7-1-2008

"Funk is its own reward" : an analysis of selected lyrics in popular funk music of the 1970s

Travis K. Lacy
Clark Atlanta University

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ABSTRACT

AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES

LACY, TRAVIS K. B.A. CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY DOMINGUEZ HILLS, 2000

“FUNK IS ITS OWN REWARD”: AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED LYRICS IN POPULAR FUNK MUSIC OF THE 1970s

Advisor: Professor Daniel O. Black

Thesis dated July 2008

This research examined popular funk music as the social and political voice of African Americans during the era of the seventies.

The objective of this research was to reveal the messages found in the lyrics as they commented on the climate of the times for African Americans of that era.

A content analysis method was used to study the lyrics of popular funk music. This method allowed the researcher to scrutinize the lyrics in the context of their creation. When theories on the black vernacular and its historical roles found in African-American literature and music respectively were used in tandem with content analysis, it brought to light the voice of popular funk music of the seventies.

This research will be useful in terms of using popular funk music as a tool to research the history of African Americans from the seventies to the present.

The research herein concludes that popular funk music lyrics espoused the sentiments of the African-American community as it utilized a culturally familiar vernacular and prose to express the evolving sociopolitical themes amid the changing conditions of the seventies era.
“FUNK IS ITS OWN REWARD”: AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED LYRICS IN POPULAR FUNK MUSIC OF THE 1970s

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY
TRAVIS K. LACY

DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
JULY 2008
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my lord and savior Jesus for giving me the strength and patience to complete this endeavor; without him this would not have been possible. I must acknowledge my wife Lerniece and daughter Asia Briana for their unconditional love, support, and fortitude needed to maintain our family as I resided in Atlanta and they in Los Angeles—they are to be highly commended. I would like to acknowledge my mother Sharon Ann Madison and father Isaac Lacy, Jr. whose spirits have been ever-present and guiding during my studies at Clark Atlanta University. For their friendship, I would like to acknowledge Ryan W. Bowers, Seipati J. K. Mogotsi, and Julian Dube. Also, I must acknowledge all of my fellow students in the African-American Studies department who have certainly been my family while in Atlanta. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my thesis committee for their guidance, patience and presence on my committee.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .......................................................... ii

LIST OF TABLES ................................................................... iii

DEFINITION OF TERMS ........................................................ iv

CHAPTER  

1. INTRODUCTION. ................................................................. 1  
   Theoretical Framework ......................................................... 8  
   Methodology .................................................................... 10  
   Research Questions .......................................................... 13  
   Chapter Organization ....................................................... 15

2. LITERATURE REVIEW ....................................................... 16

3. HISTORICAL CONTEXT ..................................................... 32  
   African-American Socio-Political Climate of the 1970s ............ 32  
   The Birth of Funk Music .................................................... 43  
   The Black Aesthetic in Funk Music ...................................... 60

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS .................................................... 70  
   Research Findings .............................................................. 70  
   Lyrical Analysis and Discussion ......................................... 74

5. CONCLUSION ............................................................... 103

APPENDIX ........................................................................ 106

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................. 129
LIST OF TABLES

1. LYRICAL THEMES 1970 TO 1974. ........................................ 13
2. LYRICAL THEMES 1975 TO 1979. ..................................... 14
DEFINITION OF TERMS

4/4 time signature – Also known as the “meter,” is a concept in music to signify the number of beats per measure and the note value. It is a common time signature in music.

British New Wave – A genre of music that originated in the United Kingdom in the late 1970s to the mid 1980s. Its sound was marked by heavy usage of the synthesizer. It is sometimes referred to as the second “British invasion” of music artists following the first “British invasion” of musical artists, which took place in the mid 1960s.

Crossover Funk Songs – Songs that move from the exclusively African-American music charts or Rhythm and Blues charts to the white or mainstream music charts also known as Pop charts.

Cultural Memory – Refers to “nonfactual and nonreferential motivations, actions, and beliefs that members of a culture seem, without direct knowledge or deliberate training to ‘know’— that feel unequivocally ‘true’ and ‘right’ when encountered, experienced, and executed.”¹

Disco – A genre of popular dance music that gained prominence in the late 1970’s that utilized a straight 4/4 rhythm pattern and strong repetitive bass and synthesizer rhythms. Also the genre utilized string orchestration, and reverberated vocals.

Discothèque – A dance hall where disco music was exclusively played.

Groove – A continuous rhythm or beat most often established by the interaction of the bass and the drums. It is not a repetitious pattern although at times it can be. It allows the musicians to freely experiment and create new melodies and new rhythms. It is also an element of funk music that forces the body to move and dance.

Lick or Licks – Refers to the short musical phrasing in funk music and other forms of African-American music that adds texture to the overall sound of a particular song.

Lyrical Imagery – Lyrical content in funk music that compels the listener to imagine the vividly described scenarios and stories within the song.

Sampling – Is a method of electronically recording portions of existing music to serve as a platform for the Rap artists to engage in a vocal performance.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to analyze the lyrics of selected popular funk music of the 1970s in order to establish how these songs served as the cultural, social, and political voice of African Americans during that era. This study is significant because it unearthed how African Americans in the grips of marginalization by the white mainstream society adopted funk music as the medium of their protest and social expression, which in turn, allowed this research to gain a better historical understanding of the relationship between music and the African-American community. This study is also significant because it serves as a tool to further examine African-American life, history, society, and culture of the seventies.

The topic of funk music is immensely important to the African-American Studies discipline because music has always been an integral part of the history of African Americans since the time of capture in Africa to contemporary times in America. If historians neglect to study any genre of the music of African Americans, a significant portion of their history will be sorely missed. Musicologist Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr. exposes the parameters now seen in African-American music in academia, “Music scholars now argue quite profitably that [African-American] music is a dynamic social text, a meaningful cultural practice, a cultural transition, and a politically charged,
gendered, signifying discourse." Guthrie also agrees that music has illuminated the African-American condition and experience throughout the history of this nation.

Historically, music has played a large role in the African-American aesthetic and has expressed the sentiments and intentions within that community. The Jazz music of the 1940s and 1950s and Soul music of the 1960s displayed that distinctive aesthetic, which can only be attributed to the African-American population. It was unique in its sound, style, and connection to its audience. Funk music of the 1970s also expressed a singular African-American aesthetic that was unique to that era, and it expressed the social and political conditions of the people.

The social conditions and events that led to the birth and the distinctive aesthetic of the funk music genre stemmed from the turbulent era of the 1960s. Also known as the Civil Rights era, the sixties were wrought with social protest, resistance, sit-ins and marches designed to bring attention to the unfair conditions of African Americans. This era was the impetus for bringing about a social change that would continue well into the next decade. This era was particularly noted for its strong and “conciliatory rhetoric” from black leadership. Leaders like Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. prophetically guided the African-American community out of social degradation toward a life of elevated self-esteem and purpose. As leaders, they played pivotal roles in the moral victories for African Americans and were a strong and shining collective voice for the African-American communities of the sixties. Also of great importance in the era

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was the rise of organizations for social change that championed the grassroots movement of Black Nationalism. Groups such as the Black Panthers and others took a radical stance in the fight for Civil Rights that resonated with the youth couture of the sixties.

Toward the end of the sixties, the dynamic voices of Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. were silenced and the American government systematically began to eradicate the groups for social change. In their place were revolutionaries such as H. Rap Brown, Eldridge Cleaver, and Angela Davis whose bodies and voices were kept stifled as they were paraded back and forth to prison. As a result, these revolutionaries were not easily accessible to a mass audience in the same manor as Malcolm X and Dr. King. The void left by the silenced dynamic leadership and then revolutionaries was filled for a brief moment by individuals who sacrificed themselves while in the public eye for the greater good of the African-American community. For example, in 1968, Olympic sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos displayed on the medal stand what is historically the most recognizable image of resistance for African Americans in the U.S. as they raised their black-gloved fists in the air to demonstrate to the world black pride and protest while the American National Anthem was played. They were removed from the Olympic team, stripped of their medals, and immediately sent home. Meanwhile, heavy weight boxer Muhammad Ali publicly resisted the U.S. government by refusing to go to war in Vietnam. He mocked the U.S. government with his famous anti-war line “No Viet Cong ever called me a Nigger.” His actions were seen on a global scale and once again brought attention to the social conditions for African Americans in the U.S. who were not

3 Vincent, 53.
truly free, but were mandated to fight for someone else’s freedom. Ali was consequently stripped of his boxing license for his disobedience.

Amid the absence of strong black leadership, African-American musicians began to fill the void that was once occupied by various leaders. Their music communicated the social and political conditions to a listening black community on a large scale, as did the voices of Malcolm X and Dr. King. Thus, music became the collective voice of the African-American community. Stressing the power of black music as the collective voice of the community, scholar and activist Angela Davis states, “black people were able to create with their music an aesthetic community of resistance, which in turn, encouraged and nurtured a political community of active struggle for freedom.”

Continuing the struggle for freedom was James Brown, the father of the funk music genre, who was the first and lyrically strongest musician to fill the void left by the absent leadership by solidifying the aesthetic community of resistance. Rooted in black pride, Brown called for the black community to empower themselves only months after Dr. King’s assassination in his song, “Say It Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud.” Observe his lyrics that spoke as the collective voice of the black community of the era:

Some people say we’ve got a lot of malice
Some say it’s a lot of nerve
But I say we won’t quit moving
until we get what we deserve
We have been bucked and we have been scorned
We have been treated bad
talked about as sure as you born
But just as it takes two eyes to make a pair, ha
Brother we can’t quit until we get our share

Say it loud

---

I’m black and I’m proud

Without a doubt, funk music of this era was imbued with the social realities of the time. Because of the freedom of expression in the music, it was able to address and motivate change and act upon the social conditions that plagued the black community, as well as gain a massive audience that could identify with its prose and rhythms. Prior popular African-American music of the sixties, such as Jazz and Rhythm and Blues, did not dare achieve the same role as funk music for fear of losing its core constituency and receiving a negative critique from the white mainstream community that heavily patronized those genres.

By the 1970s, the black community began to experience an economic change that greatly affected their lives. This change hinged on the movement from an industrial-based economy to a postindustrial, information/service-based economy. The change created a shift in labor that spawned the growth of the African-American middle class and was detrimental to the traditional black working class of the day. The postindustrial based economy sparked the black middle class flight from the urban centers to white suburban areas, which cultural critic Mark Anthony Neal suggests were “much more insidious than segregated black spaces prior to the Civil Rights movement.” The black poor who were not able to escape the urban centers continued to experience growing...
poverty that included areas of illicit economy of drugs, petty thievery, and prostitution.⁸

The economic conditions of the seventies had a long-term impact on the African-American community and on popular funk music of the era as well. Groups such as the Ohio players, Earth Wind And Fire, and James Brown regularly exposed, through their lyrics, the economic conditions and themes of poor inner-city life in the black communities.

Overall, the seventies witnessed and embraced the most prolific and popular era in funk music history. Unfortunately, an academic inquiry into this genre has been sparse. In comparison, Negro Spirituals, Blues, Gospel, Jazz, Rhythm and Blues, and more recently Hip Hop have received more scholarly attention than funk music. Consequently, funk music's origin, history, style, sound, lyrical content, and composition are not widely known and thus have caused it to be marginalized by academia as a result of the lack of familiarity with the genre. Scholars continue to avoid the genre because undoubtedly, it is an era of music that has never been seen as academically viable.

Further, to understand the complexities and nuances of funk music, one must invest a considerable amount of time and effort listening and transcribing a popular music form—an activity many scholars surely deem important. Funk music historian Rickey Vincent comments further on the need to research the topic of funk music:

_As a study of music, as a study of society, and as simply a study of the way black folks be, an understanding of The Funk can help explain the continuity of the black folk experience in America since the 1960s. With the many changes within black America since that mid-1960s, it can be helpful to find a reference point from which to interpret the result we are witness to today. The Funk brings it all together._⁹

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⁸ Neal, 102.

⁹ Vincent, 12.
However, during the 1970s, white mainstream music outlets such as radio and print media largely ignored funk music. White mainstream radio, having recently established formatted programming to feature and promote specific genres of music, did not prominently feature funk music because it did not fit into the familiar established genres of the time. Vincent suggests the possibility that those not paying close attention to funk music may have missed it altogether because it was absent from the growing white mainstream F.M. radio stations. As a result, early funk music was aired on loosely formatted urban A.M. radio stations where deals were brokered by disc jockeys and record companies for airtime. Ultimately, because of the pervasive power by mainstream media to exploit and showcase topics and genres of music in their perspective eras and the lack of white mainstream funk music enthusiasts, the fervor necessary to maintain an interest in funk music was deficient, as the music was not regularly heard in public spaces. Vincent also discusses the attitude of the mainstream print media and its neglect of funk music in the early seventies. In his discussion with the writer John Morthland, he clearly uncovers the marginalization experienced by funk music in the early seventies:

By the 1970s many established authors abandoned [funk music] as a topic of discussion. As former Rolling Stone writer John Morthland told me in 1994, ‘Most music writers of my generation are white, like I am and sort of gave up on [black] music after soul music, and they really didn’t follow it into the early seventies and the funk era. A lot of them just kind of lost interest when the soul music era ended.’

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10 Vincent, 24.


12 Vincent, 29.
Therefore, this examination of selected popular funk music lyrics is critical in order to resurrect a “lost” genre and to discover the cultural, social, and political worth of both the music and the people it represents.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research has employed a theoretical framework used by music scholars Dr. Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., Edna M Edet, and Dr. Bernice Johnson-Reagon. In Floyd’s book, *The Power Of Black Music*, he asserts that African and African-American music was socially passed down utilizing an African oral tradition thus effectively preserving “cultural memory.” The funk music genre similarly utilized the oral tradition to preserve the history, culture, and even the socio-political memory of the seventies. The second theory that was used to guide the lyrical analysis was Edet’s theory of “protest music.” Subscribing to the notion of songs reflecting the struggles of African Americans, Edet discusses:

> All men protest. It is part of their humanity. Deprived of the right to protest with impunity, the American black man sublimated his anger in song and story. Every confrontation with adversity was accompanied by songs reflecting and depicting his struggle. Words of protest have infiltrated and permeated his music just as the inimical conditions in which he has been compelled to live have constricted his life and threatened his existence. Slavery, Jim Crow, lynching, chain gangs, poverty—all of these have affected the black man in America. All of these and more have been themes in his protest.

Scholar, singer and musician Dr. Bernice Johnson-Reagon advanced Edet’s theory of “protest music” and expanded it to include “freedom songs.” Her theory in

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most of her writings and articles argued that African Americans use songs, not only to communicate to the masses, but also to protest undesirable conditions in society. Her theory was applied and proved to be conducive in uncovering funk music lyrics as an agent of political and social change. Dr. Johnson-Reagon book, *If You Don’t Go, Don’t Hinder Me*, discusses themes and analyzes lyrics that dealt with the undesirable conditions for African Americans in the South during the first part of the twentieth century and how these freedom songs spiritually supported them on their journey to northern cities. As a researcher, she has extensively studied Gospel music to reveal the social and political voice of African Americans in every era the music has existed. Examples of freedom songs and protest songs include, “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around,” “Keep Your Eyes On The Prize,” “We Shall Not Be Moved,” “This Little Light Of Mine,” and “We Shall Overcome.” Johnson-Reagon’s literary works have shown that the collective consciousness of African-American musical protest efforts have been effective in changing their overall social and political condition.

An additional theory that guided the lyrical analysis was Harvard University scholar Dr. Henry Louis Gates’ theory regarding prose in African-American literature, explained in his book, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory Of African-American Literary Criticism*. Gates’ theory examined the language used in African-American literature and argued that the African-American Vernacular English (A.A.V.E.) is a language that is understood best by those who spoke it and wrote it. Gates states, “Black writers to a remarkable extent have created texts that express the broad ‘concord of sensibilities’
In the seventies, A.A.V.E. had its own style, complete with rhythm, rhyme, inflection, and signifying. Gates developed his theory by drawing attention to the language used in the classic works of African-American authors Zora Neal Hurston, Ralph Ellison, and Ishmael Reed. He contends that these texts spoke to one another and shared a sense of a common experience or a common blackness. Funk music used A.A.V.E. to communicate to the masses that were familiar with the language used in the songs; therefore, Gates’ theory was helpful in the analysis of language, tropes, and signifying used in funk lyrics of the seventies.

Additionally, to facilitate the application of Gates’ theory from prose to song lyrics, this study followed the precedent set by Dr. Floyd, Jr. He expanded Gates’ theory beyond the language in literature to include African and African-American music and the language found therein. The theories of Dr. Bernice Johnson-Reagon, Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Dr. Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. were instrumental in performing an analysis of funk music lyrics and to the understanding of the results of the research.

**METHODOLOGY**

The delimitations for this research and the analysis of the data were restricted to the most popular funk single song recordings or ‘singles’ of the 1970s. These popular singles were heavily aired on urban and A.M. radio, which resulted in a high amount of singles sold in the urban community. Popular singles were a great indicator of what the African-American audience was listening to and consuming in the era of the seventies.

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16 Ibid.
In order to create a robust corpus of songs for analysis, a large collection of funk songs that reached the top of *Billboard*’s Rhythm and Blues charts was selected.

*Billboard*’s music chart was the most widely known and respected entity maintaining music charts in the U.S. during the era of the seventies. *Billboard*’s Rhythm and Blues chart exclusively posted African-American top selling Rhythm and Blues singles and albums. They have also maintained charts for several other music genres for decades. However, *Billboard* did not create a separate chart for funk music in the seventies, which is the reason funk music singles appear on the same chart as Rhythm and Blues singles. Through *Billboard*’s Rhythm and Blues chart, urban audiences followed the rise and decline of African-American artists, groups, albums, and singles of the era.

For this research, a popular funk music criterion was created and established to identify and extract singles from *Billboard*’s Rhythm and Blues chart. This criterion defined funk music’s qualities and parameters to indicate its style and format. Indicators of the genre’s criteria exclusively included:

- Songs that were performed by individuals and groups that claimed to be funk bands and artists.
- Songs that combined the vocal styles utilized in Gospel, Blues, Jazz, and Rhythm & Blues.
- Songs that demonstrated the following musical qualities and elements found in funk music.
  - Pronounced and integrated drum and bass rhythms.
  - Prominent bass presence.
o Horn sections that utilized obvious rhythm lines instead of melody.

o Guitars that maintained polyrhythm, tempo, as well as showcased solo performances.

o Songs that employed synthesizers in place of and along side traditional musical instruments.

- Songs that exclusively utilized the concept of the One set forth by James Brown.\(^{17}\)

- Songs with a high occurrence of the black aesthetic.
  
  o Call and Response
  
  o Black vernacular
  
  o Narrative Storytelling
  
  o Metaphors

All songs in this research reached the number one, two, or three positions on Billboard's Rhythm and Blues charts from 1970 to 1979. Three songs from each year in this study, totaling thirty songs, were collected as data. From these songs, fifteen songs that displayed significant amounts of the most common lyrical themes and black aesthetic qualities found in funk music were ultimately chosen for complete analysis in this research.

Also, to help illustrate the most common themes addressed in popular funk music lyrics, a table was produced that notes the themes found in the analysis of selected songs. The tables have been placed on the following pages for clarity.

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\(^{17}\) The concept of the ONE is explained in detail in chapter 3.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. In what ways did the lyrics of popular funk music serve as the social and political voice of African Americans during the 1970s?

2. What were the themes or issues most often addressed in the lyrics of popular funk music in the 1970s?

### TABLE 1. LYRICAL THEMES 1970 TO 1974

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Songs</th>
<th>Political Themes</th>
<th>Social Themes</th>
<th>Cultural Themes</th>
<th>Active Protest</th>
<th>Male and Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>&quot;Super Bad&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Get Up&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>&quot;Family Affair&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>&quot;Talking Loud&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Good Foot&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>&quot;Funky Worm&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Jungle Boogie&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>&quot;Fire&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Songs</td>
<td>Political Themes</td>
<td>Social Themes</td>
<td>Cultural Themes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>“Fight The Power”</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Love Rollercoaster”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>“Getaway”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>“Ffun”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>“Flashlight”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“One Nation Under A Groove”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>“Move You Boogie Body”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ORGANIZATION

Chapter 1: Introduction. This chapter introduces the main topic of research and the purpose and importance of the study. This chapter also discusses the theoretical framework, Methodology, and research questions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review. This chapter explores and examines all known, available and accessible literatures on the subject of funk music. This chapter examines the knowledge base of the subject in an effort to expose needed areas for further research.

Chapter 3: Historical Context. This chapter contains three sub-topics: African-American Socio-Political Climate of the 1970s, The Birth of Funk Music, and The Black Aesthetic In Funk Music. This chapter details the seventies era and the culture connection between the genre and the African-American community. The chapter provides a knowledge base for a better understanding of the lyrical analysis.

Chapter 4: Findings, Lyrical Analysis and Discussion. This chapter discusses the findings of the research and provides the lyrical analysis and discussion of selected songs.

Conclusion. The conclusion sums up the research in terms of its findings and contributions to the field of African-American Studies, as well as suggest further study of the genre.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Academics and cultural critics seem to have overlooked funk music as a viable area of research. The music’s rich history, musicians, the connection with its audience, and the era in which it was most popular are largely unexplored. Funk music has neither received the academic attention of Gospel, Blues, Jazz, Rhythm and Blues, and Hip Hop nor has it been explained via media sources to reveal its social and political connection to the African-American culture and its people. Furthermore, its lyrics have neither been deconstructed nor have they undergone a scholarly analysis to reveal their social, political, and cultural content. This thesis seeks to fill this void.

There are, however, some available sources that contain marginal to crucial analysis of funk music. These sources were reviewed to expose the gap in the body of knowledge of 1970s funk music. To begin, what may seem to be an obscure deposit in the limited body of knowledge of funk music literature, yet contributes to the genre, are music instruction books that contain the musical teaching of funk music. Musical instruction books were excellent sources and guides for the research of funk music. They were designed for the purpose of learning the rudiments of funk music, and they also explained scales, chord structures, and chord progressions that were typical of funk music in the 1970s. Indeed they provided crucial knowledge whereby this researcher was able to view and grasp musical concepts of the genre. its voice of that era.
Music instruction books such as *Mel Bay's Fundamentals of Funk Guitar* and *Mel Bay's Getting Into... Funk Guitar* written by the late Los Angeles guitarist Ronald Muldrow, in 2004, were gleaming examples of practical and conceptual guides through the various idioms that were commonly practiced in funk guitar.\(^1\) Muldrow was well versed in Jazz guitar and had a sound and style reminiscent of the legendary Jazz guitarist Wes Montgomery. Muldrow toured with Maceo Parker who was, at one time, the saxophonist in James Brown's band. Muldrow has imparted his knowledge of funk music in his music instruction books. In doing so, he has introduced the musical philosophy that is necessary to re-create on guitar the unique funk music sound of the seventies.

Other books written by Muldrow include *Famous Funk Guitar Lines* and *Famous Funk Bass Lines,* which were both published in 2001. These music books reveal the rhythms that were rarely explored in funk music. Proving to be extremely vital to the genre, *Famous Funk Bass Lines* examined the rhythms of the bass guitar of popular funk, which was the heart and soul of funk music in the 1970s. A strong bass line is the driving force in a funk song. Tony Oppenheim is another musician and writer to have examined the all-important bass rhythms. His 1981 book, "Slap It": *Funk Studies for the Electric Bass,* was the first book to be published that examined the technique of "slap" that involves the rapid thump of the thumb against a single string of the bass. The technique allowed the bass to not only keep its low timbre sound, but to also be percussive in nature. Although Muldrow and Oppenheim's contributions to the instruction of funk music are quite adequate, they failed to enter into the realm of fine scholarly writing and

\(^1\) Ronald Muldrow, *Mel Bay's Getting into... Funk Guitar* (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications, 2004), 1.
research for the genre. Their books are suited for those whom desire to casually learn the genre through musical performance. Other books examined that do not contain the same level and quality of bass instruction are *Funk Bass* by Jon Liebman and ‘70s *Funk and Disco Bass: 101 Grovin’ Bass Patterns* by the phenomenal bassist Josquin des Pres.

Author and musician Ross Bolton, a music teacher at the Musicians Institute (M.I.) in Hollywood, California who specializes on the guitar, offers a scholarly approach to the teaching and instruction of funk music. Bolton teaches the popular “standing room only” funk music classes at M.I. He has performed live and recorded with members of the bands Tower Of Power and Earth Wind And Fire. Bolton shares his insight and knowledge of funk music in the introduction chapter of his music instruction book *Funk Guitar: The Essential Guide*. He states, “The traditions of funk guitar playing are all about one thing: groove. Groove is the holy grail of being ‘in the pocket,’ which boils down to finding a great part and locking in with the rhythm section. When it all comes together, magic happens.” Bolton clearly understands and teaches the traditions of funk music. The elements needed to perform the genre are found in his music instruction book.

Yet Bolton’s colleague Gail Johnson brings an even more scholarly method to her teaching and instruction of funk music at M.I. Johnson, who holds a B.A. degree from Berklee College of Music in Boston, has toured with various music artists such as Morris Day, vocalists Vanessa Williams, Phil Perry, Howard Hewitt, Vesta, Pamela Williams and guitarist Norman Brown. She once served as music director for Norman Brown’s

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band. Johnson conveyed her-more-than ample knowledge of funk music in the classroom and in her music instruction book entitled *Funk Keyboards: The Complete Method*. This publication contains clear and concise examples of funk music’s chord structures, rhythm patterns, and “licks.” Her music instruction book was designed for the individual who desires to learn the intricate details of funk music on the keyboards. Her book offers a great academic assessment of a musical genre lacking a scholarly presence.

The music instruction books written by Muldrow, Oppenheim, Bolton, and Johnson contribute to the body of knowledge relating to funk music. The fact that these authors are all musicians and have exceptional skills in the performance of funk music makes their music instruction books all the more important to the study and research in the genre. Although the authors’ intentions were to teach the individual student the musical structures and techniques used to perform funk music, the authors have unknowingly contributed to the overall knowledge of funk music. Nevertheless, neither of the authors has examined in full detail funk music’s origins, evolution, artists, nor have they discussed or conducted a lyrical analysis of the genre.

Another solid music instruction book that bears mentioning is *The Funk Masters: The Great James Brown Rhythm Sections* by Allen “Dr. Licks” Slutsky and Chuck Silverman, which contain the musical notation of Brown’s famous rhythms section from the 1960s through the 1970s. The book comes with an instruction Compact Disc (CD) to help guide the individual or group in their effort to comprehend and learn the basics of funk music. The book is brilliant in its musical examination of James Brown’s rhythm section to grasp an understanding of funk music, as they were the progenitors of the funk music genre.
Additionally, documentary film maker Yvonne Smith released her well-received film *Parliament Funkadelic: One Nation Under a Groove* in 2005, which chronicles the rise of the famous 1970s funk bands Parliament and Funkadelic as well as George Clinton who headed both bands at the same time. The film contains interviews of the original band members and their personal anecdotal stories about the development of funk music and the origins and history of their band. Smith also interviews contemporary musicians who revered and were inspired by George Clinton and his bands of the seventies. Although the film focused on Clinton and his bands, important elements that make up the funk music genre were perfectly expressed by musicians in their own words, which is invaluable to the genre. Ultimately, the film was insightful to the genre of funk music, but still lacked an intense examination into the social and political voice, and lyrical content of funk music in the seventies.

Meanwhile, scholarly journal articles for this research did not offer much in the way of a full presentation of the funk music genre of the 1970s. However, they tend to explore singular segments of African-American music, which may include funk music and its attributes. Alexander Stewart’s article “‘Funky Drummer’: New Orleans, James Brown and the Rhythmic Transformation of American Popular Music” in *Popular Music*, an international multi-disciplinary journal covering all facets of music published by Cambridge Press, in part, delves into the origins of the “Funky Drummer” rhythm pattern made popular by James Brown in the 1960s. Stewart writes an excellent essay describing the New Orleans drumming patterns that contain similar rhythms and sounds of the music of the Caribbean. Early musicians of New Orleans were able explore and establish new percussive rhythms that permeated and influenced the sound of African-American music.
since the turn of the twentieth century. One can chronologically follow these changing trends in music from New Orleans to Kansas City, and on to Chicago and New York as African Americans migrated from the southern plantations to the industrial cities in the north. Stewart suggests that the New Orleans drumming pattern had a direct affect on the sound of funk music in the sixties and seventies that was, indeed, transformed through the genius of James Brown. Brown expanded and modified the New Orleans drumming patterns to fit his unique style of music. Stewart’s essay indicates that the most significant modification to New Orleans drumming patterns made by Brown was the emphasis on the first beat of the measure also known as the “One,” which solely identified the genre of funk music.

Another author who uses James Brown to discuss funk music is David Brackett in his article “James Brown’s ‘Superbad’ and the Double-Voiced Utterance,” also found in the scholarly journal Popular Music. His article heavily discusses the language used in early African-American music. He examines the origins of the black vernacular and its purpose in the African-American community. Brackett conducted a great etymological study in African-American culture as he drew from the findings in Dr. Henry Louis Gates’ book The Signifying Monkey and the black vernacular characteristics. As the article concludes, Brackett uses Brown’s song “Superbad” as an example of the black vernacular commonly found in funk music. He attempts to analyze the lyrics of the song to reveal the “double-voice” and meaning of words, yells, shouts, and screams that freely flow out of the mouth of James Brown. His analysis would have been better served to have also included some semblance of the era or context in which Brown is uttering these words.
Overall, both scholarly journal articles give a great account of the presence of James Brown and his contributions to the funk music idiom. On the other hand, both articles fail to deliver any new revelations that would strengthen the body of knowledge especially in terms of the music’s social and political context within the African-American community.

Moreover, some literatures have placed funk in the background of individual biographies. A list of some biographies that have done so are James Brown’s *James Brown: Godfather of Soul* and *I Feel Good: A Memoir of a Life of Soul*, trombonist and James Brown’s former music director Fred Wesley’s *Hit Me Fred: Recollections Of A Sideman*, Sly and The Family Stone’s *For The Record 4: Sly & The Family Stone* and *Sly & The Family Stone’s There’s A Riot Going On*, George Clinton’s *For The Record 5: George Clinton & P-Funkadelic*, Rick James’s *Confessions Of A Super Freak*, and Chaka Khan’s *Chaka!: Through The Fire*. These biographies are set amid the era of funk music’s popularity and, rightly so, discuss the personal events that help shape the selected individuals multi-faceted life. Understandably, these biographies never venture into a deep discussion of funk music.

Also, Professors Kip Lornell and Charles C. Stephenson, Jr. have briefly examined the funk music genre of the 1970s. In their book entitled *The Beat: Go Go’s Fusion of Funk and Hip Hop*, they discuss the combining of funk music and early Hip Hop to create the popular Go-Go music genre in Washington D.C. It is a scholarly written book on an African-American music genre that, like funk, music needs to be discussed more in academia for its role in the African-American community especially in the D.C. area.
Next, musicologist Dave Thompson's book *Funk* is a nicely assembled reference literature for the genre. In it, he briefly details the biographies and histories of funk musicians and groups and personally lists and rates over 1,500 recordings of the funk music era. His collections of biographies are decidedly brief and concise. Interestingly, funk songs that appeared on *Billboard*’s Rhythm and Blues chart and crossover funk songs that appeared on *Billboard*’s mainstream pop chart are listed in his book. It is the only reference book of its kind intended to address funk music. Other literature discussed funk music in passing and notes that the genre is part of a grand list of African-American music. The writings of Dr. Mark Anthony Neal, Greg Tate, Stanley Crouch, and Nelson George briefly note the existence of funk music in their works.

Furthermore, in terms of definitive literary books on the subject of funk music, Scandinavian musicologist Anne Danielsen, who is a music researcher at the University of Oslo in Norway, has provided a decent inquiry into the genre. She has spent time as a singer in a European funk band and has also researched funk music as a student at the University of California in Los Angeles. She has explored in great scholarly detail the rhythms and grooves of the “Godfather Of Funk” James Brown and the funk band Parliament in her book *Presence and Pleasure: The Funk Grooves of James Brown and Parliament*. James Brown and the band Parliament were the main progenitors of the funk music genre during the seventies, and they evolved and solidified the elements that made up the musical structure and sound of funk music. They have also clearly set the stage for the identity and movement of funk music in the era. From Brown’s single-handed creation of this new musical genre to Parliament’s out-of-this-world sound and philosophy, they both characterized and defined funk music of the 1970s. Danielsen’s
book focuses on the elements of the grooves in funk music and how they were manifested through the artistry of James Brown and Parliament. She begins her book by first exploring how funk music was "experienced and understood" by a "mostly white, pop- and rock-confident Western fans." Her perspective on funk music and its grooves as a white European is a first of its kind literary work; she explains that her interest in funk music began with the phenomena of the crossover of African-American dance music in Europe. She immediately descends into the concept of rhythms in the funk music idiom through the sensibilities of James Brown and Parliament. She examines how the evolution of rhythms begets funk grooves.

Danielsen’s musical background allows her to use sophisticated language and terminology that may be foreign to the musically challenged reader who may be interested in learning or understanding the details of funk music. Terms such as “two bar unit,” “twelve bar blues pattern,” “modal harmony,” “dorian mode,” and “four bar groups” as well as many others are strewn throughout her book. However, these terms are absolutely necessary to explain in full musical terms the rhythms and grooves of funk music. An intellectual audience who may be well steeped in musical terminology will appreciate her literary prose. Danielsen’s decision to use such terminology is brilliant because it helps to legitimize the genre to the musically astute researcher and reader. Through her literature, funk music is now in route to the same arena of study as other highly researched musical genres, which are discussed in familiar musical terms.

Danielsen further examines in Presence and Pleasure counter rhythms, polyrhythm, and the concept and importance of the One, which is a musical phenomenon.

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found in funk music that signifies the beginning, ending, and groove pattern in a song. James Brown describes it as the emphasis on the “downbeat at the beginning of every bar” or musical measure.\(^5\) Danielsen suggests about the One that once it is heard it is “demonstrative” and “impossible to rhythmically deviate from.”\(^6\) Throughout Presence and Pleasure, Danielsen expresses the physical presence and her emotional pleasure with funk music as she has experienced it. In fact, she describes her experience with funk music as a state of being.\(^7\) Although Danielsen has analyzed the funk rhythms of Brown and Parliament and divulged her personal attraction to the genre in a scholarly manor, as a white European of Scandinavian ancestry, she admittedly was truly unable to experience the African-American aesthetic and culture connection between the artist and audience. She lacked the cultural intimacy and familiarity necessary to have an authentic experience of funk music.

Essentially, to understand funk music, one must be familiar with the culture that surrounds the music. It is entirely possible for one to learn how to perform the rhythms and techniques of funk music as well as explain its composition in musical terms. However, funk music needs to be internalized to gain a full understanding of its dynamic elements. It is without question impossible for one to internalize a genre of music without sharing the similar experiences of the people who created it; this is especially true for funk music. Writer and funk music historian Rickey Vincent is an African American who has had a life long experience with funk music. He was reared in and is

\(^{5}\) Danielsen, 121.

\(^{6}\) Ibid., 139.

\(^{7}\) Ibid., iv.
familiar with the culture that surrounds funk music, and he has undoubtedly internalized it. His book, *Funk: The Music, The People, and the Rhythm of THE ONE*, offers a clear look at the culture in which funk music dwelled and prospered. In casual prose, Vincent places funk music amid the changing times that characterized the era of the 1970s. Funk existed amid a time when African Americans collectively ventured out of their previous constraints and musically expressed their social, political, and economic conditions on their own terms. For example, the band Funkadelic embodied this new way of expression in their 1978 song “One Nation Under A Groove.” The group lyrically described the obstacles that were conquered in the 1960s and offered a call to take advantage of the new social and political opportunities of the 1970s for African Americans. The group’s lyrics boldly asserted the prevailing new ideology of the time:

Here’s a chance to dance our way  
out of our constrictions  
Gonna be freakin’!  
Up and down  
Hang up alley way  
With the groove our  
Only guide  
We shall all be moved

Ready or not here we come  
Gettin’ down on the one which  
We believe in  
One nation under a groove

Vincent’s book also discusses the culture and people that were involved in the creation and evolution of funk music during the seventies, eighties, and nineties in the U.S. His book examined the musical genre amid the noteworthy events of the 1960s.

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through the 1990s such as the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Vietnam War, changing social conditions, President Richard Nixon, poverty, Reaganeomics, and the rise of Hip Hop. Most importantly, his book fantastically separates funk music into “Funk Dynasties,” which stem from the 1960s to the mid 1990s. His “Funk Dynasties” clearly shows the origins of the genre. It also shows the influence each artist and band has had on the following dynasty. In some instances, artists like James Brown span several dynasties. Vincent identifies the first dynasty as the “Predynastic.”9 This period, which took place in the early 1960s, consisted of, but was not limited, to Gospel artists James Cleveland and Mahalia Jackson, Rhythm and Blues artists James Brown and Booker T & the MG’s, Blues/Rock artists Muddy Waters and Little Richard, and Jazz artists Miles Davis and Sun Ra.10 The artists of the “Predynastic” period set the musical groundwork and foundation for funk music in the decades to come.

Next, Vincent identifies the “First Funk Dynasty,” which materialized in the late 1960s, and recognizes this dynasty as the era of “unification,” which alludes to the unification of African-American musical genres.11 This “unification” was the coming together of established African-American musical genres and prominent Rhythm and Blues and Soul artists to create the new sound of funk music. Artists highlighted in the “First Funk Dynasty” were James Brown, who by this time established the funk idiom. Others included the artists of Stax, pioneering guitarist Jimi Hendrix, Sly and The Family Stone, Isley Brothers, Miles Davis, and Herbie Hancock. Vincent goes on to identify the

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10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.
“Second Funk Dynasty” of the early to mid-1970s; he called it the era of “The Shinning Star.” The “Second Funk Dynasty” was characterized by the newfound power of funk music’s ability to lead African Americans into a new consciousness in the changing times of the 1970s, thus the name “Shinning Star.” Musical luminaries of this era included artists such as Stevie Wonder, Curtis Mayfield, and Marvin Gaye. Bands of this era included Earth Wind And Fire, War, Rufus, Kool & The Gang, and the Ohio Players. The Jazz artists of the “Second Funk Dynasty” were led by Miles Davis and Herbie Hancock who both were in the midst of exploring the possibilities of funk music and rock music combined.

The “Third Funk Dynasty” of the late 1970s was known for the absolute musical domination of the bands Funkadelic and Parliament. Together, these bands were known as P-Funk. In a homage, Vincent aptly named the “Third Funk Dynasty” the “P-Funk Era.” The P-Funk era sound headed by George Clinton ranged from hard rock to futuristic funk. With its lyrics filled with double entendre and hyperbole, they captured the minds of the urban youth with imaginative story lines that made up the bulk of their songs. P-Funk set the new standard in funk music in the seventies era.

Subsequently, Vincent explored the “Fourth Funk Dynasty” of the 1980s or the “Naked Funk Era,” as he also called it. This era was identified by the 1980s highly sexualized climate, and on cue, funk music artists responded with bold lyrics to address the sign of the times. Artists that Vincent named in this era are Rick James, Prince, Zapp/Roger, Cameo, The Time, Gap Band, Dazz Band, and female group Klymaxx.

12 Vincent, x.

13 Ibid.
These artists’ lyrics, which contained audacious sexual tones, pushed the envelope of what would soon become the accepted norm in music as the 1980s progressed.

Finally, the “Fifth Funk Dynasty,” which began in the 1990s, ushered in what Vincent calls the “Hip Hop Nation.”\(^{14}\) This era witnessed the rebirth of funk music through the vehicle of sampling. Pioneering Hip Hop artists sampled portions of funk songs that were created up to two decades earlier as the background music for their rap. Some of the most successful Hip Hop groups of the 1990s that relied heavily on the sampling of funk music were Digital Underground, EPMD, De La Soul, Public Enemy, KRS-One, Ice Cube, Tupac, and Too Short. Through sampling, funk music was introduced to a new audience who could culturally identify with its pure rhythms, timeless messages and dominating grooves. As a result of sampling, Hip Hop effectively re-launched the careers of artists and bands of the 1970s. The new millennium has seen the rebirth of funk artists such as the P-Funk All-Stars, Bootsy’s New Rubber Band, and the Ohio Players.

All of the funk dynasties consisted of artists who characterized the climate of the times and who influenced the movement and evolution of funk music. Vincent is the first writer to conceptualize funk music into dynasties. He is also considered the authoritative scholar in the funk music genre and is highly quoted in most studies completed thus far on the topic of funk music. Although lacking an examination on funk music’s political role and a lyrical analysis, Vincent’s book was the most comprehensive treatise of funk music to be reviewed.

\(^{14}\) Vincent, x.
The most recent writer and scholar to comment on the funk music genre is
musicologist Dr. Portia K. Maultsby, chair of the ethnomusicology department at Indiana
Introduction*, is an exceptional research in the genre of funk music. The book contains a
collection of essays by several noted musicologist espousing the history and social roles
of several African-American music genres. Her essay briefly explains and defines the
funk music genre to the reader. She covers its historical origins, its architects, its unique
beats and rhythms, its performance aesthetic, its influence on Disco, and its continuation
within the Hip Hop community. Her brief discussion of the lyrical content found in funk
music set it apart from other essays about the funk music genre. She identifies themes
and their perspective roles in the era of the music’s popularity. Similar to this research,
Maultsby discovers that funk songs contain party themes, social themes, and political
commentary. A portion of her essay demonstrates a political commentary found in the
lyrics of Parliament:

The song “Chocolate City” (1975) from the album of the same title (in reference
to Washington, D.C., and other cities with a predominantly Black population), for
example, emphasizes the power of the Black vote, situating “Blacks in places
where you don’t conceive of them being.” In this song, Clinton alludes to the
potential of electing a Black President with Aretha Franklin as the First lady, and
appointing Muhammad Ali, Reverend Ike, Richard Pryor, and Stevie Wonder as
cabinet members in the “Black House” (instead of the White House).\(^\text{15}\)

Maultsby’s essay is the only literature reviewed that clearly examined some of the themes
found in funk music, albeit briefly. Her research is extremely important to the genre
because very little research has been conducted on funk music lyrics in literature.

\(^{15}\) Portia K. Maultsby, “Funk,” in *African American Music: An Introduction*, eds. Mellonee V.
In conclusion, this literature review has researched and examined all available scholarship to gain the full knowledge of what is publicly known about the funk music genre. While there were great literatures that offered the technical performance of funk music, from the analysis of its rhythms to the cultural and aesthetic surroundings of the genre, a gap in the knowledge of funk music was obvious from the review of literature. No literature has been published that specifically examines the social and political role of funk music or deconstructs the lyrics in funk music during the 1970s to better understand the African-American community and its voice of that era.
CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL CONTEXT
THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN SOCIO-POLITICAL CLIMATE OF THE 1970s

The 1970s was a decade of social unrest and national transition. It was born on the heels of the 1960s “Motown Sound,” the Civil Rights Movement, the assassinations of both El Hajj Malik El Shabazz (a.k.a. Malcolm X) and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and before the 1980s Reaganomics, the rise of Hip Hop culture, the HIV epidemic, the reign of Michael Jackson, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the *Cosby Show*. For African Americans, the 1970s was a time of great social change, newfound political power, political representation, and social highs and lows amid expanded possibilities of the era.

The most striking change of the 1970s in comparison to the 1960s was the utter absence of radical and grassroots organizations for social and political change. These groups prior to the 1970s had effectively transformed and advanced the status and perceptions of African Americans in the sixties. Powerful groups such as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Congress Of Racial Equality (CORE), Us Organization, and the Black Panther Party were either not as active as years prior or were completely dysfunctional by the 1970s. As these groups for social change waned in their drive and cause, there were no replacement entities available to further the movement of the sixties, which had been in full stride a decade earlier. Social scientists
Curlew O. Thomas and Barbara Boston Thomas further explain the reasons for the waning grassroots organizations for social and political change of that era. They stated, “During the 1970s the Civil Rights movement declined in its ability to mobilize America’s blacks for collective protest and to recruit new members and retain its current ones.”¹ The ability to mobilize and retain personnel contributed to the decline of grassroots organizations.

Furthermore, due to the efforts set forth by the FBI director J. Edgar Hoover and his Counterintelligence Program commonly known as COINTELPRO, groups for social change suffered the complete and systematic destruction through federal policy that was bent on stopping a collective movement of the African-American community. COINTELPRO also looked to end all African-American leadership. Dr. Maulana Karenga contends that Hoover wanted to “disrupt, discredit and destroy, all real and potentially threatening Black leadership.”² Hoover’s COINTELPRO was effective in its mission of destroying the black organizations and black leadership in the latter part of the sixties. The 1970s never realized the emergence or presence of any significant black leadership that rivaled that of the 1960s.

The 1970s began with the struggle to fulfill the promises of the 1960s. Vernon Jordan, one-time president of the National Urban League, in 1980, commented on the unfulfilled promises of the 1960s, “For black Americans the decade of the 1970s was a time in which many of their hopes, raised by the Civil Rights victories of the 1960s,


withered away; a time in which they saw the loss of momentum that seemed to be propelling the nation along the road to true equality for all its citizens.”³

In the absence of a strong social movement and leadership, African Americans, as a group, began to seek other ways to gain equal footing amid the white mainstream dominated society. Taking full advantage of the hard fought voting rights act of 1965, African Americans experienced growth in terms of participation in the entire voting process. For example, the beginning of 1970 saw the percentage of African-American voters at 43.5 percent and by 1980, a decade later, the percentage had increased to 50.5 percent.⁴ Voter registration also increased for African Americans during this time period.⁵ As a result, African Americans voted into office large numbers of black officials in comparison to the 1960s. The beginning of the 1970s also saw the deliberate attempt for African Americans to become part of the political landscape. Karenga asserts that by far “the greatest gains of African Americans during the seventies were their penetration and victories in electoral politics.”⁶ This turn to political movement and participation led to the birth of political organizations and events such as the Congressional Black Caucus and the National Black Political Convention, of 1972, where The National Black Political Agenda was created and ushered into African-American society. Political Author Reginald E. Gilliam asserts that The National Black Political Agenda called for a new vision of bold and independent politics to meet the challenge of a clear social crisis in the


⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Karenga, 180.
From this “agenda,” the 1970s experienced an unprecedented amount of political involvement and historical firsts. In the form of descriptive representation, African Americans elected their own to Congress and several hundred others to elected state offices across the U.S.

Consequently, society of the 1970s witnessed the successful and historical elections of African Americans to the position of mayor of major U.S. cities. The most notable elected mayors were Tom Bradley of Los Angeles in 1973; Coleman Young of Detroit also in 1973; Maynard Jackson of Atlanta in 1974; and Walter E. Washington of Washington D.C. in 1975. *The National Black Political Agenda* had become bold and far-reaching. It encouraged individuals to reach for goals slightly out of hands reach a decade earlier. Such was the case, in 1972, when Shirley Chisholm, New York Congresswoman made her run for the president of the United States. It was a bold political move and statement that tested and stretched the limits of *The National Black Political Agenda*. In the 1970s, African Americans for the first time excelled as they traveled the political road and put forth an earnest effort to gain racial and social equality in America.

Socially, African Americans made great forward strides into mainstream society. This was especially evident in the realm of entertainment. African Americans enthusiastically began to embrace their culture and define themselves by it without apology, a trend that began in the sixties. No longer was the definition of an African-American man, woman, or child defined by the white mainstream society. This fact was made visible in the Blaxploitation films of the 1970s; new definitions of blackness were

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expressed in theaters throughout America. This genre of film effectively crushed the images of the “mammy” figure “Stepin Fetchit” and Sydney Poitier’s “safe negro” characters of the 1960s. Blaxploitation films ushered in never before seen images of African-American men and women standing their ground and fighting for what was right, even if it meant launching an attack on the white power structure with guns blazing. Film critic Gene Seymour says these “movies offered black audiences catharsis and release.”

These films not only attracted African-American moviegoers who were hungry to see images of themselves on screens in new roles, but also attracted a curious white mainstream audience. Both African-American and white audiences poured into the theaters to see such films as Melvin Van Peebles’ *Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song* in 1971, which Seymour notes was “made with a modest $500,000 budget, and took in more than $10 million in its first few months,” and Gordon Parks’ *Shaft* in 1972, whose $12 million take within a year may have arguably saved the Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer studios (MGM) from bankruptcy.


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9 Ibid.
(1974), and the Motown Productions of _Lady Sings The Blues_ (1972), _Mahogany_ (1975), and _The Wiz_ (1978) offered stories that resonated with the memory, culture and sensibilities of the African-American community.

As the seventies progressed, African-American culture and sensibilities began to ease slowly into the white mainstream culture with the advent of the televised black situation comedy or black sitcom. Within this era of newfound changing perceptions and definitions of blackness by African Americans, the white mainstream began to accept and call on the black image especially in the form of the black sitcom. Black sitcoms via the television screen entered the living rooms of black and white American families everyday. They displayed elements of African-American life such as black culture and the black values and realities that define their existence within the white mainstream society. Images viewed on television ranged from highly idealized to negative stereotypical depictions of African Americans. Most importantly, they exhibited African-American life amid the political and social climate of the 1970s. Consider the majority black cast of _Room 222_ (1969-1974), which was a first of its kind situation comedy and drama. It was based on and around a high school classroom filled with a multiethnic student body under the instruction of an African-American male. _Room 222_ was ground breaking because it offered the image of a positive African-American male role model who could fight the white mainstream power structure with his education and intellect rather than his fist or a gun. It also proved highly successful as it tackled issues of the era such as illegal drugs, race relations, homosexuality, and many others.\(^\text{10}\) The Academy of Television Arts and Sciences recognized _Room 222_ with an Emmy award for Outstanding

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New Series in 1969. Other successful black sitcoms to follow presented a more intimate look into the lives of African Americans, which was seldom seen. Most notable was *Sanford and Son* (1972-1977). It was a comedy built around the relationship of a father (Fred G. Sanford) and son (Lamont Sanford) who together managed their junkyard. The characters Fred G. Sanford and Lamont Sanford were played by raunchy comedian Redd Foxx and acquiescent actor Demond Wilson respectively. What drove this sitcom to fame was the verbal interplay and comedic banter between the father character Fred G. Sanford and a host of richly written characters. *Sanford and Son* effectively displayed the African-American esthetic of language and tropes, which resonated with its familiar African-American audience. It also delivered to the white mainstream society, for all intents and purposes, their first experience with the African-American father and son relationship.

Another sitcom, *Good Times* (1974-1979) depicted the African-American family in the midst of poverty that seemingly plagued most of black America in the 1970s. Poverty among African-American families experienced a significant change for the better as the decade progressed. In 1970, 40.7 percent of African-American families lived amid poverty in comparison to white American families, which was 14.6 percent. By 1980, the number of African-American families living in poverty decreased to 27.9 percent, a 12.8 percent change for the better. In comparison, white American families living under the poverty line experienced minimal decrease to 10.2 percent, which was a 4.4 percent decrease.

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change for the better over the same period. The sitcom *Good Times* was significant in the fact that it broke new ground as it showcased an intact African-American family. The parental figures were married, exemplified Christian values, and both were involved in the rearing of their three children. For the first time, the African-American family on television began to resemble the moral structure and the visual aesthetics of white families in America. It was a rare image on television in comparison to the often seen growing single parent households in African-American communities. *Good Times* was indelibly connected to the plight and dreams of the African-American family who held the same views of prosperity, as did the characters on the sitcom.

Finally, in contrast, *The Jeffersons* sitcom (1975-1985) explored one couple’s experience in upper middle class America. Complete with a wisecracking African-American maid and a deluxe apartment on Manhattan’s upper eastside, *The Jeffersons* was an example of African Americans finally getting their proverbial “piece of the pie” as the lyrics of the rhythmic theme song seem to suggest. The 1970s ushered in the emergence of the African-American middle class phenomenon, which reached its maturity in the following decade of the eighties. Through economic means, African Americans began to mingle with their white counterparts and share their similarities and experiences. *The Jeffersons* sitcom in great comedic flare allowed the American community to bare witness on television the emergence of the black middle class and its interaction between historically opposing ethnicities on an economic plateau that was new to society. To add, the role of the character George Jefferson, played by the actor Sherman Hemsley, was a unique role for an African-American actor. He was rude, racist,

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and unapologetic, which made for interesting dynamics when in the presence of his white counterparts. George Jefferson was seen as the African-American version of Archie Bunker, a white character of the famed sitcom *All In The Family*, (1971-1979). Archie Bunker was also rude, racist, and unapologetic. In fact, to illustrate their connection *The Jeffersons* characters George and his wife Louise Jefferson originated from the sitcom *All In The Family*. Regardless of the abrasiveness of the George Jefferson character, he was accepted and embraced by the white mainstream public, which pointed to the social change and acceptance that African Americans slowly achieved in entertainment during the 1970s.

The changing social climate of the seventies allowed for African-American individuals to emerge and participate in the mainstream social environment unfettered in their self-expression. Famed comedians and actors Flip Wilson and Richard Pryor emerged amid this changing social climate. Both were able to express and expose intimate scenes of African-American life, which in this era appealed to and was accepted among the white mainstream audience. Wilson and Pryor were celebrated by both an African-American audience and a white mainstream audience because of their authenticity in their expression of African-American culture.

As a result of their slow social and cultural acceptance into the white mainstream, African Americans began to take on a new self-dignity in the era of seventies. This new self-dignity stemmed from the disintegration of Jim Crow laws and the few just rewards of the Civil Right struggle of the 1960s. By the seventies, Seymour states this new
dignity "helped release a wave of pride among African Americans for themselves, their culture, and their heritage."14

African-American culture and its aesthetic became part of America’s everyday life. Its aesthetic contains the elements that set African-American life apart from that of the white mainstream. Its culture and its aesthetic dwelled in music such as Jazz, Rhythm and Blues, and Soul, which was embraced by the white mainstream audiences. Artists such as Herbie Hancock, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, and Gladys Knight, who were mainstays in the era of the seventies, upheld the African-American culture and aesthetic with their lyrical delivery and textual content that was culturally connected to the community of the seventies. The culture and aesthetic could also be found in the literature and prose of the era. Writers such as Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye (1970), Ernest Gaines’ The Autobiography Of Miss Jane Pitman (1971), Ishmael Reed’s Mumbo Jumbo (1972), Donald Goings’ Never Die Alone (1974), and Iceberg Slim’s Long White Con: The Biggest Score In His Life (1977) all delivered authentic African-American culture and aesthetics that had begun to weave its way slowly into the fabric of American society. Seymour suggests that it was impossible from “that time on for Black culture to be dismissed or taken for granted” in reference to the seventies and the emerging African-American culture.15

Conversely, although African Americans were in fact making unprecedented strides into some social sectors in American society, namely entertainment, there were other social sectors where their status remained stagnated. This dichotomic existence

14 Seymour, 28-29.

15 Ibid., 29.
caused unique societal occurrences in the seventies. For instance, the image and 
aesthetics of African Americans had permeated white mainstream America and yet the 
issue of ending segregation and implementing integration continued to plague most cities 
in the U.S. The issue of ending segregation had festered since the mid 1950s, but it was 
not until after the 1960s protest and demands for the eradication of segregation and the 
push for integration that change had begun; the 1970s hosted that change. Although there 
were laws already in existence to desegregate public schools and public places, these 
laws were never rigorously enforced until the 1970s. With change came violent protest 
by white mainstream society, as well as accusations of deliberate delays in the 
implementation of integration by President Richard Nixon and his administration that 
prevailed in this era.16 Public schools witnessed numerous accounts of violent attacks on 
African-American students as officials tried to integrate campuses.17 Similarly, violence 
erupted as laws were enforced to integrate neighborhoods via housing projects located in 
white communities. Furthermore, the issue of integration involving busing students from 
black ghettos to white suburbs for education became the largest fight for blacks and 
whites in the implementation of integration of the 1970s. Busing students to achieve a 
racial balance was resisted by white mainstream American citizens in major cities across 
the U.S.18 As African Americans began to explore their new employment opportunities 
available to them in the 1970s, they experienced in the new work force a similar response

16 Alton Hornsby, Jr., Chronology Of African American History: From 1492 to the Present, 2nd ed. 
(New York: Gale, 1997), 245.

17 Ibid., 204.

18 Ibid., 200-338.
to that of school busing, which was one of hostility. This resistance by far caused the
most socially stressful situation of the era.

Ultimately, amid great political and social strides forward, African Americans
nevertheless experienced setbacks and some stagnation throughout the 1970s. Case in
point, in Ebony magazine’s senior editor Alex Poinsett’s annual progress report is 1975
concluded that the condition for African Americans has been in the state of “erosion”
since the beginning of the decade.19 Poinsett’s article speaks of the promise set forth by
the works of the 1960s and the subsequent setbacks and stagnation of the 1970s. Overall,
the 1970s were indeed a decade of change that witnessed the end of powerful grassroots
organizations, the advent of full political access and participation, accepted authentic
cultural aesthetic expression, as well as perplexing lingering social conditions of
integration. These occurrences helped to give the 1970s its texture and a quality that set
it apart from any other decade.

THE BIRTH OF FUNK MUSIC

Funk music is an African-American music style that began its rise in the mid-
1960s along side the turbulent Civil Rights struggle. Funk music scholar Rickey Vincent,
author of Funk: The Music, the People, and the Rhythm of THE ONE, defined funk music
as the “successor to the soul music of the 1960s in terms of its representations of popular
black values – particularly those ideas of social, spiritual, and political redemption.”20 It
reached its peak in popularity in the 1970s, a time of social and political change for


20 Rickey Vincent, Funk: The Music, the People, and the Rhythm of THE ONE (New York: St.
African Americans. It was birthed in the urban ghettos across America, and employed the musical elements of Gospel, Blues, Jazz, and Rhythm & Blues. This genre of music was a danceable music form marked by a loose ensemble structure and a heavy emphasis on the first note or beat in a musical measure. The late singer and musician James Brown introduced the concept of the emphatic first note or beat in a musical measure as part of the defining musical element of funk music. Funk music ushered in new musical sounds and rhythms that took root as well as flourished during the decade of the 1970s. The sounds of funk music ranged from integrated polyrhythms to the ability to interchange those rhythms for melody as the lead musical voice. The sound of funk music included electric rhythm guitars, up front and pronounced bass rhythms, independent horn sections that relied heavily on rhythm rather than melody, and the use of synthesizers, which became the staple ingredient for creating the overall sound of funk music in the mid-to late 1970s.

Funk music in the 1970s contained a sound that was significantly different in all aspects when compared to the well-established popular music styles of that era. Cultural aesthetics that developed from the collective experience and history of African Americans in the sixties along with the bold artistry of musicians helped to create funk music's distinctive sound. The sound of music in the 1960s was quite different in contrast to the sound of funk music in the 1970s.

First and foremost, the sixties musical sound was characterized by the rise and dominance of Motown Records and the "Motown Sound." In 1959, Barry Gordy, Jr. formed his record company and fondly referred to it as "Hitsville U.S.A." Subsequently,

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the famous “Motown Sound” began to permeate the fabric of the sixties. Gordy’s polished “Motown Sound” was identified by his use of string orchestras, horn ensembles, scripted melodies, overdubs, 4/4 time signatures with an emphasis on the second and fourth beat, and rigid chords structures, which usually supported the vocal styles of both male and female groups. Notable artists on the Motown Label were Smokey Robinson and The Miracles, Marvin Gaye, The Temptations, The Supremes, Gladys Knight and The Pips, and The Jackson 5. The “Motown Sound” was extremely successful in that by the mid-1960s three out of every four Motown releases made the charts.22

Also contributing to the sound of the 1960s was Stax Records. Originally named Satellite Records, the company changed its name in 1961 to avoid litigation from an older California company with same name.23 Stax, as it was commonly known, was started by Jim Stewart and his elder sister Estelle Axton in Brunswick, Tennessee in 1959, but later moved to Memphis, Tennessee. The siblings combined the first two letters from their surnames, Stewart and Axton to create the name Stax.24 The sound of the music was decidedly different than the polished sound of Gordy’s Motown Records. The recordings at Stax records were considered raw; they were not stylishly produced and did not employ a high level of musical orchestration. Stax producers were interested in producing an intimate, blues and gospel rooted feel to their music, and [a philosophy of] appealing to blacks first—almost the direct opposite of their counterparts at Motown.25

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23 Thompson, 45.

24 Ibid.
Artists at Stax in the sixties included Otis Redding, Sam & Dave, Rufus Thomas, Carla Thomas, Mar-Keys, Isaac Hayes, Eddy Floyd, and Booker T. & The MG’s. Although Motown and Stax records differ in their sound, both labels held tight to formal music elements of the era. Conversely, Funk music’s development required it to abandon the sixties “Motown Sound” and the intimate sound efforts of Stax Records. In turn, funk music adopted a loose, less formal sound and structure. It did not follow the rules set by the popular mainstream music of the era.

What was to become funk music began with the very capable bands in the rehearsal halls, practice rooms, and garages throughout the black ghettos and urban areas in America. As musicians in any given band began to tune and warm up their perspective musical instruments for rehearsal, they often had the opportunity to experiment with several musical elements such as tempo, rhythm, cadences, and counter melodies. This exploration led the musician to utilize his musical instruments in non-traditional ways. Most notably was the non-traditional use of the electric bass to maintain a melody and not its traditional role of establishing chord progressions.

The electric bass was paramount to the sound of funk music. Its low timbre and rhythm commanded the attention of the listener. The electric bass’ deep sound helped to support the multiple rhythms in funk music. Its timbre allowed it to stand out as the lead voice in pursuit of a melody. With the musical skills of bass players, Larry Graham of the band Sly & The Family Stone and William “Bootsy” Collins of James Brown’s band and later the band Parliament, the bass and the bass player were able to freely “pursue any number of influences and was expected to provide rhythmic direction, either from

Vincent, 64.
percussive thumps or entire melodic phrases."\textsuperscript{26} The free style of the bass was unheard of in the realm of mainstream music of the seventies.

Another musical element used to create the breakthrough sound of funk music in the 1970s was in the percussive style or rhythm used by the guitar. The percussive sound and technique was created by a quick strum of the strings not allowing them to resonate, thus regulating the sound to a percussive beat. By the 1970s, the electric guitar had evolved into an instrument that could be explored with no limits or boundaries. Not only was it used in its typical role of sustaining key signatures, accompaniment, and chord progressions as it was used in the Jazz genre, it was also the lead instrument. As the lead instrument in a band, the guitar player emerged as the quintessential musical star of the seventies. The phenomenal movement of the guitar from a background and supportive instrument to a lead role in African-American music in the 1970s can be attributed to guitarist Jimi Hendrix.\textsuperscript{27} In his fearless originality, he effectively created a new role for the lead guitar in a band who was free to extend his improvisational solo, perform an array of melodic lines, and when needed, maintain a percussive rhythm to blend in with the syncopated rhythms of the band. James Brown’s guitarists Jimmy Nolen and Cheese Martin perfected the percussive style for the electric guitar. The bands Parliament and Funkadelic’s highly skilled guitarists Eddie “Maggot Brain” Hazel, Dwayne “Blackbird” McKnight, and Michael “Kidd Funkadelic” Hampton effortlessly moved back and forth between the percussive style and a lead style that easily rivaled the accomplishments of Jimi Hendrix.

\textsuperscript{26} Vincent, 16.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
Much like the newfound role of the guitar in the 1970s, the horn section found a
new role in funk music. Vincent contends that it is much more than a role when he sates,
"Horns were given a new responsibility" in funk music. The musicians of the horn
section began to stretch out the parameters of their already distinctive sound. In order to
blend in better with the high level syncopation of the band, they began to perform in a
rhythmic percussive style similar to that of the guitar. Examples of this percussive style
were first heard in several of James Brown’s recordings. The horn section would
punctuate and counter the vocals of Brown with short staccato rhythmic blast, effectively
creating a counter rhythm. Brown’s horn section, which included tenor saxophonist
Alfred “Pee Wee” Ellis, trombonist Fred Wesley, and alto saxophonist and flautist Maceo
Parker, established a sound and style that lasted throughout the seventies. As funk music
in the 1970s unfolded, the horn section began playing more secondary or counter rhythm
to any and all primary melody created by the rest of the band. The counter melody
carefully balanced the sound, the rhythm, and the musical movement of the group. Funk
music’s structure allowed for the secondary horn melody to easily move to the forefront
and become the primary melody in any given song.

Moreover, groups such as Earth Wind And Fire (EWF) and Parliament horn
sections accomplished the movement on every recording. The horns sections in their new
role in funk achieved fame and stature outside of their group affiliation. Several groups
contained very famous horn sections. Bands such as EWF had the “Phoenix Horns,”
Parliament had the “Horny Horns,” which contained Maceo Parker and Fred Wesley of
Brown’s band, and Junie Morrison, the keyboardist of the band Ohio Players, referred to

Vincent, 17.
their horn section as the "Detroit Symphony." Individual artists also had famous horn sections in their bands. For example, Isaac Hayes had the "Memphis Horns" and Curtis Mayfield had a symphony led by the horn section named Mother Father Sister Brother, better known by their initials "MFSB." Toward the end of the 1970s, some members of the "Phoenix Horns" teamed up with the funk duo The Brothers Johnson to form the horn section group the "C-Wind Horns."

The most unique element of funk music's sound was the utilization of the analogue synthesizer, an engineered electronic device that modifies sound. It has undergone serious modifications since its inception in the 1920s. It was developed to manipulate sound and combine the elements of acoustics, physics, and electronics. It was actuated or played using a keyboard much like a piano. The synthesizer was commonly used in an academic setting. Its early developers were, in fact, university research professors and students in the fields of electrical engineering, mathematics, and physics. During its development, the synthesizer was virtually unknown in the music arena. Its ability to create a wide range of new musical sounds facilitated an easy transition from academia to the field music.

Several noted individuals skilled in electronics and music contributed to the development of the synthesizer. An early pioneer and highly revered in the advancement of the synthesizer was Dr. Robert Arthur Moog. His creation of the famous Moog Synthesizer in 1965 set the stage for musicians to explore their musical prowess on an electrical instrument. Engineers and musicians Don Buchla, Hugh LeCaine, Alan Robert Pearlman, Harold Bode, and Composer Raymond Scott played a part in expanding the playability and popularity of the synthesizer as a viable musical instrument. Early users...
of the technology utilized the synthesizer to create psychedelic, cosmic, and sounds unattainable by all known common musical instruments. It was not until classical music composer and musician Walter Carlos (now Wendy) used the Moog synthesizer to record the entire Triple Grammy-award winning album entitled *Switched on Bach* in 1968 that mainstream artist noticed synthesizers.\(^{29}\) *Switched on Bach*, which contained selections from Johann Sebastian Bach’s body of work, became the first Platinum selling classical album.\(^{30}\) Carlos effectively changed the notion of the synthesizer from merely a novelty sound maker to a more viable musical instrument that could thrive in mainstream music. From this point on, the synthesizer became part of the typical musical equipment and set up found in quality music studios across the nation. Funk music musicians gravitated toward the synthesizer because of the wide range of musical sounds that were possible. As funk bands pushed to explore the far-reaching parameters of their music, the synthesizer became the vehicle used to achieve that goal.

One of the early mainstream musicians in the 1970s to implement the synthesizer was Stevie Wonder. His synthesizer work can be heard on his album entitled *Music Of My Mind* released in March of 1972. Wonder’s following album *Talking Book*, released in October of 1973, utilized the sounds of the Hohner Clavinet synthesizer. The clavinet, as it was commonly referred, was designed to be the electronic version of both the clavier and harpsichord instruments. This instrument is prominently featured on the songs “Superstition” and “Maybe Your Baby” from Wonder’s *Talking Book* album. This is

\(^{30}\) Ibid.
when “the clavinet became the staple of funk music” and its sound made it suitable to accompany a bass line, “making the bass bottom sound thicker, and often was simply played in a counter rhythm to make the entire ensemble fill with sound.”

In the mid 1970s, the Moog synthesizer began to be utilized exclusively as an accompaniment to the bass guitar and at times replaced bass guitars all together. It was able to create layered bass sounds and explore an instrumental range the bass guitar could not achieve. It effectively created sounds the audience could hear and feel resonate throughout their bodies. Funk synthesizer keyboardist Bernie Worrell of the bands Parliament and Funkadelic was the most celebrated and most proficient on the Moog synthesizer. A “child prodigy” classically trained on piano, Worrell excelled at programming the Moog’s multitude of sounds. He is noted for replacing the bass guitar with expansive synthesizer sounds and rhythms. His work can be heard on Parliament and Funkadelic albums in the mid to late 1970s. Worrell’s contemporary funk musician on synthesizer was Junie Morrison of the Ohio Players. Together they both established roles for the synthesizer in funk music and further characterized the unique sounds of this urban music style.

Funk music’s loose structure or “collective improvisation” discussed in Vincent’s book is part of the continental African music making tradition. This tradition was recreated in a rehearsal setting during the seventies, which encouraged the musicians to

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31 Vincent, 132.

32 Ibid., 246.

33 Ibid., 18.
interact with one another in a musical conversation.\textsuperscript{34} This became the standard practice and performance structure of funk music. As the “collective improvisation” progressed in rehearsals, the musicians began to musically intertwine and contribute to the overall melody and rhythm of the musical conversation. Musicologist Dave Thompson contends that funk music is “the moment when two, four, [or] any number of musicians stop playing with one another and begin playing as one.”\textsuperscript{35} Garry Shider, writer, musician and vocalist of the bands Parliament and Funkadelic, discussed “collective improvisation” within the band, “I started the jam off, and everybody joined in. You could here the vibe in our music. You can here we’re all in there together. Our music has always been a group thing.”\textsuperscript{36} The ebb and flow of ideas between the musicians would continue until the interrelationship of rhythmic patterns and phrases began to complement one another in a specific “time span” establishing what is commonly known as a groove.\textsuperscript{37} The most important musical conversation within the groove and part of the “collective improvisation” was between the drum and bass. The drum and bass had the responsibility of setting the rhythmic patterns, tempos, and grooves to come.

Helping to advance the new burgeoning African-American musical style and sound was the element of syncopation. It was the elegant and successful integration of multiple instruments seamlessly combining numerous melodic lines amid an established groove. Highly experienced musicians could only accomplish this feat. It should be

\textsuperscript{34} Thompson, vii

\textsuperscript{35} David Mills et al., \textit{For The Record: George Clinton and P-Funk} ed. Dave Marsh (New York: Avon Books Inc., 1998), 130

noted that funk music was the last form of African-American music played by musicians trained in the Jazz arena. Formidable bands that mastered this technique of syncopation included the Ohio Players, Parliament, Funkadelic, Bootsy’s Rubber Band, and James Brown, all of which employed highly skilled musicians fluent in musical genres that ranged from the Blues, Gospel, and Jazz to classical European music. James Brown’s band, the JB’s, was noted for its heavy employment of syncopation. In search of a uniquely syncopated sound, Brown and the JB’s explored the usage of two drummers playing congruently for the purpose of effectively maintaining a solid syncopated Rhythm pattern within the rhythm section. The brilliant implementation of the two drummers, John “Jabo” Starks and Clyde Stubblefield, allowed for the creation of the famous “Funky Drummer” rhythm, which became the signature drum style of Brown and the JB’s.

Furthermore, several elements of 1960s music had to undergo a change to usher in the new sound of seventies funk music. However, the vocal styles largely remained the same as they were in the sixties. Vocal elements found in Negro Spirituals, Blues, Gospel, Jazz, and Doo-Wop were integrated into the vocal styles of funk music, which followed a long line of early African-American music and utilized vocal elements and traditions of continental Africa. Yells, shouts, hollers, moans, humming, and melodic riffs are some of the parts of the African vocal music tradition that were embedded in the fabric of 1970s funk music. Elements of African music such as call and response, the oral tradition, and narration in song were included in African-American music. Thus, they were also heard in funk music. The African musical retentions found in funk music
gave "it a distinctive color, character, and emotional quality and effecting an artistic continuity that is tenacious and unmistakable."\textsuperscript{38}

The final and single most important musical element found in funk music is the concept of the \textit{One}. It is the emphasis of the first beat or note in a musical measure. The \textit{One} is an exclusive funk music term, concept, and ideology, which suggests the beginning and end of a musical piece or performance. When applied to funk music, the \textit{One} becomes the starting place for all rhythm, melodies, horn riffs, vocal punctuations and key changes. It is emphasized in every 4/4 measure throughout an entire song. Musicologist Anne Danielsen further describes the \textit{One} as "continuously deep and heavy all the way, from its sharp attack far beyond any metrical limits; the one introduces, almost demonstratively, its own pulse. The whole idea of a syncopation, of anything deviating from the one, is all but abandoned."\textsuperscript{39} Within the context of funk music, the \textit{One} can also signify the last beat or count in a song. Vincent explains the concept and the African music origins and the spirit of the \textit{One}:

Perhaps the most important retention from Africa has been the spiritual element of music making, the necessity to bring about trance, to raise rhythm to a cosmic level. African music, gospel music, and jazz were designed to accomplish this, and with The Funk the tradition has continued. Traditionally, West African music did not emphasize melodies that meandered along the rhythms; the music emphasized rhythm itself, and in doing so, it ventilated around The One.\textsuperscript{40}

As rhythm itself kept time in Africa by utilizing the \textit{One}, so did funk music amid seemingly never ending syncopated rhythms in the seventies. In contrast, 1960s Rhythm


\textsuperscript{40} Vincent, 37.
and Blues utilized a 4/4 count in its measures and emphasized the second beat and fourth beat within every measure and not the *One* or first beat. Also, in 1960s Rhythm and Blues songs, typically ended on the fourth and final beat of a measure and not the *One* beat. The *One* introduced a new sound and musical style that would permeate funk music of the 1970s and definitively characterize the genre of funk music. James Brown deftly employed the concept of the *One*. Thus, he became one of the first funk musicians to exclusively utilize the concept. Brown, in his search for something musically different utilized the *One* in rehearsal, as did other bands such as Booker T & The MG’s and Junior Walker and the All-Stars. However, Brown went on to be the first to record songs using the concept of the *One*. Admittedly, Brown got the concept of the *One* right with his song “Papa’s Got A Brand New Bag” in 1965.\(^{41}\) It was because of this extremely successful song that Brown was credited with recording the first funk song. He became known as the “Godfather of Funk” and later “The Minister of New New Super Heavy Funk.”\(^{42}\) His song, “Papa’s Got A Brand New Bag,” established the foundation for funk music that flourished in the 1970s.

Funk music informed and guided African Americans during the seventies as it set the social and political tone and agenda of the era. It also reflected the aesthetics of African-American culture. Its aesthetic allowed it to be used in the ground breaking yet controversial Blaxploitation films of the 1970s. Artists and groups that contributed their musical expertise and songs to the new African-American film genre were Earth Wind And Fire’s *Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song*, (1971), Isaac Hayes’ *Shaft*, “Do Your

\(^{41}\) Thompson, vii.

Thing” (1971), Curtis Mayfield’s Superfly, “Freddie’s Dead” (1972), James Brown and Fred Wesley’s Black Caesar, “The Boss” (1973), Roy Ayers’ Coffy, “King George” (1973), and War’s Youngblood, “This Funky Music Makes You Feel Good” (1978). Collectively, they created the musical scores and soundtracks that helped to promote a stylized African-American image in theaters across the U.S.

Funk music was imbued with the social realities of the time. It musically embodied the values, morals, vernacular, and attitude of African Americans. Its origins and the manner in which it was allowed to develop helped it to retain the cultural aesthetics that identified African-American society. Funk music was also able to incorporate and maintain a unique continental African aesthetic such as the rhythms, traditions, and sensibilities. Concurrently, during the era of the seventies, African Americans attempted to incorporate pure African culture and aesthetics into their communities. Funk music helped to bridge the gap that existed between continental African culture and the African-American community.

As a result of its strong display of the African and African-American aesthetic, the white mainstream music market did not appreciate its sound. Consequently, the music was marginalized, and its ability to thrive in the mainstream music market became quite difficult. Funk music spoke to an audience that was intimately familiar with its aesthetic sentiments. White mainstream society had very little familiarity and no personal understanding or knowledge of funk music’s aesthetic as it emerged out of the 1960s and into the 1970s. The mainstream audience lacked the ability to comprehend fully funk music’s messages and rhythms. For these reasons, it failed to be ranked on the

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43 Thompson, 207-213.
popular music charts of the era. White mainstream audiences lack of understanding and interest in the genre allowed for an unscripted benefit; funk music throughout the 1970s largely remained intact. It was not infiltrated by the influence of popular music or mainstream trends of the era. The inability of the collective white mainstream to absorb, participate, and function in the funk music idiom precluded them from tampering with its sounds. As a result, funk bands did not attract a large white mainstream fan base during the seventies. These inabilities of the collective white mainstream allowed it to remain pure in its aesthetic. On the other hand, its culturally tangible elements and purity allowed it to thrive among the African-American communities. In later decades, funk music’s pure unfettered African-American sound was called upon to act as the musical platform for the budding Rap and Hip Hop culture.

Seventies funk music introduced the most socially and culturally significant music artists of the decade. Funk music artist James Brown, the creator of funk music, communicated in song the social and political concerns of African Americans throughout the 1970s. Some of his songs that communicated these concerns were “Super Bad” in 1970 and “The Payback” in 1974. A band steeped in the funk music genre was the Isley Brothers. They followed pioneer James Brown’s musical lead into the 1970s and focused some of their songs on the social and political conditions of the era. The Isley Brothers also added songs about male and female romantic relationships in the urban cities to their repertoire. The Isley Brothers’ hits included “Love The One Your With” in 1971, “That Lady” in 1973, and “Fight The Power” in 1975. Yet another artist who had a broad social and political impact and appeal was Sly & The Family Stone. The group came of age musically and lyrically in the late 1960s. They communicated to the audience a mass
social consciousness that extended beyond the African-American society to at times include all ethnic communities. Musicologist Dave Thompson holds Sly, whose birth name is Sylvester Stewart, in high esteem when he states that Sly was “one of the single most influential figures in the entire history of Black music.”


Additionally, the seventies saw the emergence of large funk bands complete with their own cosmology and musical delivery like George Clinton and both of his bands Funkadelic and Parliament. They promoted their social and political views in song that could only be described as vivid. The group’s social and political views seemingly only existed within the context of their music. Parliament and Funkadelic, or P-Funk as they were collectively known, communicated to its audience in the African-American vernacular. They contained highly metaphorical prose, tropes and signifying. For example, the following lyrics of a Parliament recording titled “Aqua Boogie” include the well-known recurring P-Funk character Sir Nose D’Voidoffunk. In the recording, he metaphorically described his inability to either learn to dance or cope with society. Sir Nose D’Voidoffunk situation is all vividly described in the context of learning to swim:

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Ha-ah, ha-ah, ha-ah!
I am Sir Nose D’Voidoffunk
I can’t swim
I never could swim
I never will swim
Oh, put me down!
Let go my leg! (Ha-ah, ha-ah, ha-ah!)
I told ya...will you shut up!...I told ya I can’t swim! Ha howww no!
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Put me down, I hate water, ho

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44 Thompson, 47.
(Hah -ah hah -ah hah -ahhh)

Will you shut up!

(Aqua boogie baby) Never learned to swim,
(underwater boogie baby)
Can’t catch the rhythm of the stroke
(Aqua boogie baby) Why should I hold my breath,
(underwater boogie baby)
Feelin’ that I might choke (Ha-ah, ha-ah, ha-ah!) ⁴⁵

P-Funk’s name, metaphors, and unique sound were synonymous with funk music in the mid-1970s. Some of P-funk’s hits include, “Tear The Roof Off the Sucker” in 1976, “Flash Light” in 1978, “One Nation Under a Groove” in 1978, and “(Not Just) Knee Deep” in 1979. ⁴⁶ Other funk bands of the seventies were clear and straightforward in their musical messages. Artists and bands such as Isaac Hayes, Curtis Mayfield, and Earth Wind And Fire expanded on what it meant to be an African American in the 1970s politically and socially. Their songs ranged from the joys of being “black” to the despair in the urban ghettos and communities. Some of the hits in the 1970s for Isaac Hayes, Curtis Mayfield, and Earth Wind And Fire were “Theme From Shaft” in 1971, “Freddie’s Dead” in 1972, and “Shinning Star” in 1975, respectively. ⁴⁷ Lastly, the band Ohio Players was able to bring its wonderful urban vernacular and lyrics about African-American women and urban love into the 1970s. The group was lyrically unmatched in the seventies in terms of describing an urban scene, life, and love. Their highly groove oriented songs were embedded with the African-American aesthetic, which spoke


⁴⁶ Thompson, 93-94.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 122, 137, 162.
directly to and for the urban youth of the era. The Ohio Players’ hits were “Pain” in 1971, “Funky Worm” in 1973, “Fire” in 1974, “Sweet Sticky Thing” in 1975, and “Love Rollercoaster” also in 1975. Funk bands of the 1970s reflected the condition of African Americans in the urban cities throughout the country. Using the African-American aesthetic, Ohio Players were able to communicate to an audience that was familiar with its vernacular, prose, and culture.

In the latter part of the 1970s funk music began its decline due in part to the growing phenomena of “disco.” Discothèques or dance halls where Disco was exclusively played “[sprang] up in every city as a replacement for the live concert” in the late seventies. Funk music’s existence was heavily predicated on the concept of the live concert where the audience could participate in the African tradition of call and response in a communal setting, while disco neither required a live performance to thrive nor participation in call or response in any form. The absence of participation in any African music traditions appealed to a broad mainstream audience. Mainstream radio embraced the new Disco sound, which in turn increased their album and single sales across the U.S. and caused a decline for the demand of funk artists and funk bands during the latter part of the 1970s. Disco effectively ended the reign of funk music.

THE BLACK AESTHETIC IN FUNK MUSIC

Funk music of the seventies reflected components of the black aesthetic as

48 Thompson, 174.
49 Vincent, 209.
50 Ibid., 205.
much as any other genre of black music. Improvisation, call and response, repetition and story telling are just a few aesthetic manifestations that can be found in its sounds, rhythms, and lyrics. It was an integral part of the African-American identity and community. Since funk music’s early existence and development, it has maintained elements of the black aesthetic within the African-American community. With its roots in continental Africa, the black aesthetic or African-American aesthetic are those elements found exclusively within the African-American culture that are evident in the walk, the talk, the music, the dance, the dress, and the attitudes of African Americans. Karenga further defines the black aesthetic “as a distinctive mode of artistic expression and a distinctive standard by which Black art [which includes music] can be identified and judged in terms of its creativity and beauty as well as its social relevance.”51 It is what is seen as naturally beautiful within the community of African Americans. As funk music evolved into its own genre in the urban cities during the early 1970s, it naturally became infused with the African-American culture and its accompanying aesthetic that demanded the music to have a strong relationship with the aesthetics of the African-American community. Vincent suggests that funk music alone is an element of the black aesthetic. He writes that funk music “is an aesthetic of deliberate confusion, of uninhibited, soulful behavior that remains viable because of a faith in instinct, a joy of self, and a joy of life, particularly unassimilated black American life.”52 For Vincent, funk music was an aesthetic that spoke to the qualities of the African-American life in terms of being comfortable with oneself with no apologies.

51 Karenga, 394.

52 Vincent, 4.
As funk music developed, it was utilized by the urban black youth to express their cultural consciousness. Funk music espoused the rhetoric of black pride to a massive black youth audience. It also created a musical forum that encouraged youth to voice their joys, opinions, and discontent about the African-American social, economic, and political climate of the 1970s. This phenomenon was promoted by James Brown, the undisputed “Godfather of Soul” and father of funk, who helped to move the music toward a more socially and politically conscious attitude. With his song “Say It Loud (I’m Black and I’m Proud)” released in 1968, a new consciousness was born amid a thriving black culture that retained the black aesthetic born in the sixties. Images of raised fist in support of the Black Power Movement were in fact a visual black aesthetic that accompanied Brown’s songs. Funk music helped to vocalize the dire concerns of the black community while simultaneously keeping in step with the visual aesthetics in black culture. The most visual African-American aesthetics were the Bell-bottom pants, platform shoes, hoop-earring, Afros, leather vests, and beaded necklaces worn by black youth in urban cities.

Funk music also ushered in a sound that was distinctly different from music a few years earlier, and yet preserved and highlighted elements of the black aesthetic. It established new ways of communicating with the African-American urban youth. Its sounds peaked their interest and spoke to them like never before. Funk music and its fans successfully rejected the very popular “Motown Sound” that was prevalent during the 1960s. It established a new sound that emotionally and physically moved its listeners and was rapidly absorbed by the African-American youth in their never ending quest for something new and different. The Motown groups such as The Temptations, The
Supremes, and The Miracles could no longer sustain the interest of the African-American youth in the seventies, who were constantly in search for the next new musical sound that would move them emotionally and physically. Funk music abandoned the Doo-Wop vocal styles and replaced them with hard driving drum and bass rhythms, which were the foundation of funk music. These rhythms combined with the rhythms and sounds of other musical instruments help to create polyrhythm, which can easily be traced back to the continent of Africa and thus was part of the black aesthetic. Author Dr. Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. writes about the historical importance of the sound of polyrhythm:

Such instrument combinations have continued to exist and have continued to be valued, sought, and utilized throughout the history of African-American musical culture. This ideal sound played a critical role in determining the nature of the blues, ragtime, jazz, gospel, R&B, and all the other African American musicals genres, and it also influenced mightily the unique sound of American popular music in general.53

Polyrhythms defined the new African-American funk music and all forms of urban music to follow in later decades. Funk music’s polyrhythm connected with the spirit of the African-American audience and compelled them to stand up and interpret in dance the music’s rhythm on the dance floor. The aesthetic of rhythm in the form of drum and bass set the mood, form, and attitude of the spirit of celebration that was ushered in once the music began. Not only did funk music employ drum and bass to create a new sound and new rhythms, it also used several methods to communicate with the prevailing spirit or mood of the African-American youth in the seventies. For example, one of several methods of communicating with the spirit of African-American youth was the concept of the “long song.” These were simply songs long in duration in an attempt to not lose an

53 Floyd, Jr., 56.
established rhythm or groove by ending a song before it was able to elevate the
listening audience to a high point of a spiritual celebration. In the pursuit of a spiritual
celebration, some funk songs lasted ten minutes or more. Steeped in the black aesthetic,
the musicians tried to invoke or invite a spirit of celebration, which could only be
achieved as the music continued over an extended period of time. Funk music allowed a
spirit of celebration to flourish within the confines of extended polyrhythms without
interruption.

Another method used to communicate with African-American youth was the
loose structure of funk music that permitted the musician to stretch out musically to
engage in a solo. This allowed the musician to fully participate in the black aesthetic of
musical improvisation. Funk musicians, while engaged in a song, would enter and exit
an ongoing musical performance, thus elevating their spirit and the spirit of their listening
audiences to a frenzy. With the steady backbeat of the drum and bass rhythms, which
were not monotonous or repetitious in nature, the audience rose to new emotional highs
as they listened and moved to the music. The element of improvisation in the black
aesthetic and the concept of the “long song” combined to create an atmosphere that was
continuously ripe for the spirit of celebration to enter. The audience and the musician
were involved in a spiritual call and response. African-American audiences instantly
connected to the new sound of funk music. They were able to dance and move to its
rhythms as the musicians and audiences shared a common aesthetic consciousness.

Due to the African-American audiences’ indelible connection to funk music, it
naturally became the perfect musical score to be used in Blaxploitation movies of the
1970s. Artists like Curtis Mayfield, Roy Ayers, Willie Hutch, and Isaac Hayes, who won
an Oscar for his funk music score *Shaft*, created the soundtracks to the Blaxploitation movie genre. These artists were part of bringing the black aesthetic in musical form to the silver screen.\(^5^4\) The rhythm and attitude of the music was a perfect marriage to the black images viewed on the screen. Funk music was so powerfully loaded with the black aesthetic that movie scenes containing only the music and no lyrics of a rhythmic funk song was all that was necessary to tell the story during the 1970s, as the music alone seem to described the African-American experience of the era. The subsequent popularity of Blaxploitation movies and their soundtracks revealed the connection and familiarity the audiences had with funk music’s black aesthetic.

Culturally, funk music’s ability to communicate to its audiences relied heavily on its lyrical content and the vocal style of that lyrical delivery to the African-American masses. Primarily, one must understand that African Americans communicate with one another in a way that is intimate and unique to their culture. Most of the elements of communication border the tenets of a dramatic performance, which in turn creates a colorful and lively exchange of gestures, facial expressions, body posture, and vocal phrases. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. speaks of the African-American literary tradition that can be found in the slave narratives and Alice Walker’s novel *The Color Purple*. Funk music’s lyrics communicated directly to those individuals who share the same black aesthetic that a given song was articulating. An example of the black aesthetic in lyrics can be found in the songs entitled “Skin Tight” (1974) and “Shake” (1979) by the Ohio

\(^{54}\) Thompson, 207-213.
Players and The Gap Band, respectively.\footnote{Thompson, 175-253.} Consider the following lyrics by the Ohio Players:

You are a bad bad Mrs.
In them skin tight britches
Runnin' folks in tah ditches
Baby 'bout to bust the stitches, yeah
Skin tight

You are a real fine lady
Though your walk's a little shady
Step on the strip on time
There's money you're bound to find, yeah
Skin tight\footnote{Ohio Players, “Skin Tight,” track no. 5 (CD), performed by Ohio Players, 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Masters-The Millennium Collection. The Best of The Ohio Players, Island Records 2000.}

The black aesthetic and vernacular that was utilized by the Ohio Players was delivered in the form of metaphoric phrases. Each metaphoric phrase is clear and comprehensible to someone who is familiar with the black aesthetic and vernacular. Audiences that are steeped in the black aesthetic and vernacular immediately identify with what lead vocalist Leroy “Sugarfoot” Bonner is communicating. A listener familiar with this style of language was not confused about the subject and themes of the song. The Ohio Players are in fact speaking of a sexy dressed woman whose motives on the urban streets are salacious in nature.

Next, observe the lyrics in “Shake” by The Gap Band:

Walk around
Not having fun
Having hard times y'all
Gotta make a run

Gotta go to work
Each and everyday
Hardly no money
Comes my way

Aint got no car
Gotta ride the bus
On the way home y’all
Gotta listen to Gus fuss

Rent is due
‘cause my loan didn’t come through
Got me a couple of dollars
Guess what I’m gonna do

Shake shake shake shake mah booty
At the disco

Yeah yeah yeah

In this case, the Gap Band lyrics are straightforward and is subtle in it black aesthetic language. Rather, the lyrics reveal the great African tradition of storytelling by illuminating common economic conditions present in the African-American community in the seventies. The song “Shake” exposed the economic realities of African Americans within urban cities of the U.S. This story becomes all too familiar to the African-American audiences who have had a similar experience in a seventies society. Therefore, the audience connected with the song’s content as the singer Charlie Wilson attempts to solve his economic situation by taking his last couple of dollars to dance his worries away. The audience who shares his situation has no doubt done the same. Still, other funk song lyrics are not so straightforward and are deeply coded in the black vernacular tradition. At times, it becomes quite difficult to translate and understand the meaning of lyrics to an individual who is not familiar with the tenants of the black aesthetic. One

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would be hard pressed to comprehend the sounds and lyrics of the funk bands, Parliament and Funkadelic, without having been steeped in the black culture and its aesthetic. These groups espoused lyrics that were deeply rooted in the black vernacular and thusly the black aesthetic as well.

Moreover, adornment is an element in the black aesthetic and cannot be understated. It is visual, and thus it is the single most identifying factor of the black aesthetic. The concept of adornment comes from a continental African aesthetic. Historically, Africans would adorn themselves with earrings, nose rings, necklaces, bracelets, and various multicolored and textured fabrics in an attempt to showcase the character of their spirit. “Cultural memory” have allowed African Americans to do the same as they adorned themselves in the 1970s amid the black conscious movement.58 Elements such as Afro hairstyles, dashikis shirts, platform shoes, and wrist and ankle bracelets were highly expressive visual aesthetics and were the fashion trend of the era.

The black aesthetic of adornment was an integral part of funk music, especially for the funk musician of the seventies. Funk bands and individuals musicians set the new fashion trends in African-American communities. In contrast, to cater to large white audiences, groups such as the Four Tops and The Temptations had to become limited in their visual adornment in the sixties to achieve crossover appeal to a white mainstream audience. The groups wore matching suits, shoes, straight ties, and neat haircuts. In turn, they lost contact with the true black aesthetic of adornment of the late sixties and seventies, which was to express the character of their African spirit. In the 1970s, funk groups adorned themselves with Afros, grew goatees or beards, and wore colorful

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58 Floyd, Jr., 8.
jumpsuits, hats, vests, jewelry, and boots in an effort to keep in rhythm with the visual improvisation of the black aesthetic. George Clinton and his bands Parliament and Funkadelic pushed the visual black aesthetic to new limits and established new aesthetic parameters. When the group performed live shows, they were free to adorn themselves as they saw fit, which included bed sheets as robes and bath towels utilized as capes and diapers. This was evidence that the black aesthetic allowed the musician to truly express his creative character. Most important was their adornment aesthetic was truly accepted by an audience whose culture and aesthetics supported this type of freedom of dress and spiritual expression.

Ultimately, the black aesthetic helped to birth funk music. It saturated every part of funk music and its surrounding culture in the seventies. Funk music’s bold new sounds, rhythms, spirituality, lyrics, and visual style can be attributed to the black aesthetic that set apart African Americans socially and culturally from the rest of society. Funk music and the black aesthetic created a culturally rich African-American community that contained African traditions and a new self-identity in the era of the seventies.
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings yielded a number of results. Some of the anticipated findings aligned with the theory of Dr. Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., which suggested in part that African music historically communicated to a community that was intimately familiar with the language, tropes, and signification used in the music. The traditional African lyrical elements of call and response, storytelling in song, and shouts and hollers were used for the purpose of communication in African music. This research has found that popular funk music lyrics also used the same traditional African elements for the purpose of communication. Its lyrics effectively communicated to African Americans in the same manner as traditional African music by using the same lyrical elements of call and response, storytelling in song, and shouts and hollers.

For example, several of James Brown's songs such as "Super Bad" and "Get Up (I Feel Like Being A) Sex Machine" were riddled with the African musical traditions of call and response, narrative story telling, and metaphors. In this tradition, the lyrics of funk music were able to communicate as the voice of African Americans in the seventies and were a reminder of a traditional music past that indeed extends back to the continent of Africa. The retention of traditional African music in popular funk music is a testament to the power of the great oral tradition. These African music traditions were embedded in

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1 See appendix A for complete lyrics.

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the culture of funk music and its lyrics.

Research also indicated that the lyrical content in popular funk music carried with it themes of protest. The findings adhered to Dr. Bernice Johnson-Reagon’s theory of protest and freedom songs. Popular funk music lyrics communicated the social and political sentiments of the African-American community. The lyrics specifically addressed the changing times for African Americans in terms of the new problems they faced in a society struggling with issues like integration. They also addressed the animosity for President Richard M. Nixon and his administration of the early seventies as the lyrics rhythmically protested these undesirable conditions of the era. Songs such as “Talking Loud And Saying Nothing” by James Brown in 1972 and “Fight The Power” by the Isley Brothers in 1975 offered a sincere account of protest to the social and political realities that hindered the freedoms of African Americans.

While the popularity of funk music grew, a massive constituency of fans who were actively experiencing the themes found in funk music began to respond through social resistance and political involvement. The artists, the music, and especially the lyrics helped to promote awareness of the injustice as well as set the scene to create a positive change in urban communities. As a result, in the absence of powerful leadership of the seventies, the African-American community had free access to the “conciliatory rhetoric” and positive messages that consequently allowed the lyrics of funk music to be the voice of African Americans of that era.

In this research, unanticipated findings were also found, revealing how funk music was lyrically delivered as well as an observance of the changing themes throughout the seventies was made. The research has found that the use of the black
vernacular was unprecedented. Initially, this research did not anticipate the abundant use of the black vernacular and prose. It was assumed that funk music’s lyrical content would sparingly utilize the black vernacular in practice during the seventies in an effort to be better understood by a white mainstream audience. However, this was not true as scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr. suggests that African Americans used what is sometimes called African-American Vernacular English (A.A.V.E.) or black vernacular to communicate with one another especially in the absence of white mainstream society.² Because the black vernacular was pervasive in the black urban centers, undeniably a disproportionately large African-American audience who used black vernacular patronized and of course understood funk music lyrics in the seventies.

For example, phrases such as “A look-a-here,” “Shake your money maker,” “Going down to the crib,” “Funk yourself right out,” “The girl is a freak,” “Move your boogie body,” and many others were used to communicate to African-American audiences that were especially familiar with black vernacular phrases. Songs like James Brown’s “Hot Pants” (1971) and Funkadelic’s “One Nation Under A Groove” (1978) utilized excessive amounts of black vernacular phrases. The frequent and pervasive usage of this vernacular points to whom the songs were written and intended for, which was the African-American community. Popular funk music lyrics in the seventies clearly showcased the cultural exclusivity of language in the African-American community, which made no concessions for the white mainstream society. This exclusive vernacular allowed the lyrics to speak as the voice of African Americans in that era.

Another unanticipated finding that came to light in the analysis of popular funk

music lyrics was the movement away from themes that addressed the daunting social and political issues of the early seventies to one of overwhelming themes of escapism and male and female relationships. Musicologist Portia K. Maultsby asserts that “For many African Americans of all socioeconomic classes, funk [music] became a form of escapism: a temporary respite from the uncertainties and pressures of daily life.”³ This was a movement or better yet, a musical trend that funk music artists, bands and groups of the day followed.

Themes of escapism for some artists were found in their lyrics that promoted temporarily leaving any undesirable condition through the lyrical suggestion of dance. Additionally, other funk artists and funk bands used “lyrical imagery” as a form of escapism. The use of lyrical imagery was especially true with the bands Parliament and Funkadelic. As African Americans moved from familiar urban areas because of economic achievement and social freedoms to unfamiliar, hostile work spaces and public places, the lyrical content of funk music was able to collectively voice the African-American’s need and desire to escape these growing pressures in the newly integrated public sphere. As the voice of African Americans, popular funk music lyrics spoke volumes about their social status in white mainstream society.

Furthermore, the theme of male and female relationships was unanticipated and was found to also be a form of escapism that became enormously abundant in funk music as the decade of the seventies advanced. Funk artists and groups such as the Ohio Players, Brothers Johnson, Con Funk Shun, and Rick James played a part in changing the direction of lyrical themes found in popular funk music in the latter part of the seventies.

Songs such as “Fire,” “I’ll Be Good To You,” “Ffun,” and “You And I” led the way in male and female relationships themes in funk music lyrics. The emerging themes of relationships illustrated that love certainly continued to thrive in song among African Americans in the midst of the stressed society in the seventies.

By the end of the seventies, popular funk music lyrics eventually abandoned all messages promoting social equality and political representations and increasingly utilized themes of escapism and male and female relationships that became pervasive in the following decade of the eighties. It was clear to see that funk music lyrics reflected the social and political times. It evolved alongside the many conditions of African Americans as they began to experience hard fought freedoms in a slowly changing society. The lyrics of funk music were also able to call attention to and narrate this change using a culturally familiar language that resonated solely with the African-American audiences of the seventies.

LYRICAL ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

For African Americans, the 1970s began with a new love of self and the embracing of “blackness” and “black pride.” This new love of self was rooted in the mid-sixties and was part of the Black Power Movement that continued into the seventies and took on a subtler and less confrontational approach to protest. The Black Power Movement was present in funk music rhythms and other places in the black community. It also appeared in the black aesthetic of an individual’s dress, in the language used when speaking, and in the attitudes of the self-assuredness exerted in the African-American community.
The Black Power Movement, the black aesthetic, and love of self were also manifested in the lyrical content of popular funk songs of the era. Father of the funk music genre James Brown, who in the first years of the seventies continuously topped the Rhythm and Blues charts, reflected this newfound love of self, black pride, and a growing black power in America. His song “Super Bad,” released in 1970, captured the new self-realization and voice of African Americans of that era. The title of the song displayed a coded vernacular phrase that was commonly used among African Americans. The use of a coded vernacular can be traced back to enslaved Africans who applied double meaning to words and messages in the era of chattel enslavement as a means to hide their conversations from their enslavers. The word “bad” in the black community was a code for “good” or “great.” Brown, who by this time abandoned a highly processed hairstyle and proudly wore a culturally “righteous” Afro, proclaimed that he had pride and love for himself, for his soul, and was “Super Bad”:

Watch me! Watch me! I got it! Watch me!
I got it! Heeyh!
I got somethin’ that makes me wanna shouta!
I got somethin’ that tells me what its all about
Huh! I got soul and I’m super bad
I got soul, huh, and I’m super bad, huh!
Now I got a move that tells me what to do
Sometimes I tease
I gotta move that tells me what to do
Sometimes I feel so nice
I wanna try Myself with you,
Huh! uh! I got soul and I’m super bad, huh!  

Brown, as well as the lyrics in his song, reflected the new sentiment of the times. Often called “Soul Brother Number One,” Brown’s song “Super Bad” illustrated the connection

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between one’s soul and self-identity. It was the unique soul of African Americans that contained the black aesthetic that set him apart from white mainstream America. It was his soul that gave him clarity and peace in a society clouded with strife. It was his soul that made him want to shout. It was his soul that told him what to do in society. Brown repeatedly proclaims he had soul and thus was “Super Bad.” The word “Super” in his lyrics implies that Brown and his listeners were somehow durable and resilient in the throes of a white mainstream society. Essentially, Brown catapults himself and his audiences to that of a super hero in a seventies society. The song suggested that the African-American community was able to thwart off, overcome, and champion all that was a threat to them during that era.

As the song continues, Brown’s lyrics explored the pure love of himself and the security he has found in this love:

I’m a lover, I love to do my thing ha
An a, an I don’t need no one else
Sometimes I feel so nice, good God!
I jump back, I wanna kiss myself!
I’ve got soul, huh, and I’m super bad, HEY!
I said I’m super bad

These lyrics were not narcissistic in nature, but were in fact a sign of the self-assuredness he has acquired. Amid the rhythmic screams, shouts, and grunts, Brown communicates a message of self-love to his audiences. His audience in the seventies embraced the presence of their unique soul, their super hero status in society, and their self-love.

Overall, Brown was celebrating the black pride that permeated the African-American communities throughout America in the seventies. His song “Super Bad” became an

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5 Brown, “Super Bad.”
anthem to the growing pride and love of self among African Americans. It voiced a new social agenda for African Americans of the era.

In 1970, Brown continued to dominate the Rhythm and Blues charts of the era. His song, “Get Up (I Feel Like Being) A Sex Machine,” topped the charts for several weeks. Although the song had neither a political agenda nor prophetic social message, it contained the cultural and social characteristic of call and response and dance that instantly resonated with the African-American audiences. Brown incorporated the African aesthetic of call and response in the opening dialog of the song between him and his band the JB’s:

Brown: Fellas, I'm ready to get up and do my thing
Band: Yeah go ahead!
Brown: I wanta get into it, man, you know
Band: Go ahead!
Brown: Like a, like a sex machine, man
Band: Yeah go ahead!
Brown: Movin' and doin' it, you know
   Can I count it off?
Band: Go ahead!
Brown: One, two, three, four!

As this traditional African method of communication was employed, it captured the attention of the listening audiences who were quite familiar with the African and African-American musical elements. Within the interaction of the call and response, the listening audiences discovered Brown’s personal intentions in his song. His use of the metaphor “sex machine” was intended to describe his desire to be in continuous motion of dance. His lyric, “Like a sex machine, man... Movin’ and doin’ it, you know,” takes

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on a highly sexual connotation, whose movement was seemingly robotic and unremitting.

As the song “Get Up” continued and became musically robust, Brown continued the usage of the African music tradition of call and response. The lyrical call and response between Brown and band member Robert Byrd, who provided the grunting verbal response “Get on up,” set the communicative tone for the remainder of the song:

Brown: Get up
Byrd: Get on up
Brown: Stay on the scene
Byrd: Get on up
Brown: like a sex machine
Byrd: Get on up

Brown calls the audiences to “Stay on the scene” or the dance floor. He then gives a directive on how to continuously move one’s body while on the dance floor:

Shake your arm, then use your form
Stay on the scene like a sex machine

As indicated by the popularity of the song on the music charts, the audience responded to Brown’s call to dance continuously. With plenty of call and response to extend the song several minutes, Brown used his unique brand of funk to motivate people to move away from the walls of the dance halls out onto the dance floor. His music commanded people to get up and dance and as asserted by Brown, to dance “like a sex machine.” “Get Up” musically and lyrically allowed African Americans an emotional and physical release from the societal woes of war, poverty, and racism that plagued 1970.

In 1971, the African-American aesthetic in culture began to take root and grow. White mainstream society began to appreciate the unique qualities of the black culture

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7 Brown, “Get Up (I Feel Like Being A) Sex Machine.”
8 Ibid.
and its aesthetics as seen in the mainstream popularity of blacks in entertainment. White mainstream society’s acceptance of black culture uncovered similarities between the two races. Consider the 1971 crossover hit “Family Affair” by Sly & the Family Stone, which reached the number one position on both the Rhythm and Blues and the Pop charts. The crossover phenomenon of songs landing the number one position on both charts was rare in its occurrence in the early seventies for funk music. The lyrics in “Family Affair” showcased the similar life experiences of African American and white communities. Sly & the Family Stone’s lead singer Sylvester Stewart or Sly, as he is commonly known, created lyrics about the realities of life. In his first verse, the lyrics poetically describe the undeniable love that a mother has for her two children. They are described as diametrically opposed to one another in behavior. One possesses all the qualities that would make an ideal child, while the other represent all that was undesirable in a child:

One child grows up to be
Somebody that just loves to learn
And another child grows up to be
Somebody you’d just love to burn

The lyric suggests that the love contained within a family structure outweighed the behavior of both sons and that they are loved equally regardless of their actions:

Mom loves the both of them
You see it’s in the blood
Both kids are good to Mom
“Blood’s thicker than mud”
It’s a family affair

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10 Ibid.
Sly uses the phrase “It’s a family affair” universally to suggest that this was an experience that takes place in all family structures regardless of race.

Interestingly, the lyrics by Sly in the song are extremely poignant as they fail to mention in any verse of the song a patriarchal figure and an adoration he may have for his children. Instead, they point to the strong matriarchal dominant structure and sadly, the emergence of the absent African-American father historically common in the African-American community. During chattel enslavement, African-American women were forced to assume leadership positions in a plantation society. Consequently, throughout enslavement, emancipation, Reconstruction, and into contemporary times, the matriarchal figure has been the stayed and sturdy constant in the African-American family. Cultural anthropologist Niara Sudarkasa suggests the African-American matriarchal figures played a large role in binding families and communities together to combat the ills of a white-dominated society in the sixties and seventies.11 Sly’s lyrics restate the prominence of the loving and ever present matriarchal figure in the African-American family and her role in that community that she guided with impunity. The African-American audience is tenderly reminded of this fact through the lyrics.

In the last verse, Sly continues and exposes infidelity in a new marriage and the anguish it creates:

Newlywed a year ago
But you’re still checking each other out
Nobody wants to blow
Nobody wants to be left out
You can’t leave, ‘cause your heart isn’t there
But you can’t stay, ‘cause you been somewhere else!

You can't cry, 'cause you look folk down
But you're cryin' anyway 'cause you're all broke down!
It's a family affair.

Sly’s lyrics offer no resolution to this tragic occurrence in a marriage; they simply state a situation that is familiar in society. Again, the phrase “It’s a Family Affair” universally suggests that infidelity is an occurrence in the family of mankind. Sly’s lyrics vividly expressed the issues of familial love and lost love, which was present in all of humanity. His lyrics did not solely sound as the voice of African Americans, but was inclusive of society as a whole. “Family Affair” was able to effectively connect to a multicultural audience based on the similar realities of life.

The era of the seventies was filled with the promises brought about by the struggles of the previous decade. The seventies ushered in new possibilities and hope for African Americans. However, what became a painful reality of the era was the delay of those very promises from a decade earlier by President Richard Nixon and his administration. Nixon’s administration had failed to adequately enforce Civil Rights laws and regulations. In 1972, James Brown, who was upset with the state of affairs for African Americans and with the empty rhetoric of the presidential administration, voiced his opinion in his song, “Talking Loud and Saying Nothing.” It made clear the sentiments he and the rest of the African-American community had with the Nixon administration:

Like a dull knife
Just ain’t cutting
Just talking loud and saying nothing
Just saying nothing

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12 Sly & The Family Stone, “Family Affair.”

13 Alton Hornsby, Jr., Chronology Of African American History: From 1492 to the Present, 2nd ed. (New York: Gale, 1997), 245.
Just saying nothing

You can’t tell me
How to run my life down
You can’t tell me
How to keep my business sound
You can’t tell me
What I’m doing wrong
When you keep jiving and
Singing that same old funny song

You’re like a dull knife
Just ain’t cutting

Because of empty promises, African Americans as a group marched forward to create paths into government in order to retrieve fairness and equality in a seventies society.

Brown’s lyrics boldly addressed and dismissed the empty rhetoric of the seventies administration. As the song continued, the lyrics exposed the inadequate performance of the administration:

Don’t tell me
How to do my thing
When you can’t, can’t
Can’t do your own

Shape up your bag
Don’t worry ‘bout mine
My thing together
And I’m doing fine

Good luck to you
Just loud and wrong
Then keep on singing that
Same old funny song

Steeped in African-American prose, his lyrics proposed that the government needed to

15 Ibid.
tend to its own affairs to be effective in society. Brown’s lyrics were a classic example of political protest against the undesirable political regime of that era.

In the midst of the political and social stress that was taking place in the seventies, African Americans welcomed the opportunity to musically escape from the harsh realities of life. Brown offered that escape in much of his music. His song “Get On The Good Foot” released in 1972, allowed for a spiritual and social release from the stress of everyday life:

Going down to the crib
Let all hang out
Where soulful people knows what it’s about
Going down to the crib
And let it all hang out
Where soulful people knows what it’s about

Where people do the sign and shake
your hands
And dancin’ to the music the
James Brown band. . . mmm

Utilizing all the lyrical characteristics of the African and African-American aesthetic, Brown used the code word “crib” to describe a place where individuals frequented to unwind from the social trials and tribulations of the era. In his song, the word “crib” was most likely a juke joint or a dance hall. It was at the “crib” where African Americans could be themselves among others who shared the same cultural and social experiences. Brown’s music rhythmically facilitated the atmosphere of release. Interestingly, the following verse mentions the racial interaction amid a stressed and often separated society. His lyrics clearly illustrated some diminishing social and racial segregation.

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among African Americans and whites in public spaces:

Said the long-hair hippies and the
Afro blacks
They all get together across the tracks
And they Party!
Ho! On the good foot
You know they dance on the good foot\(^{17}\)

Brown’s phrase “on the good foot” refers to all things that were positive and that led
toward an individual’s attempt to conduct a stress free life in American society, and any
obstacle that hinders this effort, Brown states is on his “bad foot”:

Ain’t nothing goin’ on now
But the rent
A whole lot of bills and my money’s spent
Mmm
And that’s on my bad foot
Whoa, unh\(^{18}\)

The lyrics in “Get On The Good Foot” voiced the release of stress in the urban
communities.

By 1973, funk music was in the black community to stay. There was a significant
fan base assembled to support the already established bands of funk music, as well as
enough fans to support the new emerging funk bands of the era. At this point, artists of
the genre began to celebrate the music itself. It was during this time the social and
political themes began to slowly diminish. The growing agenda in funk music
increasingly focused on lyrics descriptive of dancing, partying, and visual imagery of
bodies in motion, all of which are forms of “escapism” as noted by musicologist Portia K.

\(^{17}\) Brown, “Good Foot.”

\(^{18}\) Ibid.
The artists and bands that were in pursuit of escapism provided “party” music as the musical platform for audiences to escape from the social ills of the era.

The band Ohio Players excelled at “party” music. They provided a musical platform for visual escapism in the song “Funky Worm” released in 1973. The song followed the African oral tradition of story telling. They introduced their version of the traditional African trickster character or “Esu, one of the African pantheon of gods” or Orisas. The trickster character always took the form of an animal. In this case, the animal was a funky worm. The animal trickster habitually overcame formidable opponents and obstacles with a cleverness to be admired. Br’er Rabbit and the Signifying Monkey are gleaming examples of the African rooted trickster characters.

The Ohio Players used the trickster character to relay the message of tenacity and adaptability needed for African Americans to survive in a seventies society to its audiences. In the song “Funky Worm,” the Ohio Players placed the funk music playing ability into a guitar-clutching worm in celebration of the musical idiom. The funky worm displayed the trickster characteristic of overcoming obstacles by learning to play guitar without any hands. Virginia Hamilton, foremost scholar on the animal trickster character suggests that it was common for the trickster to have human characteristics and to be somewhat comical in nature.

The song begins with a short dialog between the characters “Granny” and the band’s drummer Cornelius Johnson:

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19 Maultsby, 299.


21 Ibid, 48.

Female voice: She's here Mr. Johnson

Mr. Johnson: Ok thank you very much. Granny, they're expecting you
You're a little late
So come right this way
And we'll get started right now Ok

Granny: What? Say it now? Say it now?
Yeah me and the Ohio Players
Gonna tell you about a worm
He's the funkiest worm in the world
Ok sing it fellas

The Ohio Players' use of “Granny” to introduce and authenticate the trickster worm highlights the considerable authoritative and wise presence of the mature matriarch, which was a common presence in the African-American community in seventies. As the song continues, “Granny” validates the fictional worm character’s ability to perform in the funk music idiom. Junie Morrison, the band’s keyboard player, created a sound on the synthesizer that was intended to be the imagined sound of a worm playing a guitar. “Granny” vocally signifies and validates the worm’s skill in the genre:

Granny: Oh that's funky, that's funky.
Like nine cans of shaving powder, that’s funky

Granny: Sang it!
Ohio Players: He plays in a band
Granny: Plays in a band
Ohio Players: Plays guitar without any hands
Pretty good, I might add

Granny: Yeah! When he grabs his guitar and starts to pluck
Everybody wants to get up and dance

The song lyrically created a welcomed and fantastic visual escape from the pressures of society for the listening African-American audience. The lyrics effectively communicated by using *Esu* to communicate to an African-American audience who was culturally familiar with the tradition story telling in song. Funk music has and continues to embrace the African gods or *Orisas* in the urban communities. Author and poet Kaia Niambi Shivers suggests in her poem, “Orisas In The Ghetto,” that this is an occurrence that continues in urban communities today.”25

Another way funk music bands promoted escapism from the social and political ills of American society was in the exclusive promotion of dance. African and African American dance scholar Katrina Hazzard-Gordon in her essay “Dancing Under The Lash: Sociocultural Disruption, Continuity, and Synthesis,” expounds on the evolution of dance and its purpose including escapism which is a phenomena that has its roots on Caribbean and southern plantations.26 The band Kool & The Gang provided the vehicle for a danceable escape in their song “Jungle Boogie” in 1973. In terms of funk music’s elements, the song’s first measure established an immutable groove. Accompanied by blaring horn lines, musical breaks, and minimal lyrics provided a platform that

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24 Ohio Players, “Funky Worm.”


encouraged dance:

Get down (4 times)

Ahhhhhhhhhhhh!

Jungle Boogie
Jungle Boogie
Get It On (2 times)

Jungle Boogie (3 times)
Get Down With The Boogie
Jungle Boogie

African cosmology indicates that dance is the expression of the spirit’s emotions when words will not suffice. John S. Mbiti, the foremost authority on African Religions and cosmology, adds that dance is the “most powerful means of communication in African traditional life.” The recurrence of dance in funk music stemmed from the African tradition that was embedded in African-American culture of the seventies era. As African Americans were increasingly frustrated by the social, political, and economic situation of the seventies, dance was quite possibly the only way one could release and communicate their bound emotions. Dance was the most effective way to escape from social realities. “Jungle Boogie,” with its simple and sparse lyrics and pronounced rhythms, provided a platform for release in the form of dance.

In 1974, funk music was in full bloom and was an integral part of the African-American society. Funk bands and groups were topping the charts and had amassed a large African-American following. The groups and bands of the era began to widen their

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lyrical themes to include accounts of male and female relationships amid the dividing issues of money, racism, and sexism. Author Michele Wallace in her book *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* written in 1979, took a controversial stance as she examined the African-American male and female relationships of the seventies. The issue of black male and female relationships stemmed from men and their active-upfront role in the Civil Rights Movement and control over the Black Power Movement and for women their increasing involvement in the growing feminist movement of the seventies, which created a power struggle within relationships of the era. Karenga was one of many who had a problem with Wallace’s comments and latter suggested about African-American male and female relationships problems that it was the lack viable “connections” among the two.\(^{29}\) He stated, “There are four basic connections which plague. . . Black male/female relationships: 1) the cash connection; 2) the flesh connection; 3) the force connection; and 4) the dependency connection.”\(^{30}\) Regardless of the intellectuals pontificating over the status of black love in society, the lyrics containing these relationships were rapidly becoming the new thematic trend in popular funk music of the mid-seventies. The Ohio Players climbed to the top of the charts again with their hit song “Fire” in 1974. The song “Fire” lyrically celebrated the black male’s relationship and their fascination with the black woman’s body and the physical effect it had on them:

The way you walk and talk really sets me off
To a full alarm child, yes it does, uh
The way you squeeze and tease, knocks to

\(^{29}\) Karenga, 292.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 292-294.
me my knees
‘till I’m smokin’, baby, baby.\

The beauty of the black female body and its role in the African-American community during the seventies was on display via the Blaxploitation films of the era. Images of the black woman’s body became highly sexualized in these films. The Ohio Players captured that highly sexualized image on their album covers and through their lyrics. The song “Fire” was riddled with African-American prose and metaphoric vernacular that spoke directly to an audience who were steeped in the language found in the African-American urban communities:

The way you swerve and curve,
really wrecks my nerves
And I’m so excited child Yeah, woo, woo
The way you push, push let’s me know that
you’re good
You’re gonna get your wish, oh, no

When you shake what you got, and girl,
you’ve got a lot
You’re really somethin’ child yes you are
When you’re hot you’re hot, you really shoot your shot
You’re dyn-o-mite, child, yeah

Well, I can tell by your game
you’re gonna start a flame Ahh, baby, baby
I’m ‘bout to choke from the smoke, got me
tightenin’ up my stroke
Do you feel it, girl, yeah

Gates’ theory supported the communication method the Ohio players used to inform the listener about the fascination they have with the black female body. The listening

31 Ibid.
audience was familiar with the vernacular used and therefore truly understood the meaning behind style and prose of the lyrics. It was with the coded vernacular that the Ohio Players were able to lyrically connect to their African-American audiences.

The year, 1975, marked the middle of the seventies’ decade. Many social changes were achieved and yet African Americans struggled to thrive and integrate into the American society. The hopes and promises of the African-American community were coming to fruition albeit painstakingly slow. During this era, the Isley Brothers boldly offered a statement on rising above the power structures that existed. The political protest song, “Fight The Power” (1975), reached the top of the charts during a time when most African Americans were not keen on confronting the political power structure of the day. Rather, they were in the midst of trying to escape the realities of it. The fight to create an equal society for African Americans through the means of protest reminiscent to that of the grass roots organizations of the sixties was non-existent in the mid seventies. The Isley Brothers song reminded African Americans that the struggle for equality and social liberation still existed well into the seventies era:

Time is truly wastin’
There’s no guarantee, yeah
Smiles in the makin’
You gotta fight the powers that be

Got so many forces
Stayin’ on the scene
Givin’ up all around me
Faces full o’ pain

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33 The Isley Brothers, “Fight The Power,” track no. 7 (CD), performed by The Isley Brothers, Isley Brothers Greatest Hits Volume 1, Sony 2002.
The lyrics contained in the chorus of the song used the word “music” as a metaphor to indicate the voice of the African-American experience in a white mainstream society. The chorus clearly illustrated the social marginalization of African Americans in the era of the seventies:

Chorus
I try to play my music
(They say my music’s too loud)
I tried talkin’ about it
(I got the big run around)
And when I rolled with the punches
(I got knocked on the ground)
By all this bullshit going down\textsuperscript{34}

Furthermore, the issue of marginalization and secondary citizenship of African Americans in the seventies were supported by the federal government. For example, Daniel P. Moynihan, domestic advisor to President Richard Nixon, suggested in a memo to the President in reference to the continuous pleading by African-American leaders to address the dire social and political situation they face, “the time may have come when the issue of race could benefit from a period of benign neglect.”\textsuperscript{35} Moynihan’s memo was leaked to the public. Essentially, Moynihan advised President Nixon to ignore and neglect the pleas of the African-American community and their call for equality. Needless to say, African-American leaders were outraged and further accused Nixon and his administration of trying to “wipe out” two decades of Civil Rights progress.\textsuperscript{36} The lyrics of “Fight The Power” addressed the realities of African Americans with no apologies to the white mainstream power structure.

\textsuperscript{34} The Isley Brothers, “Fight The Power.”

\textsuperscript{35} Hornsby, Jr., 204.

\textsuperscript{36} Hornsby, Jr., 204-205.
On the other hand, in the same year, the Ohio Players again continued to focus on the dynamics of the male and female relationships of the seventies. Their hit song “Love Rollercoaster” neglected the ills of society and the political struggles of the day. It alluded to the trials and tribulations indicative of all male and female relationships. The lyrics of “Love Rollercoaster” are highly metaphoric, insinuating the experience of a relationship to a roller coaster ride. The Ohio Players used the African aesthetic of call and response, a familiar vernacular, and narrative story telling to relay a tale to their audiences on the characteristics of love between a man and a woman:

Rollercoaster of love
Rollercoaster
Whooo, Whooo, Whooo

Your love is like a rollercoaster baby baby
I refuse to ride
(Why don’t cha ride child)
Your love is like a rollercoaster baby baby
I refuse to ride
Riiiiide

Huh huh

Don’t wanna ride girl, Yeah

Well well

Rollercoaster, (Say what) of love
Rollercoaster
(Love rollercoaster girl)
Rollercoaster, of love
Rollercoaster
Whoo Whoo Whoo
Rollercoaster, love rollercoaster child, of love
Rollercoaster
lovin you is beautiful

. . . . . . . . . . . . .
Let me ride one more time\textsuperscript{37}

Regardless of the ebb and flow of love, the lead singer Leroy “Sugarfoot” Bonner indicates the beauty of the relationship and the desire to still participate in it as he states, “Let me ride one more time.” The song’s title and the lyrics were fitting when they made reference to “roller coasters,” which were experiencing a resurgence in popularity in the mid seventies.\textsuperscript{38}

The year, 1976, ushered in the Bicentennial of America’s independence from England. It was a celebration clad with American flags and ribbons of red, white, and blue. Although the white American mainstream was in the midst of this celebration, African Americans continued to face a slow changing social and political climate. Also, the pressures of forced integration, forced busing, and the acclimation of returning African-American soldiers from the Vietnam War into American society created an atmosphere of hostility in the black communities. However, Earth Wind And Fire (EWF) with their polished brand of funk music offered the listening audience a necessary escape from an increasingly edgy society. The group’s song titled “Getaway” offered that escape if only temporal in nature:

\begin{verbatim}
Getaway
Let’s leave today
Let’s get awaaay

So you say you tried
But you just can’t find the pleasure
People around you givin’ you pressure
Try to resist all the hurt that’s all around you
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{37} Ohio Players, “Love Rollercoaster,” track no. 1 (CD), performed by Ohio Players, 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Masters-The Millennium Collection: The Best Of The Ohio Players, Mercury Records 2000.

If you taste it, it will haunt you

So come, take me by the hand,
Well leave this troubled land
I know we can, I know we can, I know we can
Yeeeeeeeaaah

Getaway
Let’s leave today

With its up-tempo rhythm and bright and blaring staccato horn lines, “Getaway’s” musical elements masked the seriousness of the message contained in the lyrics. They implied that the conditions in the seventies forced African Americans to desire to remove themselves from white mainstream society. With the unabashed escapism and utopianism, the song’s messages are confirmed by their extravagant literalism:

Watch for the signs
That lead in the right direction
Not to heed them is a bad reflection
They’ll show you the way
Into what you have been seeking
To ignore them you’re only cheating

Lay awake every night
Till the sun comes up in the morning
Nothing exciting, it all seems boring
Make up your mind which way to go about it
To your road, you just don’t doubt it.

So come, take me by the hand,
Well leave this troubled land
I know we can get away

39 Earth Wind And Fire, “Getaway,” track no. 17 (CD), performed by Earth Wind And Fire, Earth Wind And Fire Greatest Hits, Sony 1998.


41 Earth Wind And Fire, “Getaway.”
The song’s lyrics were revealing in their theme of escapism. The African-American audience connected with the sentiments in the song. “Getaway” was number one on the Rhythm and Blues charts for several weeks. Interestingly, the song did not achieve a top ten position on white mainstream charts. Its absence from those charts made a statement in terms of the white mainstream’s satisfaction with society in the seventies. The white mainstream society simply did not feel the need to “getaway,” which further exposed the dismal plight of African Americans in the seventies who felt it was imperative that they did.

In 1977, the theme of the male and female relationships continued with the band Con Funk Shun. They released the song “Ffun,” which was a straightforward love song that chronicled an evening of a committed and loving couple. The title of the song was spelled with two F’s, which implied the sincerity and extreme amount of fun the couple intended to have. It had an up-tempo groove and lyrically described the anticipated pleasure of a couple in an urban community. The lyrics were simplistic in nature, yet still underscored the thriving male and female relationships in the African-American communities across the nation:

I want to thank you
For your love so true
Your tender loving
Keeps my mind on you

I’ll pick you up and
We’ll go out and dance
You kiss my lips and
We’ll have fun, fun, fun

Make it or break it
Got to make you mine
Kissing and hugging
All the time
You are my one
And only under the sun
Give me your hand and
We’ll have fun, fun, fun.42

Similar to several other songs of the seventies, the lyrics of “Ffun” softly appealed to a release from society in the form of dance. The lyrics of the song also created an image of an African-American couple seldom seen in the public sphere.

In 1978, the band Parliament catapulted the collective minds of the African-American community out of the chaotic world of white mainstream society and tested the boundaries of escapism through imagery. The band offered their futuristic and socially conscious brand of funk music. The group led by eccentric thinker, lyricist, and musician George Clinton, was well established and extremely popular in the urban cities throughout the U.S. by the late seventies. In 1978, his band landed a number one hit single on the Rhythm and Blues chart with “Flashlight.” The song was deeply rooted in the African oral storytelling tradition, which encompassed moral tales, domestic tales, stories of praise, and stories meant to entertain.43 “Flashlight” consisted of fictional characters that fit into the fantastic world of the band Parliament and the otherworldly mind of George Clinton. The group’s fictional world and host of fictional characters within that world were well established in prior songs when “Flashlight” was released. The song tells the story of the fictional character Sir Nose D’Voidoffunk who was reluctant to dance. Through prior songs, it was established that he was incapable of dancing. In his anger, Sir Nose D’Voidoffunk traveled the universe creating societies


43 Floyd, Jr., 24.
void of dancing. The following lyrics tell the tale of Sir Nose who falls asleep and begins to dream:

Sir Nose: Now I lay me down to sleep
I guess I’ll go count the sheep,
Oh, ’cause I will never dance  

In order to dance, the character Star Child, who restores dance to all societies that Sir Nose has previously ruined, ordered that Sir Nose needed to find the funk to dance. In an attempt to “help him find the funk,” Star Child utilizes several types of lights that range from a flashlight to a stoplight to help uncover the presumably elusive funk for Sir Nose:

Parliament sings: Help him find the funk
Star Child: Ho
Parliament sings: Most of all he needs the funk
Sir Nose: Ha, don’t
Parliament sings: Help him find the funk
Star Child: I know you will Dance, sucker
Parliament sings: Most of all he needs the funk
Star Child: Shine the spotlight on him
Parliament sings: Help him find the funk
Sir Nose: Oh funk me!

Parliament sings: Flash light Flash light
(oh-ho-ho)
Spot light
Neon light (neon light)
Streetlight (streetlight)  

In the end, Sir Nose finds the funk and begins to dance.

Star Child: Dance Nose! You know you on my funk street
Sir Nose: Oh, funk me!
Parliament sings: Ha da da dee da hada hada da da

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45 Ibid.
Star Child: Get on down Nose I like it. Dance then
Sir Nose: I think I found the funk

Parliament sings: Everybody’s got a little light under the sun

The deeper meaning of this tale is difficult to ascertain as the lyrics are highly metaphoric, which was typical for Parliament. However, when closely examined, the lyrics discussed the issue of integration into society and the dream to effortlessly “dance” or function in it as well. Historically, African Americans have labored to fit into American society. Racism, segregation, and various laws have obstructed the smooth transition into society. Parliament’s lyrics, visually sought to create an easy transition into American society by offering the characters Sir Nose, who represented the African-American community and Star Child, who represented the hope that one can find a way into society through focused determination.

Bandleader George Clinton also headed the band Funkadelic in the seventies. The band contained most of the same musicians as his Parliament band. Funkadelic recorded the song “One Nation Under Groove” that reached the top of the Rhythm and Blues chart in 1978. George Clinton’s bands Parliament and Funkadelic both had hit songs “Flashlight” and “One Nation Under A Groove” simultaneously appear on the Rhythm and Blues chart. Clinton’s latter song lyrically described the obstacles that were conquered in the late seventies as well as offered the call for African Americans to take advantage of the new social and political opportunities in their own unique way. The lyrics boldly suggested the prevailing new ideology of the time:

\[46\] Parliament, “Flashlight.”
Here’s a chance to dance our way
out of our constrictions
Gonna be freakin’!
Up and down
Hang up alley way
With the groove our
Only guide
We shall all be moved

Ready or not here we come
Gettin’ down on the one which
We believe in
One nation under a groove

Feet don’t fail me now\(^{47}\)

Words such as “our” and “we” in the lyrics clearly indicated the African-American community’s collective intentions of acting as one to seize the moment of the times and to take advantage of new opportunities available to them in society. The lyrics attempted to gather African Americans together under one accord as “one nation” to tackle the new black agenda.

Finally, in 1979, popular funk music lyrics decidedly strayed away from themes of social and political protest. The theme of “party” music became the new trend in popular funk music. This theme soon became the single most identifying factor or motif in popular funk music of the late seventies. Consider the musically talented band The Bar-Kays and their song “Move Your Boogie Body,” where their lyrics followed the new trend in popular funk music. The lyrics evoked the listening audiences to dance:

Listen here now while we sing it in your ear
Whoa oo oohoo yeah

Move your boogie body you’ll feel all right
Move your boogie body let’s dance all night

Stretch out and let your body move
(Stretch out) you ain’t got
Nothing but time

We’re having a good time
(Good time, mighty fine good time)
You ain’t got nothing to lose

The song contained straightforward lyrics that beckoned the listener to get up and move their body and dance. It is on the dance floor that one can experience escapism and a release from the socioeconomic pressures of society in the seventies:

And now you’ve got to
Let yourself go
You won’t regret you got up no no

You’re gonna be dancing
(Dancing, dancing, dancing)
You’ll be the star of the show

Were here to let you know
(Let you know let you know)
If you want to boogie
Get out on the dance floor
Let’s go, let go.

Funk music’s growing trend of “party” music continued into the eighties. As the seventies ended, themes of political and social protest were absent in popular funk music. As the seventies waned, so did the popularity of funk music. By the mid eighties, funk music was not a significant part of the African-American music scene, and it struggled to survive amid several growing musical styles and trends of that era such as Hip Hop and British New Wave. Funk music never again achieved the popularity it once held in the


49 Ibid.
seventies and no longer voiced the same political, social sentiments, and concerns of the
first half of the seventies.
CONCLUSION

The era of the 1970s was indeed a time of change for the African-American community. Faced with new social and political challenges, African Americans forged their way into new public spaces. Equipped with a new self-identity, they set out to establish the dreams promised by the hard fought battles of the Civil Rights era. Accompanying them on their journey was funk music, which carried with it a sound that was birthed amid a time of struggle and served as the constant reminder of Black Pride in a white mainstream society. The lyrics in funk music were able to narrate the social and political climate of the times with an aesthetic and vocal vernacular that instantly connected and championed the concerns and sentiments of the African-American community. This research has undoubtedly illustrated and confirmed how the lyrics of popular funk music have astoundingly acted as the voice of African Americans during the seventies. In addition, popular funk music lyrics were able to detail the social and political events that affected the African-American community.

Popular funk music lyrics were the voice for African Americans in the seventies as they filled the void left by the assassinated leaders and absent revolutionaries. The lyrics directed the African-American community out of the Civil Rights struggle in the form of protests songs and resistance rhetoric. Artists such as James Brown and Sly & The Family Stone pioneered protest rhetoric in song at the dawn of the seventies decade. In time, other funk artists informed the African-American community on how to respond
amid the social and political events of the seventies with musical themes. The lyrics voiced the climate of the times and ushered in a sense of self-pride that embraced the unique African-American culture. The lyrics often espoused ideals of strength and solidarity as a form of communal protest. As the music’s lyrics served as the voice of African Americans, it wonderfully utilized traditional African musical elements such as call and response, story telling in song, and the use of metaphors as well as many others. Its use of African musical elements established funk music’s ancestral connection to the music of Africa. This connection to Africa also culturally authenticated the voice of funk music as a means of communicating the sentiments of African Americans in a communal setting.

As the decade of the seventies unfolded, the lyrical content evolved and revealed the social pressures of the era that plagued African Americans during the mid to late seventies. The lyrics at that time voiced to the community a common need to escape the newfound social pressures in white mainstream society. Most often the lyrics suggested dance as a means of escapism. Groups such as Ohio Players, Earth Wind And Fire, Kool & The Gang, were known for their themes that allowed audiences to escape to another place through dance. It was clear to ascertain that funk music and its lyrics pushed to promote escapism in the latter part of the seventies. Funk music also displayed in song the thriving male and female relationships amid the struggle for social power that stemmed from the male dominated Black Power Movement and the onset of the feminist movement. The genre of funk music was much more than the so-called “party” music. It made known the realities of life for African Americans in the era of the seventies and offered several coping mechanisms.
Popular funk music lyrics played a prominent role in telling the story of African-American history in the era as well. The lyrics have preserved and maintained historical events using the distinctive voice of the African American. Historians and ethnomusicologists alike may want to consider funk music and its lyrics as one of many tools to use in the study of a culture and its people in the latter half of this century.

Researchers have studied in detail all genres of African-American music except funk music. Funk music has been neglected and marginalized in white mainstream society for reasons linked to utter neglect to white mainstream media’s lack of understanding and comprehension of its rhythm, language and culture that surrounded the music. As a result, funk music’s sound, style, and lyrical content have had minimal attention in comparison to other African-American musical genres. This research hopes to begin a much-needed academic dialogue on the genre of funk music.

Finally, the study of funk music offers a new look at the events that shaped the realities for African Americans in the seventies. The music and lyrics offered more than a danceable rhythm, slick prose, and images of Afros. It offers the researcher an opportunity to physically connect with the rhythms of the era and the emersion into a musical genre that is lyrically beyond compare. As researchers fully begin to discover the scope and depth of the genre, they will uncover more of its role and voice in the African-American community. They will also find that acquiring the knowledge of Funk music is truly its own reward in terms of understanding African Americans amid the changing times in the seventies.
APPENDIX

Songs in this appendix are listed in alphabetical order. The song’s highest rank achieved on *Billboard*’s Rhythm and Blues charts (R&B) and Popular (Pop) charts are immediately noted following the name of the record label and are incased in parenthesis, ( ).

"Family Affair"
Sly & The Family Stone, 1971, Epic Records. (#1 R&B/#1 Pop)

It’s a family affair (4 times)

One child grows up to be
Somebody that just loves to learn
And another child grows up to be
Somebody you’d just love to burn

Mom loves the both of them
You see it’s in the blood
Both kids are good to Mom
"Blood’s thicker than mud"

It’s a family affair (2 times)

Newlywed a year ago
But you’re still checking each other out Hey!
Nobody wants to blow
Nobody wants to be left out
You can’t leave, ‘cause your heart isn’t there
But you can’t stay, ‘cause you been somewhere else!
You can’t cry, ‘cause you’ll look broke down
But you’re cryin’ anyway ‘cause you’re all broke down!
It's a family affair, (Repeat out)

“Ffun”
By Con Funk Shun, 1977, Mercury. (#1 R&B/#23 Pop)

Oh, babe, yeah, yeah
Well, well....

I want to thank you
For your love so true
Your tender loving
Keeps my mind on you

I’ll pick you up and
We’ll go out and dance
You kiss my lips and
We’ll have fun, fun, fun

Make it or break it
Got to make you mine
Kissing and hugging
All the time

You are my one
And only under the sun
Give me your hand and
We’ll have fun, fun, fun

Oh, we’re having fun

(Repeat Song)

Fun, fun, fun (3 times)

“Fight The Power”
By The Isley Brothers, 1975, T-Neck. (#1 R&B/#4 Pop)

Time is truly wastin’
There’s no guarantee, yeah
Smiles in the makin’
You gotta fight the powers that be

Got so many forces
Stayin’ on the scene, yeah
Givin’ up all around me
Faces full o’ pain
(CHORUS)
I try to play my music
(They say my music’s too loud)
I tried talkin’ about it
(I got the big run around)
And when I rolled with the punches
(I got knocked on the ground)
By all this bullshit going down

Time is truly wastin’
There’s no guarantee, yeah
Smiles in the makin’
You gotta fight the powers that be

I don’t understand it
People wanna see, yeah
Those that got the answers
Red tape in the way
I could take you it’s easy
That’s just half the fun, oh boy
Seeking satisfaction
Keeps me on the run

(CHORUS)

Time is truly wastin’
There’s no guarantee
Smile’s in the makin’
You gotta fight the powers that be

If you and I can - we got the power
Fight it, fight the power
Fight it........baby, baby, baby, yeah
Fight it, fight the power
(repeat out)

“Fire”
By The Ohio Players, 1974, Mercury Records. (#1 R&B/#1 Pop)

Hey, ha, huh-huh
Hey, hey, hey, no, (Ow, now)
Hey, ha, huh-huh
Hey, hey, hey, no

Fire (Uh) [Uh]
Fire (Say it slow) [Uh, uh]
Fire (Woo, woo, woo)
Fire

The way you walk and talk really sets me off
To a full alarm child, yes, it does, uh
The way you squeeze and tease, knocks to
me my knees
‘till I’m smokin’, baby, baby

The way you swerve and curve, really wrecks
my nerves
And I’m so excited, child [Yeah], woo, woo
The way you push, push let’s me know that
you’re good
[You’re gonna get your wish] Oh, no

Fire (What I said, child, ow)
Fire (Uh-huh)
Got me burnin’, Got me burnin’ (3 times)

Woo...hoo...hoo...baby
Somethins’ burnin, burnin’ baby
Ooh. Ooh, ooh, ooh
Burnin, burnin’ baby
Oh, baby

Throw some water on me
When you shake what you got, and girl,
you’ve got a lot
You’re really somethin’, child, yes, you are
When you’re hot you’re hot, you really shoo
your shot
You’re dyn-o-mite, child, yeah

Well, I can tell by your game
you’re gonna start a flame ahh, baby, baby
I’m ‘bout to choke from the smoke, got me
tightenin’ up my stroke
Can you feel it, girl, yeah

Got me burning (repeat out)
“Flashlight”

Now, I lay me down to sleep
Ooh, I just can’t find a beat
Flash light (ohh, I will never dance)
Flash light (3 times)

Ha-da-da-dee-da-ha-da-ha-da-da-da-da-

Oh, it’s no use

Flash light
Red light
Neon light
Ooh, stop light

Now I lay me down to sleep
I guess I’ll go count the sheep
Oh, ‘cause I will never dance

(Oh, don’t make me do it)
(Dance, sucker ooh-ha-ha)
(Oww, Get him)

Most of all he needs the funk (shine it)
Help him find the funk (ha, funk it)
Most of all he needs the funk
Help him find the funk (get him)
Most of all he needs the funk
(I know we can get him)

Help him find the funk (ho)
Most of all he needs the funk (ha, don’t)
Help him find the funk
(I know you will Dance, sucker)
Most of all he needs the funk
(shine the spotlight on him)
Help him find the funk (oh funk me)

Ha-da-da-dee-da-ha-da-ha-da-da-da-da-
(Dance, Nose You know you on my funk street)
Oh, funk me
Ha da da dee da hada hada da da (get on down
Nose I like it Dance, then)
Flash light
Flash light (oh-ho-ho)
Spot light
Neon light (neon light)
Street light (street light)

Oh-ho, ha-ha

Everybody`s got a little light under the sun

Shine it on the funk (3 times)

Most of all he need the funk
Help him find the funk

Most of all he need the funk
(Ha-da-da-dee-da-hada-hada-da-da)
Help him find the funk
(x3)

Oh
Flash light (flash light, flash light) (2 times)
Flash light (oh, flash light) (2 times)
Spot light (spot light)
Neon light (ooooh, neon light)
Flash light (ooh, flash light ho)
Stop light (stop light)

Now I lay me down to sleep
I guess I`ll go count the sheep
Shake your funk (Ha-da-da-dee-da-ha-da-ha-da-da-da)
Shake your funk (Ha-da-da-dee-da-ha-da-ha-da-da-da)
I think I found the funk

Flash light (flash light)
Day light (day light)
Spot light (spot light)
Red light (ohhh-hooo, red light)

Everybody`s got a little light under the sun

Everybody’s got a little light under the sun
Under the sun (repeat out)

“Funky Worm”
By The Ohio Players, 1973, Westbound Records. (#1 R&B/#15 Pop)

Female voice: She’s here Mr. Johnson

Mr. Johnson: Ok thank you very much.
Granny, they’re expecting you
You’re a little late
So come right this way
And we’ll get started right now Ok

Granny: What? Say it now? Say it now? Yeah
Me and the Ohio Players
Gonna tell you about a worm
He’s the funkiest worm in the world
Ok sing it fellas

Ohio Player: There’s a worm in the
ground Yes, it is

Granny: That’s right, That’s right

Ohio Players sing: He lives six feet down

Granny: Six feet down

Ohio Players sing: He only comes around…

Granny: When he wants to get down
But when he comes out of his hole
He sounds something like this.
Oh that’s funky, that’s funky.
Like nine cans of shaving powder,
that’s funky
Come on wit it again fellas,
come on wit it

Ohio Players: In a foreign land, yeah

Granny: Sang it!
Ohio Players sing: He plays in a band

Granny: Plays in a band

Ohio Players sing: Plays guitar without any hands
Pretty good, I might add

Granny: Yeah! When he grabs his guitar and starts to pluck
Everybody wants to get up and dance
Aawh, get it baby!
I'm his manager, he he yeah
Gonna make a million dollars
I get it all too, he can't spend it
Don't stop now honey, get down
That's it, That's it
Don't, don't don't fight the feeling
Don't fight it
Ok, that's enough get out of here
Here he goes people listen to this
This is really funky get out of here
Goin' back in his hole
Just the same way he came out
Do we get paid for this?

Mr. Johnson: Yes,

Granny: I wanna know

Mr. Johnson: Yes of course!

Granny: We do? OK, ok alright.

“Getaway”
By Earth Wind & Fire, 1976, Columbia. (#1 R&B/#12 Pop)

Getaway
Let's leave today
Let's get awaaay

So you say you tried
But you just can't find the pleasure
People around you givin' you pressure
Try to resist all the hurt that's all around you
If you taste it, it will haunt you

(Chorus)
So come, take me by the hand,
Well leave this troubled land

I know we can (4 times)
Yeeeeeaaah

Getaway
Let’s leave today
What you know, what you know, what you know
Let’s get awaaaaaaay
What cha, what cha, what cha what cha know

Watch for the signs
That lead in the right direction
Not to heed them is a bad reflection
They’ll show you the way
Into what you have been seeking
To ignore them you’re only cheating

(Chorus)

Lay awake every night
Till the sun comes up in the morning
Nothing exciting, it all seems boring
Make up your mind which way to go about it
To your road, you just don’t doubt it.

(Chorus)

Getaway
What cha, what cha, what cha what cha
Let’s leave today
What cha, what cha, what cha what cha know
Let’s get a way
What cha, what cha, what cha what cha
Let’s leave today

Get away
Let’s get a way
Let’s leave today
Let’s get awaaay

Get away
Leave today
Getaway
Yeah yeah yeah

"Get up (I Feel Like Being a Sex Machine)"
By James Brown, 1970, King Records. (#2 R&B/#15 Pop)

Brown: Fellas, I’m ready to get up and do my thing
Band: Yeah go ahead!
Brown: I wanna get into it, man, you know
Band: Go ahead!
Brown: Like a, like a sex machine, man
Band: Yeah go ahead!
Brown: Movin’ and doin’ it, you know
Can I count it off?
Band: Go ahead

Brown: One, two, three, four!

Get up, (get on up) (2 times)
Stay on the scene, (get on up), like a sex machine, (get on up) (3 times)

Wait a minute!
Shake your arm, then use your form
Stay on the scene like a sex machine
You got to have the feeling sure as you’re born
Get it together, right on, right on.

Get up, (get on up) (3times)

Hah!

Get up, (get on up) (4 times)

You said, you said you got the,
You said the feeling,
You got to get
You give me the fever ‘n’ a cold sweat.
The way I like it, is the way it is,
I got mine don’t worry ‘bout his

Get up, (get on up)
Stay on the scene, (get on up), like a
sex machine, (get on up)
Get up, (get on up) (2 times)

Brown: Bobby! Should I take ‘em to the bridge?
Bobby: Go Ahead!
Brown: Take ‘em on to the bridge!
Bobby: Take ‘em to the bridge!
Brown: Can I take ‘em to the bridge?
Band: Yeah!
Brown: Take ‘em to the bridge?
Band: Go Ahead!
Brown: Hit me now!

Come on!
Stay on the scene, like a sex machine!
The way I like it, is the way it is
I got mine, (dig it!), he got his

Stay on the scene, like a lovin’ machine
(2 times)
Stay on the scene

Brown: I wanna count it off one more time now
Band: Go ahead!
Brown: You wanna hear it like it did on the
top fellas?
Band: Yeah!
Brown: Hear it like it did on the top?
Brown: Yeah!
Hit it now!

Get on up, (get on up) (4 times)

Stay on the scene, (get on up), like a
lovin’ machine, (get on up)
Get up, (get on up)

Taste, (get on up)
Of Piano, (get on up) (2 times)

(Piano Break)

Get up, (get on up) (2 times)
Stay on the scene, (get on up), like a
sex machine, (get on up)
You gotta have the feelin, (get on up)
Sure as you’re born, (get on up)

Get it together, right on, right on
right on, right on, (right on, right on)
(3 times)

Get up, (get on up) (2 times)

And then, shake your money maker,
Shake your money maker, (6 times)

Get up, (get on up) (5 times)

(Piano Break)

Huh!
Get up, (get on up) (3 times)

Brown: Can we hit it like we did one more time,
from the top
Can we hit like that one more time
Band: One more time!
Brown: One more time!
Let’s hit it and quit!
Band: Go ahead!

Brown: Can we hit it and quit?
Band: Yeah! (3 times)

Brown: Hit it!

“Get On The Good Foot”
By James Brown, 1972, Polydor. (#1 R&B/#18 Pop)

Qué pasa people, qué pasa ...hit me!
Ooh!
Get on down like a
Unh!
I wanna get on the good foot
Ho! Good foot
I got to get on the good foot

Going down to the crib
Let all hang out
Where soulful people knows what it’s about
Going down to the crib
And let it all hang out
Where soulful people knows what it’s about

Where people do the sign and shake your hands
And dancin’ to the music James Brown band... mmm

They’re dancing on the good foot
I got to get on the good foot
Got to do it on the good foot
Do it with the good foot

Said the long-hair hippies and the afro blacks
They all get together across the tracks
And they PARTY
Ho! On the good foot
You know they dance on the good foot
Dance on the good foot

Ain’t nothing goin’ on now
But the rent
A whole lot of bills and my money’s spent Mmm
And that’s on my bad foot
Whoa, unh

You know my face gettin’ short and I got the blues
I got a funky job and I paid my dues on the good foot
Ho! On the good foot
I got to get on the good foot
Hey! On the good foot
Get on the good foot
Come over!

Hit it Jabs’
You got to
Get it
Get it
Sharper now, unh!

Come on, get it-ah Hunh!

(Instumental)

On the good foot (3 times)
Get on the good foot
On the good foot (2 times)
Ho! Get on the good foot
On the good foot

Bass! Bass-ah!

Get it Jabs (2 times)

Ho!
Stop-Bass

Play on it now

Come on
Get it-ah

Get it
Get on the good foot
Ooh!
I got to get on the good foot
Ooh!
Get on the good foot
Ho!
Take care of business, sister, I'm your fella.

“Jungle Boogie”
By Kool & The Gang, 1973, Delite. (#2 R&B/#4 Pop)

Get down, Get down, Get down, Get down
(4 times)
Ahhhhhhhhhhhh !

Jungle Boogie (2 times)
Get it on
(2 times)

Jungle Boogie (3 times)

Get down with the boogie
Jungle Boogie
(Come and shake it around)

Jungle Boogie
Get up with the get down
Jungle Boogie
Boogie baby
Jungle Boogie
Get the boogie
Jungle Boogie
Bruhuhuhu
Jungle Boogie
Get up with the get down
Jungle Boogie
Get the Boogie
Jungle Boogie
Let me jump In
Jungle Boogie
Down with the boogie
Get down, Get down, jungle boogie,
get down, get down (6 times)

Uh, get it
Feel the funk y’all
Let me feel the load

Get down with the boogie
I’m gonna rock with the jungle boogie
Get down
Get down with the boogie say
Ough!
Get down say ugh (2 times)
till you feel it y’all
Get down y’all
Get down
Get funky ya’ll
With the get down
“Love Rollercoaster”
By Ohio Players, 1975, Mercury Records. (#1 R&B/#1 Pop)

Rollercoaster, of love
(Say what)
Rollercoaster, (ha, ha)
Whooo, Whooo, Whooo
(4 times)

Your love is like a rollercoaster baby baby
I refuse to ride
(Why don’t cha ride child)
Your love is like a rollercoaster baby baby
I refuse to ride
Riiiiide

Huh huh

Don’t wanna ride girl, Yeah

Well well

Rollercoaster, (Say what) of love
Rollercoaster
(Love rollercoaster girl)
Rollercoaster, of love
Rollercoaster
Whoo Whoo Whoo
Rollercoaster (love rollercoaster child) of love
Rollercoaster
(lovin you is beautiful)

Your love is like a rollercoaster baby baby
I refuse to ride
(a crazy ride girl)
Your love is like a rollercoaster baby baby
I refuse to ride
Riiiiiiide

(Instrumental)

Rollercoaster (love rollercoaster girl)
Rollercoaster,
(lovin you is crazy crazy girl child)
Rollercoaster of love
(Let me ride one more time)  
Whoo whoo whoo  
Rollercoaster of love  
High (4 times)  

Your love is like a rollercoaster baby baby  
I refuse to ride (repeat)  

(Why don’t you let me ride sometime)  
(I wanna ride)  
(Ride on it)  

“Move Your Boogie Body”  
By The Bar-Kays, 1979, Mercury. (#3 R&B/#57 Pop)  

Listen here now while we sing it in your ear  
Whoa oo oohoo yeah (4 times)  

Move your boogie body you’ll feel alright  
Move your boogie body let’s dance all night  
(2 times)  

Stretch out and let your body move  
(Stretch out) you ain’t got  
Nothing but time  

We’re having a good time  
(Good time, mighty fine good time)  
You ain’t got nothing to lose  

And now you’ve got to  
Let yourself go  
You won’t regret you got up no no  

You’re gonna be dancing  
(Dancing, dancing, dancing)  
You’ll be the star of the show  

Were here to let you know  
(Let you know let you know)  
If you want to boogie  
Get out on the dance floor  
Let’s go, let go  

Move your boogie body, all right  
Move your boogie body, let’s dance all night
C’mon and party until the morning light
That’s just the way how I feel (c’mon)
Gonna have a good time
(Good time, mighty fine good time)

Cause we are funk ing in here

Get it on until you feel it up
This ain’t no time to give up no no
Cause when your body’s hot
(Body’s hot, can’t stop, can’t stop)
Just go ahead and strut your stuff

We’re here to let you know
If you want to boogie
Get out on the dance floor
Let’s go, let go

Stand up, hey

Dancing, everybody get up, everybody get up
and dance
I love to see you, come, get up
Get up and, get on up and
Get on up and

Go out on the dance floor
Let’s go, let go
Move your boogie body
Let’s go, let go

“One Nation Under a Groove”
By Finkadelic, 1978, Priority Records. (#1 R&B/#13 Pop)

So wide cant get around it
So low you cant get under it
So high you cant get over it

This is a chance
This is a chance
Dance your way
Out of your constrictions
Here's a chance to dance our way
Out of our constrictions
Gonna be freakin'
Up and down
Hang up alley way
With the groove our
Only guide
We shall all be moved

Ready or not here we come
Gettin' down on the one which
We believe in
One nation under a groove,
Gettin' down just for the funk

Gettin' down just for the funk of it

'bout time I got down one time
One nation and were on the move
Nothin' can stop us now

Feet don't fail me now
Give you more of what you're funkin' for
Feet don't fail me now
Do you promise to funk?
The whole funk, nothin' but the funk

Ready or not here we come
Gettin' down on the one which we believe in
Here's my chance to dance my way
Out of my constrictions

Do do dee oh doo (4 times)
You can dance away

Feet don't fail me now dance
Our way out of our constrictions

Gonna be groovin' up and down
Hang up alley way
The groove our only guide
We shall all be moved
Feet don't fail me now
Givin' you more of what you're funkin' for
Feet don't fail me now
Here’s my chance to dance my way
go out of my constrictions
Givin’ you more of what you’re funkin’ for

Feet don’t fail me now

Do you promise to funk, the whole funk,
Nothin’ but the funk
One nation under a groove
Gettin’ down just for the funk of it
One nation and were on the move
Nothin’ can stop us now
Nothin’ can stop us now
One nation under a groove
Gettin’ down just for the funk of it
One nation and were on the move
Nothin’ can stop us now
Nothin’ can stop us now
One nation under a groove
Gettin’ down just for the funk of it
One nation and were on the move
Nothin’ can stop us now

Do you promise to funk?
Do you promise to funk?
Hah
Do you promise to funk, the whole funk?

One nation under a groove
Gettin’ down just for the funk of it

“Super Bad”
By James Brown, 1970, King Records. (#1 R&B/#13 Pop)

Watch me! Watch me! I got it! Watch me!
I got it! Heeyh!

I got somethin’ that makes me wanna shouta!
I got somethin’ that tells me what its all about
Huh! I got soul and I’m super bad
I got soul, huh, and I’m super bad, huh!

Now I got a move that tells me what to do
Sometimes I tease ha
Now I gotta move that tells me what to do
Sometimes I feel so nice
I wanna try myself with you,
Huh! uh! I got soul and I’m super bad, huh!

I’m a lover, I love to do my thing ha
An a, and I don’t need no one else
Sometimes I feel so nice, good God!
I jump back, I wanna kiss myself!
I’ve got soul, huh, and I’m super bad, HEY!
I said I’m super bad

(Bridge)
Come on, up and down
And round an round, up and down, all around
Right on people, huh, let it all hang out
If you don’t brothers and sisters, then you won’t know Ha!
What it’s all about,
Gimme (7 times) YEEAAH! EEEEEEW!
Uh, come on [Instrumental]

I got the somethin’ that makes me wanna shout
I got that thing, tell me what it’s all about
I got soul, ha, and I’m super bad, heh!
Got the move that tells me what to do
Sometimes I feel so nice, I said
I wanna try myself with you, huh,
1111 I got soul, heh, and I’m super bad

(Repeat Bridge)

(ad lib)
Uh! come on! come on Robert, come on brother
Do it Robert, blow me some ‘Trane brother
Hey! gimme!, huh! gimme! uh! gimme, gimme
Said I’m Super Bad, a Super Bad brother, ha!
Super Bad uh! come on man, come on
Super Bad, Jab’, Good God! Super Bad
Bootsy, huh! let me hear ya, Super bad.

“Talking Loud and Saying Nothing”
By James Brown, 1972, Polydor. (#1 R&B/#27 Pop)

(Chorus)
Like a dull knife
Just ain’t cutting
Just talking loud and saying nothing
Just saying nothing (2 times)

You can’t tell me
How to run my life down
You can’t tell me
How to keep my business sound
You can’t tell me
What I’m doing wrong
When you keep jiving and
Singing that same old funny song
You can’t tell me
Which way to go
Cause three times seven
And then some more
You can’t tell me, hey

(Chorus)

Don’t tell me
How to do my thing
When you can’t, can’t
Can’t do your own

Don’t tell me how to be a boy
When, when you know I’m grown

Can’t use me like a woman
Woman throws away her dress
And you can’t tell me, hey
How to use my mess

(Chorus)

Shape up your bag
Don’t worry bout mine
My thing together
And I’m doing fine

Good luck to you
Just loud and wrong
Then keep on singing that
Same old funny song

Then keep on singing that
Same old funny song
(4 times)
Oww

(ad lib)
I got to, I want to
I must, I got to
Ashes to ashes and dust to dust
I must, I'll jump on
I will, I can't

I say I will
Is too dark to fill
You say I cant.
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