly the band’s “research department,” he was now the one who poisoned the minds of blacks with white supremacist hate literature, someone in need of “intellectual detoxification” (Mills, July 21, 1989), a hanger-on and a meaningless back-up dancer (Adler, 1990, p. 57). Further, his assertions were tied to the philosophy of Louis Farrakhan, “who has referred to Judaism as a ‘gutter religion’ and to Hitler as a ‘great man’ ” (Robins, 1989). Griff is identified as the corrupting influence on the group, having introduced Chuck D to the teachings of Louis Farrakhan (Mills, June 22, 1989) and an “undereducated patsy for those in the Nation of Islam who would make a scapegoat of Jews, for whatever reason” (Mills, July 21, 1989).<sup>15</sup>

Initially, Chuck D attempted to support Griff’s right to make the statements, although he was careful to separate his own beliefs and those of the band from Griff’s. The reaction to this stance, however, did little to change the text of Griff’s statement and hence met continued critique and censor. As a result, Chuck D’s insistence on maintaining loyalty to Professor Griff was also roundly criticized and questioned. Writers who claimed to be Public Enemy admirers noted that they were confused over the “hold” Griff had on Chuck D (Cole, October 19, 1989, p. 95). Similarly, the band was criticized for taking a “stand together or be conquered” attitude: “A public display of loyalty became more important than a rejection of prejudice” (Cole, October 19, 1989, p. 96). Public Enemy’s sluggishness in responding to Professor Griff’s claims was said to make the group stubborn, clumsy, and impolitic (Pareles, 1989, p. C15). Finally, even the motives behind the band’s decision to keep Griff were questioned; Chuck D was accused of attempting to keep the controversy quiet in order to protect the economic interests of a production company he was planning to sell (Cole, October 19, 1989, pp. 54, 96).

The reaction from within the barracks of the group’s management and record company, entities with an economic interest in the band’s acceptance within dominant media, was one of immediate apology and a distancing of everyone from Griff. Russell Simmons, Public Enemy’s manager, quickly asserted that the band should engage in more reading and “be more careful about what they say. I hate what Professor Griff said, and I don’t like him”; Simmons also noted that his partner was Jewish as were many of his employees (Pareles, 1989, p. C15). One of the band’s publicists claimed to have known about Griff’s feelings about Jews for years and had “advised Chuck D last year not to let Professor Griff speak to reporters” (Mills, June 21, 1989). CBS Records, the band’s parent label, immediately issued a statement calling for the group to back down from their statement (Mills, June 22, 1989).

CBS’s call for a backing down, as well as numerous calls for apologies from the band, were in effect calls for the band to offer a new text concerning Jews. In the terms of cultural discipline, Griff’s statements indirectly challenged the dominant cultural ideology and hence drew forth the censor or discipline of individuals who were themselves constituted in and through that ideology. Because Griff’s statement so clearly attacked close to the heart of liberalism and American culture, the reaction was a demand for nothing less than full therapy, an apology for the text that the band had offered. In effect, the band was asked to supply a different text, to delegitimize Griff’s claims.

After the group’s initial silent response to Professor Griff’s statements met with almost unanimous criticism, Chuck D took several “concrete” actions. Chuck D’s first statements regarding Griff’s assertions came in late June 1989, one month after Griff initially made the statements, when he observed that “The real enemy is a system, not a people” (Mills, June 21, 1989) and consequently suspended Griff from the band.<sup>16</sup> He also noted that Griff was



the only member of the band who held such beliefs about Jews, again distancing himself from the claim (Mills, June 21, 1989). However, the suspension of Griff and Chuck D's localizing of the statements to Griff did not put an end to negative news coverage of the band. Media critics continued to call on Chuck D to offer a satisfactory apology to the Jewish community, to make it clear that not only did he disagree with Griff's statement but that he also saw that making the claim was itself wrong. Once again, a new text, or a rehabilitation of the original text, was being called for.

In Public Enemy's (1990) next single, "Welcome to the Terrordome," Chuck D finally offered an apology, albeit an ambiguous one: "Crucifixion ain't no fiction/so-called chosen, frozen/Apology made to whoever pleases/Still, they got me like Jesus." After these phrases also, perhaps predictably, met with criticism, Chuck D emphasized that the band was indeed "sorry" for Professor Griff's remarks: "I did apologize—those remarks weren't in character for Public Enemy" ("Beyond," February 1990, p. 18).

Chuck D noted publicly that his primary concern about apologizing was his fear that he would appear to be "knuckling under" to white media and would as a result lose credibility within the black community (Mills, June 22, 1989). His fears appear to have been well-founded; while Chuck D was being attacked for not firing Griff by more traditional mass media outlets, members of the black press were accusing Chuck D in advance of "knuckling under" if any conciliatory gestures whatsoever were made (Mills, June 22, 1989). After his initial apology, then, Chuck D pointedly noted that his action was not one of giving in to pressure. To fend off attacks from those who thought he did not punish Griff enough and from those who charged him with bowing to pressure, Chuck D claimed: "This is a black and I repeat black family matter" (Mills, June 21, 1989). Hank Shocklee, one of the group's producers observed, "Don't talk to me about knuckling under. We work in a studio where people bring their babies. What if some crazy person threw a bomb in here?" (Mills, June 21, 1989). Russell Simmons more directly noted that "Contrary to some recent reports, this decision is not a result of pressure applied by the music industry. It was made independently by Chuck D" (McAdams, 1989, p. 69). Simultaneous tensions existed, then, for the band to appear as if it were not "caving in" and for writers in popular publications to force the band to take actions that would illustrate a belief that "all humans are created equal." Chuck D, caught between two ideological struggles, attempted to play both sides and never completely satisfied either.<sup>17</sup>

Chuck D later complained that he had been "sand bagged by the record industry" and should have been allowed to punish Griff in his own way without a public sacrifice (Mills, August 14, 1989). By this time, however, the construction of the controversy was close to complete: Griff had made statements implying that Jews ran power structures that were discriminatory against blacks; representatives of the media and record industries had criticized the statements; Griff had been fired, and the band had apologized for the statements. Chuck D's new claims about being "sandbagged" did little to change the depiction, grounded in his apology, that viewpoints like Griff's would not be tolerated. Indeed, Chuck D was deluged with questions concerning racial equality and status in every interview following Griff's comments. Rather than the uncompromising stance that Professor Griff had, Chuck D's responses now fit well within the ideology of equality and liberalism: "There is no such thing as black and white. The difference between black and white is set up by people who want to remain in power. This black and white thing is a belief structure not a physical reality" (Owen, 1990, p. 57). While Chuck D continued to comment on particular problems with the status quo, it was now specific problems, specific people, or specific systems being pointed to rather than ethnic groups. As Alan Light noted of the band's next release, "The targets of Public Enemy's fury were narrowed—Hollywood

and the US tax system among them" (1992, p. 50). The critique of individuals or systems that practice racism is acceptable; the claim that an entire group of people are responsible for wickedness is not.

The subsequent actions taken by Professor Griff, however, are perhaps the most telling signs of the efficiency and potential of the cultural discipline in encouraging subjects to agree with ideologically consistent constructions of reality. Half a year after making his original comments, Professor Griff apologized and simultaneously criticized Chuck D for not having supported him during the uproar. Griff asserted that the group betrayed him, throwing him "to the wolves to appease the media" (Pearlman, 1990, p. 95). By allowing Griff to be sacrificed, Public Enemy had itself lost credibility in the black community: "A lot of people thought Chuck became a sell-out and everyone else in the group became questionable" (Pearlman, 1990, p. 96). Griff not only attacked Chuck D's behavior during the controversy, he also questioned the group's sincerity and integrity on questions of black liberation: "On all these tours and all these records, they don't really mean none of that. They're full of shit, they really are" (Pearlman, 1990, p. 96). Not only, then, did Chuck D provide an apology for Griff's claims, but Griff went on to re-present the band as uncredible spokespersons for the black community. Furthermore, Griff himself went on to apologize, admitting that the history of Jews is indeed "one of profound suffering," something which should be understandable by all blacks (Pearlman, 1990, p. 96). Griff not only admitted that he had turned isolated incidents of power and domination by individuals who happened to be Jews into a generalized claim about an entire community, he also asserted that blacks were more at fault than anyone else for their ignorance of their own culture and the cultures of others (Pearlman, 1990, p. 96). Griff's comments concerning Jews, then, had been apologized for by both the band and Griff himself.

Each of the major reactions by the band, Chuck D's apology, Griff's removal from the band, and Griff's subsequent apology, in effect served as a withdrawal of the original text and the offering of a text that more easily fit within the dominant ideology. However, as discourse does act materially, such claims are not easily forgotten. As a result, the band continues to be maintained in a state of therapy. Just as any patient exhibiting "abnormal" psychoses remains in therapy for some time after the symptoms have stopped, Public Enemy continues to be held in a state of therapy even after its apology and withdrawal of the offending text. As Chuck D noted, three years after Griff's comments, in recognition that one aspect of the band's representation would forever be tied to racism: "You can't talk about the Mets and not talk about 1969" (Light, 1992, p. 50).

It is certainly the case that the motives of the band have continued to be questioned and inspected long after the controversy has died down as a media event. Hence, the band has been reconstructed from a thinking, "pro-black" group to a "racist" and "ignorant" one: "For all its militant posturing, Public Enemy crumbled like a cupcake when the hammer came down last month, because there's no excuse for Professor Griff's pitifully ignorant statements, and there's no justification for Chuck D's own ignorance in defending those statements" (Mills, July 21, 1989). Their militancy was transformed from sincere to postured; in retrospect, Public Enemy was depicted as having been insincere political activists from the very beginning. While the band insistently claimed to be solving problems from the inside, not bowing to outside pressures, descriptions of the group's actions following Professor Griff's statements made "knuckling under" to outside pressure a particularly prominent depiction. The persistent calls for a boycott of Public Enemy by the Jewish Defense Organization were named as a main factor in Public Enemy's decision to apologize (Cole, August 10, 1989, p. 24). Indeed, in one depiction of the break-up of the band, a number of external causes were cited: "Pressure from the black community, . . .

Jewish organizations, the press, and the music industry are believed to be major factors causing the group to *self-destruct*" (McAdams, 1989, p. 5, emphasis mine). Public Enemy was transformed into a group that dissolved from fear of boycotts, that crumbled under pressure.

It is not Professor Griff alone who questioned the motives of the group after both he and Chuck D had apologized; the popular press also redefined Public Enemy's purpose. Although the apology may have been accepted as legitimate, Chuck D's reason for making the apology was framed in such a way that the future credibility of the group is questionable at best: Chuck D showed "concern that the action would tarnish the band's carefully constructed image of defiance and radical pride with its core audience of black youth" (Mills, June 22, 1989). The group's new depiction was no longer one of sincere pro-black spokespersons, the construction developed by the media prior to discourse concerning Griff's anti-Semitic remarks. Instead, their motives were transformed from aiming for social changes to monetary gains—rather than spokespersons for a movement, they were transformed to mercenaries of popularity (Browne, 1989). Furthermore, charges of sexism and homophobia now became prominent in depictions of the group; they were charged with being "unapologetically macho, contemptuous of 'ho's and 'gays'" (Pareles, 1989, p. C28). Finally, they were reconstructed as not only insincere but also inauthentic; they only pose at being "b-boys." They were raised as middle class suburbanites and only pretend to be hard core rappers (Cole, October 19, 1989, pp. 48–53). Chuck D's marriage, family, and home on suburban Long Island are said to completely contradict his ability to communicate on a street level (Cole, October 19, 1989, pp. 47–48). The timing of these comments is of the essence; these charges, charges that could have been leveled against Public Enemy earlier, only emerge after Professor Griff made his comments regarding Jews.

The band's ability to be effective in the quest for social change also becomes questionable. A reviewer of a Public Enemy video, for instance, noted that Public Enemy's accord with Malcolm X's dismissal of the March on Washington as "nonsense" and their use of Tawana Brawley in their "Fight the Power" video would probably end up doing more harm to Civil Rights than help (Farber, 1989, p. 100). Again, the alignment of the band with Louis Farrakhan was generally concurrent with attacks on Farrakhan's epistemology: "They praise Farrakhan who has called Judaism a gutter religion and said that Whites were products of 'demonic genetic experiments'" (Pareles, 1989, p. C28). The black press, too, recast Chuck D, this time as "another bought, whipped slave" (Leland, 1989, p. 100). Hence, not only did the band apologize for its ideological transgressions, but its future claims were also prefigured as insincere and irrelevant. Chuck D can claim that he is "hitting at the whole belief structure of the Western world with its white world supremacy," but the therapeutic readings suggested by the reactions to Griff's claims, both the band's reactions and those of commentators, encourage us to decode a far less radical statement (Owen, 1990, p. 57).

Ideological excommunication or nihilation is clearly a prevalent factor in the reconstruction of Public Enemy (Therborn, 1980, p. 175). After being branded as abnormal, the band's discourse was depicted as "a revealing symptom calling for therapy or repression," leaving only what is acceptable to the dominant class' definition of reality (Therborn, 1980, p. 175). As has been shown, processes of ideological excommunication effectively questioned the status and motives of the group. In terms of therapy, however, cultural constraints, as they operate in and through media outlets, the record company, the buying public, etc., were not satisfied with the band's conciliatory gestures until an apology was offered and a clear admission of the error of Griff's claims was made. Only after Griff was removed from the group and both Chuck D and Griff had made separate apologies, hence

removing the offensive text and offering an acceptable one in its place, was the group able to regain the acceptance of their record company, the Jewish community, and social critics.

While my main focus has been on ideological excommunication, it is obvious that economic and physical violence were also utilized to delegitimize Griff's comments. Professor Griff's statements threatened the employment of the members of the band—indeed, outside groups threatened boycotts of their recordings, and their record company asked that they apologize. While it is not prudent to make much of the case of one industry's response to an ideological crisis, in this case, the short term loss of income to the record company was indeed overcome by the possible long term effects of allowing Griff's comments to pass unchallenged. Either the record company itself would soon face larger losses through boycotts or, on a more radical level, if Griff's statements were accepted as "true," the maintenance of contemporary economic, political, and ideological systems would be threatened. The short term losses of the record company are clearly outweighed by such a prospect.

Rumors and threats of violence emerged from several groups, including the Jewish Defense Organization. Hank Shocklee's fears that bombs could be directed against the band reveal that the fear of violence was at least a determining factor in the band's move to apologize for its comments. That is, the threat of violence was effectively directed against the group, and this threat brought about changes in the band's status and attitudes.

The mechanisms of cultural discipline each worked to encourage the removal and re-presentation of a text that did not fit within the dominant cultural ideology. Through physical, economic, and ideological means, Public Enemy was placed in a position in which the only relief they could find was in the removal of a text and the offering of a new one. While audiences may interpret the original claim that Griff made concerning Jews, their interpretations must now be made through the tint of apology and withdrawal. The efficiency of this "process" in shutting down ideological resistance and in maintaining the equivalencies necessary for the reproduction of the current system should give us pause. In terms of constitutive rhetoric, we are forced to observe that an alternative discourse which could interpellate subjects into a liberatory (or even different) subject position is far more difficult to imagine than we at times might wish. While I again in no way wish to suggest that depicting Jews as responsible for the majority of wickedness in the world can be seen as a liberatory construction, this case does illustrate that what was seen as liberatory from Professor Griff's position was quickly stifled once articulated; indeed, the end result was a reification of the dominant ideology itself. If we hope as critics to articulate our own version of what a liberated "people," when created, would be, we are necessarily indicted in this study. We must begin to take note that, as James Curran (1982) has asserted, "The mass media have now assumed the role of the Church, in a more secular age, of interpreting and making sense of the world to the mass public. Like their priestly predecessors, professional communicators amplify systems of representation that legitimize the system" (p. 227). Before we agree to accept the liberatory potential espoused by theories like Radway's (1984), Fiske's (1987), or Laclau and Mouffe's (1985), we must ask ourselves to reenvision how one may operate through a system of mediation which so efficiently disciplines, so effectively excommunicates its offenders.

## Concluding Observations

Hopefully, it is clear that I have been attempting to make two theoretical points as a result of this study. First, as should be obvious, by placing the argument within a particular theoretical "tradition," I have attempted to note the ways in which textual interpretation is constrained culturally. However, the implication goes much farther than to limit the

autonomy of the individual reader of the text. In some sense, much of the discussion surrounding the space for resistant or hegemonic readings has implications for discussions of the meanings of texts within the postmodern condition. That is, while the case study illustrates that texts themselves are more limited than we sometimes theorize and asks us to refocus on cultural determinants of the text itself, it also acts as a response to claims that we have entered a postmodern condition in which communication in many senses comes to a screeching halt. Indeed, it has become commonplace to note the onslaught of a condition in which objects and subjects can utter no more than meanings that lie on the surface, that have no ideological depth, no metanarratives. Jean Baudrillard's (1988) assertion that "everywhere one seeks to produce meaning, to make the world signify, to render it visible. We are not, however, in danger of lacking meaning; quite to the contrary, we are gorged with meaning and it is killing us" (p. 63), should give us pause. While this study does not investigate how individuals construct meaning out of the fragmented texts we encounter daily and, in some part, help to construct, it does illustrate that from a multiplicity of positions, something is still at stake—there is still a depth to the meaning of texts, even if it is a contingent depth. Hence, when Griff makes his claims, others, speaking from a multiplicity of subject positions, sense that something is at stake and challenge Griff's claims, disciplining them. By the time others receive Griff's comments, they are part of a much larger text that has been given shape and orientation by others before them, a shape and an orientation that continues to encourage a dominant reading rather than a multiplicity of readings that, according to Baudrillard, "gorge" us.

In general, then, Griff's claim that Jews are responsible for "the majority of wickedness that goes on across the globe" is problematic to the degree that it negates any sense of fair and equivalent collective representation; it indeed essentializes race as a determining characteristic of power. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985) have noted, one of the basic characteristics of the current system of liberalism is that of an articulation of equivalence among all subject positions. When social struggles are directed against simple empirical referents (e.g., men or whites as biological referents) rather than against contingent systems of representation, the struggle is doomed to fail because it will in the future be forced to attack already existent antagonisms that are established along with the establishment of the "empirical referent" they have set up as the enemy (1985, pp. 132–33). Hence, Griff's campaign against Jews as an "objective entity" is doomed to fail when questions of the struggles "for the freedom of expression or the struggle against the monopolization of economic power" emerge (i.e., such a monopolization of power could simply be taken over by another group if the Jews in Griff's universe were removed). Moreover, as I have shown, Griff's campaign is also stifled by cultural constraints through each of the apparatuses defined by Therborn—economic pressure, physical violence, and most importantly, ideological excommunication.

The claims and counter-claims of this case work well in highlighting, not just the audience's problems and powers in the interpretation of messages, but the ways in which cultural mechanisms, especially mass media outlets, resist and encourage a reconfiguration of those claims that differ from or challenge the dominant ideology. Hence, regardless of how much space audience members have for interpretation or evaluation, "critical texts" and their producers are encouraged through cultural discipline to become supportive of the dominant ideology rather than resistant of it. This is not to say that interpretation cannot be resistant; indeed, I have not dealt at all with what audience members did with the overall controversy. However, this case does show the degree to which the words and actions of "resistant" performers are rhetorically re-presented to make such interpretations potentially more difficult to make. In the case at hand, Public Enemy is depicted as espousing "bizarre"

ideas, and its discourse only becomes acceptable after they “apologize,” placing themselves in therapy and providing more fitting ideas. Further, it should be clear from other obvious examples that this is not an isolated case: witness Jimmy the Greek and the economic consequences of his claims about the physical prowess of African-American athletes; witness Marge Schott’s suspension from baseball and the ideological consequences of her claims about African-American baseball players in her organization.

I should also make clear that Public Enemy’s disciplining on this matter does not disallow their ability to make resistant claims in other contexts or to redefine themselves over time. Indeed, their next album included the single and its accompanying video, “By the Time I Get to Arizona” (1991), both of which depicted a fantasy narrative in which the band kills the political chiefs of Arizona because of Arizona’s refusal to declare a state holiday for Martin Luther King, Jr. While controversial and resistant, the video and song required less cultural discipline because Chuck D made it clear that not only was the song about “fantastic” actions but also that he was critiquing an individual state and its actions and not a race in general (Light, 1992, pp. 50–53). As a result, his text is open for readings acceptable within the dominant cultural ideology.

While I have not taken up this line of inquiry in this essay, it might also prove fruitful to situate Public Enemy’s discourse as a case study of “apologia.” Such a study might fortify the study of apologia as a genre in at least two ways. First, as Carole Blair (1984) noted a decade ago, generic studies have too often placed their focus on the actual or potential effectiveness of generic rhetoric by analyzing messages within particular taxonomic structures (p. 259). Blair suggests that generic studies require that critics consider the entire range of factors that comprise the rhetorical situation, including the form of media chosen (1984, p. 254).<sup>18</sup> In the case of Chuck D, we have an instance of apologia in which the rhetor does not have immediate access to what we think of as the traditional means of apologia (i.e., “public speaking,” books). While there are obvious outlets for his explanations, they lead to at best a fragmented, and often ambiguous, discourse (e.g., journal interviews, sound bites on MTV News, song lyrics). Chuck D is called upon to “apologize” but is forced to provide an apologia in a rhetorical position with little precedent and with even less of a clear location from which to speak. Hence, cases of this nature move us from particular strategies of apologia to the specific positioning of the “apologist” via occupation, race, gender, etc.

Secondly, in terms of apologia, this case might provide the grounds for understanding how apologia as a genre not only works to “constrain” the apologist but also to provide space for change of the culture to which s/he speaks. As Sharon Downey (1993) notes in her recent historical survey, “genre criticism charts the dynamics of permanence and change in recurrent rhetorical forms (although it is ironic that few genre studies fulfill the evolutionary goals of the method)” (p. 45). While I have focused on the ways various cultural mechanisms work to stabilize or maintain a culture’s dominant ideology, a study of an apologia such as Chuck D’s, keeping in mind Downey’s argument that apologia changes shape and form in order to respond to particular historical situations, might also allow a discussion of the way such voices can change dominant culture. In this case, Chuck D was able to influence popular culture in part because he had taken the position of what had largely been a nonpolitical forum and used it to make political statements. Hence, in breaking genre, Chuck D and Public Enemy’s discourse was given more focus than it might have if spoken elsewhere. Moreover, because of the focus given their claims, the clamor for “discipline” was stronger than it might have been had Griff made the claims in another forum. Hence, the calls for apologia indicate that to some degree the original claims made by Griff were to be taken seriously, not simply as entertainment. In effect, the calls for

apologia, while primarily reinforcing dominant ideology, also work to indicate a seriousness to the critique being offered by the offending party.

In 1944, Horkheimer and Adorno warned that the mass media cultural industry was all-encompassing of the human subject, "occupying men's sense from the time they leave the factory in the evening to the time they clock in again the next morning, with matters that bear the impress of the labor process"; it "mockingly satisfies the concept of a unified culture which the philosophers of personality contrasted with mass culture" (1972, p. 131). While the cultural industry is not nearly as omnipotent as Horkheimer and Adorno charged, and while such arguments have justifiably fallen into disfavor, this study forces us to acknowledge the efficiency of culture and the mass media in limiting avenues of resistance through limiting the grounds of interpretation. Returning to our original concerns, this study illustrates the routes by which various mechanisms work to reproduce dominant cultural beliefs and representations and limit the texts available for appropriation by various audiences. Hence, media and rhetorical critics cannot focus on liberatory readings by the audience at the expense of critiques of the efficiency of the mass media in shaping the messages which the audience reads.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>While Chuck D, the group's leader, generally was responsible for interviews with the press, he was reportedly busy when *Washington Times* reporter David Mills came to interview the band. In the course of a number of questions about the band's beliefs and political stances, attention turned to race relations. It was in this context that Professor Griff was attempting to articulate his views on the Jewish population as a whole. Incidentally, the *Washington Times* is a paper owned and operated by the Reverend Sun Myung Moon.

Because the two main subjects of this paper are referred to by their names as performers, Professor Griff and Chuck D, those are the names I will use throughout the paper. For the record, Professor Griff is Richard Griffin and Chuck D is Carlton Ridenhour.

<sup>2</sup>The Jewish Defense Organization is a different organization than the Jewish Defense League; it is often described in articles about this controversy as a "radical Jewish organization."

<sup>3</sup>Some observers of this controversy have suggested that outrage was expressed specifically because Public Enemy, generally critical of racism, here espoused their own brand of racism. While this may have added to the virulence of opposition that the band faced, I maintain that if such comments had been uttered by any popular figures, especially ones of "marginal ethnicity," regardless of the history of their politics, the reaction would have been fairly similar. Griff's claims go beyond a critique of the existence of institutionalized racism or of the racism of particular individuals, critiques that are generally accepted as kinks in the operation of free market economics or liberal democracy. Instead, rather than pointing to minor aberrations, Griff points to the elitism of a particular ethnic group that he sees as acting in almost conspiratorial fashion against another ethnic group.

I should also note that when I refer to liberalism, I am not referring to any particular theory of liberalism, but the commonly accepted ideas of how "American" liberalism works and the privileges and rights of those living in the United States.

<sup>4</sup>My perspective reflects that of Raymie McKerrow's "critical rhetoric," a practice which pulls together "disparate scraps of discourse which, when constructed as an argument, serve to illuminate otherwise hidden or taken for granted social practices" (1989, p. 101).

<sup>5</sup>A very brief history of the debate over the meaning of texts within cultural studies, from Hall's "encoding/decoding" to Screen theory to polysemy, can be found in Graeme Turner's introductory text (1990, pp. 87-130).

<sup>6</sup>In addition to the texts that I will briefly review here, one should also see recent issues of *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* that have centered on this issue. See the June 1990 issue "Reading Recent Revisionism" and the December 1991 issue "Media Interpretation."

<sup>7</sup>I would be remiss not to point to Bonnie Dow's (1990) discussion of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. While not operating with textual or cultural binarisms, Dow suggests that even if audiences do supply texts with meanings or values held in their own interest, the text can contain contradictions that maintain the dominant ideology. Dow attempts to provide a reading of the show as promulgating "patriarchal values" despite popular readings of it as a feminist text. While perhaps tenuous, there is a

line of agreement between Cloud and Dow's readings in that both are suggesting that despite how audiences may read the text, they ultimately support dominant readings.

<sup>8</sup>When I use the term "text" here and elsewhere in the paper, I am of course using it in a very broad sense, similar to McGee's definition of the text and the role of criticism and critics in the "postmodern condition": "Critical rhetoric does not begin with a finished text in need of interpretation; rather, texts are understood to be larger than the apparently finished discourse that presents itself as transparent. The apparently finished discourse is in fact a dense reconstruction of all the bits of other discourses from which it was made. It is fashioned from what we can call 'fragments' " (1990, p. 279). Hence, text refers to an overall message pulled together from fragments of discourse by members, critics or otherwise, of a given culture.

<sup>9</sup>I was initially hesitant to employ Therborn as this may lead some to quickly merge my thesis into a political economy argument based in traditional Marxism. A close inspection of Therborn's text, however, reveals quite a different story. In his *What Does the Ruling Class Do When it Rules?*, Goran Therborn, while using the more marxist terminology of the "state," posits a discursive and processual system that protects dominant meanings. Therborn's state is one which is "relatively autonomous" from ruling subjects; while it can make decisions which are against the interests of this group in the short-run (e.g., income distribution through welfare systems), its policies always benefit this group in the long run (e.g., by maintaining the overall economic, political, and ideological systems) (1980, p. 147). While a logical connection exists between ruling classes and the state, then, it is not necessary that either be contingent on the economic in the last instance; rather, both may be seen at any given point as results of an historical, discursive articulation (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, pp. 105–114). Therborn notes that when a ruling class rules, it maintains its hegemonic grasp on power through reproducing the economic, political, and ideological relations of its domination (1980, p. 161). In essence, Therborn leaves us with no reason to discuss the "state" but to look instead to the ways in which cultural discourses and definitions are reproduced and protected by the established order. That is, the state is not something which can be pointed to; it is only in the reproduction of the power of the current systems of economics and power that its function may be seen. There is no need to look for an entity which by intent protects particular groups and classes but instead to look at the function of mass media outlets in maintaining the "meanings," the "ideology," necessary for the current systems of economics and power to continue. The mass media, then, is one of the voices, albeit a very powerful and far reaching one, which works to reproduce the hegemonic voice of ruling interests through a reproduction of the economic, political, and ideological relations of domination.

In this view of mass media, we see the function of ideology and articulatory processes highlighted over those of the economic and the political. As Laclau and Mouffe note, hegemony is delineated as a political "type of relations, a form . . . of politics," not a "determinable location within a topography of the social" (1985, p. 139). Hegemony signifies a set of articulatory practices, of floating signifiers which define and create class positions, positions not constituted on the plane of essentialized classes but centered instead on one hegemonic articulation. Hegemony must be viewed as the set of dispersed articulatory practices which function to maintain a set of relations and subject positions which support a non-determinate class in a position of power. In brief, in this conception, the *cultural* or *ideological* is, while perhaps not determinate, most fully influential in the last instance.

<sup>10</sup>Another obvious route to a discussion of the disciplining of subjects, especially as it pertains to culture would be a reading of Michel Foucault's discussion of "discipline." See Michel Foucault (1977, pp. 293–308) and Mark Poster (1989, pp. 124–142).

<sup>11</sup>Methodologically, this study was conducted by surveying each article listed under the heading "Public Enemy" in both "Newsbank" and "Infotrac" from the band's inception until this particular controversy had run its course as a topic of interest in articles about the group.

<sup>12</sup>This same claim is often made by those in the "hip-hop" community. See, for example, Jerry Adler (1990, pp. 56–60).

<sup>13</sup>See also Reynolds (1987, p. 23).

<sup>14</sup>I do not mean to suggest that no one saw the band as challenging or that no "disciplinary" procedures were operating. Instead, I want to highlight that this was certainly not the primary representation of the band and its music.

<sup>15</sup>One should also note the uproar that occurred in late 1993 when Nation of Islam National Spokesman Khalid Abdul Muhammad made a speech that contained several comments that were taken to be anti-Semitic. The types of actions taken, and the position that Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan was placed into, parallel the Public Enemy case in multiple ways. In his address, Muhammad notes that "They're [Jews] the bloodsuckers of the black nation and the black community.



Professor Griff was right, when he spoke here . . . and when he spoke in the general vicinity of Jersey and New York, and when he spoke at Columbia Jew-niversity over in Jew York City."

<sup>16</sup>Professor Griff was later rehired with a different title and has since left the group to pursue a solo career.

<sup>17</sup>It is interesting to note that because Chuck D was forced by one community to appear as if he were not bowing under pressure, he was forced to pose the problem as if Professor Griff was indeed wrong rather than merely a scapegoat for white media. This tactic, however, plays well into the demand that he admit that equivalence rather than difference exists between African-Americans and Jews. If Chuck D could have presented himself as having been forced to fire Griff, the presentation may have been very different indeed.

<sup>18</sup>One should also read Mary Kahl's (1984) study of John Dean's apologia in his *Blind Ambition and Lost Honor*. Kahl similarly suggests that significant differences might exist between written and oral apologia due to the varying constraints that form places upon the apologia.

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