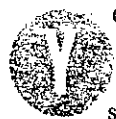


Bum Rush the Locker Room

By Evelyn McDonnell



YOU ALL NEED TO STAY OUT OF MY dressing room," an exasperated Yo-Yo (Yolanda Whitaker) says, shutting the door on Ice Cube DJ Sir Jinx. Backstage at the Chicago stop of the Holiday Rappfest tour, the guys from the Lench Mob—Ice Cube's posse—keep dropping in on Yo-Yo, a black 19-year-old woman with blond braids and yellow-green eyes that sparkle across a crowded room. Never mind that Jinx and Cube produced Yo-Yo's slamming debut album, *Make Way for the Motherlode*—Yo-Yo wants to hang with the ladies right now. "It's kind of hard to blend in with the Lench Mob," she explains. "I love to kick with them, and Ice Cube, that's my dude. But just hanging out with 'em, after a while it gets on your nerves."

Nikki D remembers the day she finally got through to Def Jam Records head Russell Simmons. With L.L. Cool J, Public Enemy and the Beastie Boys in its roster, Def Jam was rap's leading label. Nikki (née Nichele Strong) had moved to New York from West L.A. in hopes of joining the lineup. Her friends in the L.A. Posse had given Simmons Nikki's demo tape, and one day they found a message on their answering machine. "That bitch," Nikki recalls Simmons' voice saying. "The tape of the bitch you gave me, she's dope, I want her. Sign her up."

Nikki D was the first woman Simmons signed to Def Jam. "He's real shaky about female rappers," Nikki says. "I found that out later. He told me, 'That's the only reason I got you is I finally heard a voice that I want. You got the voice to whine. It's like you demand something.'"

Women rappers frequently find themselves in strange relations with men. Rap, after all, is traditionally a form by which young black males—the group Ice Cube calls an "endangered species"—have asserted their identity and carved an economic niche for themselves. After "Rappers' Delight" brought rap out of the urban underground, it took six years for a woman, Roxanne Shante, to get a rap hit. Perhaps it

was inevitable that such high concentrations of testosterone would lead to the locker-room lore of 2 Live Crew, or the bitch-dissing of Ice Cube. Even when male rappers try to be gender-sensitive, they end up sticking women in male-nurturing roles, like Public Enemy proselytizing, "It takes a woman to make a stronger man."

Public Enemy's black nationalism has spurred a consciousness-conscious stream of Afrocentric hip-hop acts, from the Jungle

Bros. to Boogie Down Productions. Women have expanded this in a rediscovery of their own need for gender identity and liberation. In 1990, woman rappers turned the turntables

on sexism. In 1991, they're taking the struggle to the streets. In "Gotta Up the Ante for the Panties," Nikki D raps: "Flash your drug money, watch me take it and run/I

don't mean pay me for my sexual pleasures/ But if you want to give it to me make me feel that it's better/Than any other stunt that I

Yo-Yo and Nikki D
turn the turntables
on sexist homies



Yolanda Whitaker, a.k.a. Yo-Yo

