



BROTHAS BE, YO LIKE

# GEORGE

AIN'T THAT FUNKIN'  
KINDA HARD ON YOU?

A MEMOIR BY

*George Clinton*™

WITH BEN GREENMAN

ATRIA BOOKS

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY NEW DELHI

Tercer Mundo into another company, which we called EGMITT; it stood for "Everybody's Gonna Make It This Time." We went down to the Capitol Records office, me and Archie and Stephanie, and officially severed ties with Nene. He wasn't happy, but he didn't object. He was at a point where he needed the money. But he couldn't resist one last play. Rather than just sign Tercer Mundo over to me, he insisted on signing it over to Archie under the theory that it needed to be protected from me. Archie, of course, signed it right over to me. We were finished with Tercer Mundo and, as far as we knew, finished with Nene.

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I have a soft spot for the last solo record I made for Capitol, *R&B Skeletons in the Closet*. That's the record that brought me new musicians like Amp Fiddler and Steve Washington, who helped me do amazing things. Most people want to do records cleanly for radio, and sometimes that works brilliantly. It worked with Neil Bogart for Parliament. But as a solo artist, especially after the freedom I earned with "Atomic Dog," I was always thinking along more radical lines. I wanted to make music that most people might not fully understand at first, but that they'd come back to the year after that, or a decade later. Art outlasts charts. Amp was a jazz musician, and he helped create some of these extended pieces on the record, sort of like Bernie had done a decade before. There's a multipart composition called "Mix-Master Suite" that picks up where "Loopzilla" had left off. In my mind, it was more in keeping with musique concrète composers, a way of using samples and interpolations to design a new type of classical music. Ten years after the record came out, it was working in a well-established mode, and maybe then it was more easily digestible.

There were some great moments on that record. One of the singles, "Hey Good Lookin'," had backup vocals by Vanessa Williams, who had been crowned the first black Miss America and then forced to resign in the wake of a nude-photo scandal. Another single, "Do Fries Go with That Shake?" charted higher than any other solo single except for "Atomic Dog." *R&B Skeletons in the Closet* was also my first attempt to deal directly with hip-hop. I had been aware of it since just after *Uncle Jam Wants You*, especially in the New York area, where kids would come out with their boom boxes and start rapping over background music. It was connected to Jamaican toasting a little bit, and to the dozens, which was the comic playground insult game kids had played as long as I could remember. I liked the energy of rappers, the way they combined musical simplicity and intricate wordplay, and I liked the idea that a turntable was an instrument. The minute they got an Anvil case, they were musicians.

It was also a lifeline for funk. Music kept changing, year after year, and if you didn't embrace change, change would just turn its back on you. As rap grew into hip-hop, another element came into play, which was building your new song on an existing foundation, and sampling soul and funk. Hip-hop gave us a chance to get back in the game. Where else are you going to hear your own music? On a K-Tel compilation? It didn't hurt that early rap grew right out of P-Funk. One of the earliest songs I can remember, "Funk You Up," was by a girl group called the Sequence, which included Cheryl Cook, Gwendolyn Chisolm, and the future solo star Angie Stone. They were like the sister act to the Sugar Hill Gang. They didn't sample the song outright but replayed a section of it, which meant that rights had to be secured through publishing channels. I didn't understand that fully at the

time, though. No one did, really, except maybe Armen. He was already designing ways of collecting on our publishing whenever a section of a P-Funk song was incorporated into someone else's work, even if the sample (and thus the master) was never used.

Financially, rap would turn out to be a major factor, but I was focused more on the creative aspects of the genre. And they were a mixed bag. After that first surge of creativity, I heard mostly average hip-hop acts. They were competent but not spectacular. Every once in a while, though, the genre would throw out a genius and I would perk up. The first time I can remember that clearly was in 1987, when someone played me Eric B. & Rakim's "Follow the Leader." I had heard lots of rappers by that point, but that fucking record stopped me absolutely dead in my tracks. It was a what-the-fuck moment. The lyrics on that record, with that cool flow, sounded just like the Five Percent Muslims I had heard preaching years before in New York. When they chant, they add knowledge. Rakim had that cadence down perfectly. And his words had meaning for days: they were street, poetic, witty, wise. When I heard that record, I felt like I hadn't done anything in the music business. Damn, I thought. I have to start all over again. It was a feeling I loved, like a boxer coming out of retirement. There was excitement at the tips of my fingers.

The other hip-hop group that had me from the start was Public Enemy. When I heard "Bring the Noise," I knew that they understood the way that sound could either organize upward into music or dissolve into chaos, and how both of them were parts of the same continuum. When you admit what you're making is noise, you're halfway there. They had the vocals and the sonics: they said it right off the bat, with "Bass, how low can you go?" In P-Funk, we were always tuning our guitars down or set-

ting up Bernie's synthesizers to get the deepest vibrations possible. They had the ideas. "Can I tell them that I really never had a gun?" was top-level thinking about the ways that criminals get created, how society needs to identify enemies so it can protect its idea of itself. And they had some of the same sensibilities that made P-Funk work. They had concept albums and affiliated acts. Most important, they had a sense of how to treat their own product so that they were taken seriously without being taken too seriously. Chuck D was the chief information distributor, but Flavor Flav put a check on things with comedy. Some of the people in their circle didn't understand at first how things were supposed to work. Professor Griff spoke out of turn, which he had the right to do, but he did it without the proper balance, without the proper coordination with Chuck and Flav, and that disrupted the group's carefully organized structure. The grace note with Public Enemy is that I had something to do with their name. For years, I didn't know that it was my voice saying "Public Enemy" on their record. They had sampled from "Undiscoverd" and slowed the vocals down.

The thing I admired most about Public Enemy was that they figured out how to be outspoken in corporate America, which was nothing easy. When John Lennon said that the Beatles were bigger than Jesus, he got in trouble, and he was John Lennon. I understood what he meant, but that's not the lesson I took from the controversy. Lennon's remarks taught me that everything significant has to be leavened with comedy. When I'm asked about something serious, I try to make jokes because deep down, I know that I don't know what the fuck I'm talking about. I don't mean that I'm wrong about everything, or that there's nothing I'm right about. I mean it as a matter of philosophy. How can I

be so presumptuous as to say something definitively bad or definitively good about somebody? If there's a controversy already in place, I'll sometimes weigh in, but I try to be clear that it's just my opinion. It's clear to me fairly quickly that there are at least two sides to most questions, and that the other one is just as valid as yours. That's why tolerance is the only thing that really makes sense. Take sexual orientation. I know what I prefer for me. It hurts me when I poop, so I can't imagine anything going up in my ass. I don't even like to hold my own dick when I pee. But what do I know? Anything in the world can be sexy to a person. I've seen motherfuckers fuck radiators. I'll fuck a gay girl if she lets me. And so if I'm ever asked seriously about gay rights, I tell people exactly what I would tell my kids and my grandkids. Do what you want in life. Do what you are. If you talk to me, I'm not going to put you down. I'm going to help you become you. Over the years, we've played with musicians who were straight, and we've played with musicians who were gay. Why should I care? I don't give a fuck who he's fucking. Can he drum?

## **RHYTHM AND RHYME, RHYTHM AND RHYME, RHYTHM AND MOTHERFUCKING RHYME**

**T**here were only a few stars who carried the torch for raw funk in the mid-eighties, and the baddest of them all was Prince. He knew P-Funk in and out, and he was trying some of the same tricks we had. He believed in the two-band balance, though he did his own take on it, setting the Revolution up against the Time. He wrote and produced for outside acts like the Family, Sheila E., Jill Jones, and more. And his Camille character, a sped-up voice that was one of his alter egos, had more than a little Star Child in it. Prince had been hip to us since the early days. He was the perfect age. In the late seventies, when he was getting ready to debut as an artist, he had brought his first record to his label, which happened to be Warner Bros. During their meetings, they played him *Ahh . . . The Name Is Bootsy, Baby*, and it stopped him cold. He didn't even want to go forward. He took his own record back home and worked on it for eight more months. Mo Ostin from Warner Bros. told me that he had been talking to Prince once and that Prince had given me a compliment: he said I was up there with Elvis and James Brown.

One evening in Los Angeles, Archie Ivy and I drove away from a coke dealer's house up onto the 405 expressway, took the exit to head home, and saw flashing police lights in our rearview mirror. The cop who walked up to our window said that Archie's headlights weren't on, which wasn't true. More than that, it wasn't possible: you couldn't even start his car without the lights coming on. The cops searched the car like they knew what they were looking for, though they didn't find it—I stuffed the paper with the drugs down into my pants. But the paper was open, and as I walked around, everything leaked out: coke, paper, all of it. When we got down to the jailhouse, the police somehow managed to produce the same amount of cocaine that had leaked out through the bottom of my pant leg.

From jail, we called Nene's daughter. We hadn't seen him in a while—it had been a year or two since we'd spoken—but we knew that he could pull some strings in Los Angeles. He and one of his guys got there before anyone even knew. It was under an hour. And there he was just like old times, standing out in front, smacking the news people.

I probably shouldn't have called him. We needed to get out of jail, but there was an unintended consequence, which was that Nene was back in my life. Almost immediately, he started in on me about a bank in Panama that he had a stake in, and how he wanted me to invest with him. I resisted. If nothing else, I had learned that. But then he went back to playing dirty pool. We were out one night, and he leaned over to me and said, "Your problem is that you won't tell Stephanie about your bitches." He had some nerve, because he was seeing people on the side, too. "I'm glad you're into hippieism and freedom," I said. "Everybody's free to do whatever they do, right?" He said right. "Well,"

I said, "can your girlfriend have her other man in here and fuck him in front of you?" I wanted to provoke him.

That night, I went straight back home and told Stephanie about all the people I had been messing with. I wasn't proud of it or defiant or anything. It was a fact of life for musicians, and something that had been happening for decades, but I was going to be damned if I let Nene control what happened. Stephanie took the news in stride. She was angry at me for having girls on the side, but she was angrier at him for bringing up the issue the way he did, that kind of crypto-blackmail shit. We ended up getting married, Steph and I, in Toledo in 1990. Nene was mad about it—he didn't like anything that was outside of his sense of control. The next time, he was frustrated to hear that we had gotten married, and he said so. She came right back at him: "Don't you ever call me and tell on George. That's not going to work." Nene did the same thing to Archie Ivy, spread word that he wasn't treating his wife right. Or he'd call Ronnie, get him upset, and then call me and say that Ronnie was freaking out without quite mentioning who had lit the fuse in the first place. And if he was talking to me about them, you can be damn sure he was talking to them about me. That's how Nene was back in the seventies and how he was in the nineties, and it only took a bit for the present to fall in line with the past.

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Hip-hop came in waves, and just as I was certain that I had understood the first and the second and the third, the fourth came along, and this time it was personal. The debut album by the rap group De La Soul, *3 Feet High and Rising*, was released in 1989, and it immediately became a huge hit. One of its biggest singles,

"Me Myself and I," was built solidly on a sample of "(Not Just) Knee Deep." I loved the group's attitude and their music, and I was pleased with the way they dealt with the sample, too. The record was out, using our music. To head off a lawsuit and also, to some degree, to do the right thing, their record label, Tommy Boy, paid us \$100,000 to use it. At the time, we didn't know if that money was being paid as a result of masters or publishing. There were no rules worked out yet, no real understanding of how samples were supposed to be accounted.

A few other rap acts ponied up with money, too. Digital Underground paid for "Let's Play House," which was the basis for "Humpty Dance." X-Clan paid for using "One Nation Under a Groove" in their song "Earth Bound." In those cases, the process worked the way it should have worked. De La Soul also put the song out as a twelve-inch, and one side was basically just our original song. Still, in the Wild West of hip-hop, this seemed like it was okay.

We were just figuring out how to work the new system, but Armen was a full chess move ahead. Because he was getting regular earnings statements and we saw only occasional summaries, he had time to strategize. For him, the strategy involved more lawsuits. He filed suit against Public Enemy. Terminator X, the DJ for Public Enemy, had used a sample of the *Trombipulation* song "Body Language" on his solo album *Valley of the Jeep Beats*. The suit was for the outrageous sum of \$3 million. Armen's executive assistant, Jane Peterer, went on MTV explaining that they were suing on my behalf, which wasn't the case. In fact, I had to go back on the channel myself with Chuck D and Flavor Flav and say that as far as I was concerned, there was no problem using the sample. It led to the claim being dropped.

Nene came right back with a flurry of his own litigation. He threatened to sue every record company, along with Armen, on behalf of a group he called the Association of Parliament-Funkadelic. The group, which Nene assembled, consisted of a bunch of guys who had worked in our office. They weren't musicians or songwriters. But Nene's move was another false front designed to make it look like someone else other than Armen—in this case, him—was acting on my behalf. I guess he figured that in court people would look at four black guys sitting together and assume that they were seeing P-Funk.

With cooler heads, we could have worked out a nice system, scaled to sales. If an artist sampled us and didn't sell very many records, that artist wouldn't have to pay us very much. But if an artist sampled us and sold between half a million and a million records, the cost would be fifty thousand; if sales exceeded a million, the price would go up to a hundred thousand. That's just a broad sketch of what I had in mind. I'm sure there were even more nuanced ways to charge, and I would have been receptive to them, too. What I wasn't receptive to was tying everything up in court, in red tape and malice. That fucks it up for everyone, because then you're talking about five hundred different cases involving thousands of songs. It's litigation, and it's a docket, and it's a judge taking a panel of jurors and playing both records, the hip-hop song and the original, and asking if they can recognize one song in the other. If the jury couldn't, the case was thrown out, no matter how egregious the borrowing was. And if they could, then there was a byzantine settlement process with no transparency. Artists couldn't tell how much money was changing hands. Everything was obscured by a legal fog. At around that same time, Archie and I went to Warner Bros. to try to col-

lect money from MC Hammer's record "Turn This Mutha Out," which basically lifted "Give Up the Funk (Tear the Roof off the Sucker)" wholesale. In the process of investigating that record, we discovered that Warners claimed to have our catalog, and that Armen was claiming the publishing for the *Mothership Connection* songs, and in fact everything: every Parliament, every Funkadelic, everywhere my name appeared. When we looked into it further, Warners got nervous. They said they would have to get back to us. When they finally called Archie back, they were belligerent and unhelpful. But the paper trail, or whatever of the paper trail we could find, seemed to suggest that Warner Music had acquired our catalog by buying Chappell Publishing, which included Polygram, which also included Rick's Music. (The Chappell catalog also included "Happy Birthday to You.") But based on various provisions in our contract, Polygram had no authority to sell our catalog. And when we asked Polygram how it was sold, they said they had acquired my power of attorney and transferred those copyrights to the label, who later sold them to Warners. Strange doings, strange days.

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The album that really upped the ante on the sampling question was Dr. Dre's *The Chronic*, which took over the world in 1992; its biggest songs, its main singles, were powered by P-Funk. More specifically, they were fueled by a certain type of P-Funk sample. There was a scatter plot of P-Funk samples in hip-hop; they differed by region. The East Coast had more interest in the early Funkadelic records. Rakim sampled "No Head, No Backstage Pass." Public Enemy sampled "Undiscoverd Kidd." But East Coast producers cut and sliced and rearranged, while West Coast

groups tended to take them wholesale. Dr. Dre went right for the biggest Parliament hits, the ones with the fat synthesizer and horn lines that could hold up an entire song. "Let Me Ride" took "Mothership Connection" almost wholesale, and in the video there's even a scene of Dre being invited to a Parliament concert.

I knew Dre all the way back from N.W.A, though that was a group I wasn't sure about. They acted hard, but the ghetto out there is like our suburbs. I couldn't believe that the police went crazy when they said "fuck tha police." That wouldn't have been a big deal back in New York. As it turned out, that controversy was the best thing that ever happened to them. It got them noticed by the FBI, put them on magazine covers. When they came to Detroit the police department came and lined up, out of uniform. They had five hundred officers there. The police actually asked me to go talk to the group, as a kind of ambassador, to see if I could get them to forgo playing "Fuck tha Police." Dre was scared as hell. Cube didn't want to be talked into any shit. The D.O.C. was there, with his scratchy voice, saying that N.W.A was going to do whatever the fuck they wanted. They ended up not playing it.

In the wake of *The Chronic*, other West Coast artists started to build their sound on our samples. Snoop Dogg's *Doggystyle* came out the next year, Warren G's "Regulate" the year after that. I did a duet with Ice Cube on his own version of "Bop Gun," which was on his *Lethal Injection* album. That's how P-Funk fathered G-Funk. It also fathered another round of Armen's sue-and-settle strategy. If the hip-hop song got too close to anything in the P-Funk back catalog, Armen would sue, and the artists would settle just to keep from going to court. He also started to design a legal strategy based on the principle of interpolation. Under this theory, a hip-hop artist not only couldn't sample a record, but couldn't

even have someone come in and play any part of the song: the bass line, the horn line. If a West Coast rapper had a keyboardist in who played a keyboard figure that was similar to something in "Flash Light," Armen felt justified suing them. This was a foolish way of approaching things, and it had a chilling effect, not only because Armen sued over everything, but because he wasn't honest when it came to disclosing settlements. Nene opposed Armen, but Nene wasn't being honest about what he owned, either, and the two of them started warring in court about who controlled the catalog.

Meanwhile I tried to settle things the only way I knew, which was through music, and in 1993 I released a three-disc set called *Sample Some of Disc, Sample Some of DAT*. The record had hundreds of keyboard figures, horn parts, guitar riffs, and drum breaks, all taken from P-Funk records. It was basically a sampling kit that bypassed publishing fees. If you let us know that you wanted to use one of the samples, we'd charge you for it according to a scale we had worked out. Armen was infuriated by this, because it was threatening his revenue stream, and he tried to get *Sample Some of Disc, Sample Some of DAT* treated the same way as any hip-hop record, arguing that it was basically an anthology of unauthorized samples. We weren't the only band to do that: Prince released a set later called the New Funk Sampling Series that had the same idea.

All in all, I have mixed feelings about the way that hip-hop affected P-Funk. It brought P-Funk's music back into the public eye and ear. There's no doubt about that. But it also put a price tag on everything again, which meant that the people who had a vested interest in ripping me off were back in strength. The new money coming in over hip-hop was like blood in the water for sharks. And every time I hired a lawyer to look into it, that same

lawyer ended up on the other side, waving back at me. Could I have kept the train on the rails if it wasn't for the drugs? I'm not sure. Plenty of stone-cold-sober people get ripped off, too.

To this day, the record companies haven't paid me fairly. But the problem isn't a rapper problem. They're artists, and I love their work, whether it's Ice Cube or Humpty or Too \$hort or EPMD or Public Enemy. When there are artists who have remained true to the P-Funk philosophy, I love them even more. Early on, I told Snoop Dogg he was the pick of the litter, and he used that phrase until he became Snoop Lion (though he's still doggin' and lyin'). I love artists like Mystikal, for the way he updated Joe Tex and used those second-line New Orleans rhythms. And, of course, Eminem was a star from the word go. He wrote like Smokey Robinson, with hooks and metaphors and real ideas that were sharpened and elevated by his obsession with structure. All of the rappers know that I never came after them personally and that I never will. Artists aren't allowed the luxury of fighting with each other. The lawyers and record executives fight over you and around you, for their own reasons. Those people went to school to beat you for your shit.



Two of my favorite records from the extended P-Funk family came out during that period: Trey Lewd's *Drop the Line* and Bernie Worrell's *Blacktronic Science*. Trey Lewd was my son Tracey Lewis, whose mother was my old writing partner Vivian Lewis, and *Drop the Line* was a perfect encapsulation of his aesthetic: funky, danceable, a little raunchy, and funny as a motherfucker. I cowrote a song called "Rooster," and there are also collaborations between Tracey and "Clip" Payne ("Wipe of the Week"), Tracey and Andre Williams ("Duck and Cover"), and Tracey



**EPILOGUE: BROTHAS BE, YO LIKE  
GEORGE, AIN'T THAT FUNKIN'  
KINDA HARD ON YOU?**

**S**o what happens now? Am I closer to the end or just farther from the beginning? I don't know the answer to these questions. I don't even know if they are questions of theology or if they're just a paradox. The questions are too big, anyway. There are smaller questions inside of them, though, that I can more easily grasp. What's a song I can reach out and touch today? What's the music that I'm going to make tomorrow? For years, I caught hell trying to get myself back into the studio. I had to get rid of a habit. I had to change my image, not just for other people but for myself. When I started making music again, really creating, the main thing I remembered was how much fun it can be. I have a studio near my house in Tallahassee. When I'm in town, I try to go down there every day. There's a new Funkadelic record nearly finished: thirty-three tracks to commemorate the thirty-three years since the last Funkadelic record. It's called *Shake the Gate*, and I worked the way I did on *Dope Dogs* and *T.A.P.O.A.F.O.M.*, sometimes making entirely new songs, sometimes unearthing old tracks from recording sessions—

unused takes, abandoned starts—and growing new songs from them. Producers call these tracks stems, like stem cells, but I like to think of them as seeds.

Seeds, stems. Those tracks link the new work to the old work. Sometimes the link is personal rather than sonic. One afternoon, my son Tracey and I were sitting around talking about all the different aspects of poles: the word, the idea, the concept. It was like an old-fashioned Funkathon, the free-association sessions where we volleyed jokes and puns back and forth. Strippers use poles. Race-car drivers do their best to get pole position. And junkies use pipes, which are just poles with holes in them. That turned into a new song called “Pole Power.” There's another song Tracey and I wrote called “Catchin' Boogie Fever” that has classic Parliament-style horn riffs, one called “Baby Like Fonkin' It Up” that revives Star Child, one called “As In” that's a beautiful piece that Jessica Cleaves recorded, and one called “Jolene” that I'm singing with Sidney Barnes, my partner from half a century ago; the guitar work on the track is by the rapper Scarface, Garry Shider, and Blackbyrd McKnight. In other places, we're looking not into the past of P-Funk but into the distant future, at the spot where time curves. Take the title song, “Shake the Gate,” which is both primal and futuristic, which uses both didgeridoo (an ancient Australian wind instrument) and electronic effects. It's another dog song—“Coming up in here without shakin' the gate / Fucking bit / You gonna get ate”—that's about the gate around the planet Sirius, and the way that it protects the funk from unannounced visitors. The song is defiant, too: we've had to contend with plenty of trespassers and intruders, second-story men, larcenists. We've stationed guard dogs to protect what's ours. The song is way out of the box, like “Maggot Brain.” I don't know

if it's commercial, but I know that I don't care. It's not the first time.

First time, last time. In the studio, listening to songs, you lose track of time. But when you're inside music, time doesn't exactly apply. One of the songs from the new record is called "Brothas Be, Yo Like George, Ain't That Funkin' Kinda Hard on You?" It's a memoir just like this book, a song that looks at my time in the funk business and how I keep moving through it. My answer in the song is my answer now, has been my answer always: "I was hard when I started / I'll be hard when I get through." You can measure the truth of that statement by looking at the hardest world around: the prison world. Jails are full of P-Funk fans, and each one is stuck to the time when they last heard us in the free world. If they went inside in 1974, then *Cosmic Slop* might be their definitive P-Funk. If they went inside in 1983, their P-Funk of choice might be "Atomic Dog." Each of them thinks they have access to the heart of the matter. But there's a softer answer, too. When I get up there onstage, when the musicians behind me are turning the corner and heading into "Let's Take It to the Stage," when the angels of our better nature are spreading their wings and the devils are going to the lower level, I feel like the music that I'm giving is, above all, a gift. It's not a word I like to use often, but it's a word I'll use now and again.

Angels, devils. Some of my old bandmates have passed on. Catfish Collins died in 2010, the same year as Garry, Malia Franklin, and Ron Banks. Belita Woods died in 2012, Boogie Mosson in 2013, and Jessica Cleaves in 2014. Others remain, still committed to keeping the funk alive, and still others remain committed to keeping the funk down. Armen continues to use his ill-gotten copyrights against the interest of everyone but him-

self. In 2013, Robin Thicke's "Blurred Lines" was everywhere, including in court: the Thicke camp sued Bridgeport Music preemptively because they knew that Armen was getting ready to sue them for copyright infringement for using the Funkadelic song "Sexy Ways," from *Standing on the Verge of Getting It On*. Armen's claim was baseless, but that didn't stop him or his lawyers from going out there and trying to grab some cash in a quick settlement. When I first heard Robin Thicke's song I loved it. I was wishing I wrote it. I can hear a little bit of the quality of my voice in the vocals, a certain urgency, but it's nothing more than that. It's certainly not plagiarism. Pharrell, who cowrote the song, is good at mimicking different characters, at imitating certain styles from the past and bringing them into the present. That's permissible. In fact, it's more than permissible. It's necessary. You've got to change up something. The rules are well known. You can't do seven notes in a row the same, so you just do six, change one, and then come back to the original model. In the early days, people bit melodies all the time and no one bothered looking into it with any degree of scrutiny. Rock and roll got no respect unless your name was, say, George Harrison—the Beatles were so big that the shit became undeniable. Anything associated with them attracted worldwide notice and mountains of cash. Plus, with "My Sweet Lord," George was putting his hand in the till of one of rock and roll's most famous songs, the Chiffons' "He's So Fine." Occasionally there are artists whose style lets them protect everything they play. Jimi Hendrix was like that: you can't even do his licks without getting sued. You have to respect the fact that he coined those phrases—not just the songs but the parts on the guitar. But those cases—the Beatles, the Hendrixes—are few and far between, and "Blurred Lines" isn't one of them. I told TMZ

that I would go into court as a witness for Robin Thicke. A few months after that, there was an equally ridiculous lawsuit: the Jimmy Castor Bunch sued Ariana Grande for using the phrase “What we gotta do right here is go back, back into time,” because it’s similar to a line from their 1972 hit “Troglodyte.” The lawyer in charge of that was Richard Busch, who was one of the architects of Armen’s strategy. You can read about him in Jane Peterer’s statement. But all we can do is get the word out. The word gets out. In November of 2012, Kid Rock was debuting a new song he had written about the history of Detroit music at the half-time of the Detroit Lions’ Thanksgiving Day game. I went out to midfield with him, wearing a Flashlight2013.com shirt. I was proud to support the city, of course: Detroit is the most important place for American music, hands down. We have Motown, Aretha, Iggy Pop, Alice Cooper, Kid Rock, Eminem, and of course Parliament-Funkadelic. It’s a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame all on its own. Last year, faced with a possibility of a highway project running through the center of Detroit, a group decided to turn United Sound studio into a museum of local music. It’s beautiful now; they even restored a piano I had out at my farm and put it on display. There are framed records and photographs on the wall documenting recording sessions from Charlie Parker right up to the Chili Peppers.

Moving forward, taking back. What is past and what is present, really? You’re only purely in the present once, when you’re born, and then you’re divided between present and past. That’s why you have to reach into the future. I try to remember that we are only new once. And once you’re not new, you’re in that much bigger bag of old. Kids today don’t know the difference between me and Snoop Dogg, or me and Stevie Wonder. Everybody

who’s old is old. And because of that, being old is a growth industry. I look at other musicians my age and pay special attention to the ones who don’t stop making things. A few years ago, Paul McCartney put out a song, “My Valentine,” that was a beautiful motherfucking piece of music. I know it was for someone special, because it made him into someone special again. And that’s after being a Beatle, after being in a place when you’re so big that you can’t even hear yourself to make music. How did Paul come back from that point where the eeks took over, where it was all screaming girls and deafening fame? I’ve been on stages and heard the crowd shriek for us. I was careful never to take audiences for granted. The key has always been thinking of people as family, whether it be my blood family, my family of musicians, or the extended family of fans. I think about what Sly said, gently mocking me for my sense of responsibility: “You got those little ones.” Maybe over time, those little ones make you big.

Little, big. When you don’t top the chart anymore, does that mean that everyone’s over you? Or are there other ways to get over? In the last decade, people have started to say that something popular goes “viral,” that it moves around the world, usually through the Internet, on its own. That’s nothing new. *Davy Crockett: Indian Fighter* came on TV in 1954, and I sat down to watch it in New Jersey. Davy Crockett killed a bear with his knife. That was a time before hula hoops, before *Maggot Brain*, before “Bop Gun.” There was only Davy Crockett, or at least that’s how it seemed. I remember it so clearly: on our lunch bags, our jackets, our hats, and toy guns. Everything was Davy Crockett. When people say “viral,” it’s just a new name for that same old thing. Look at kids nine to thirteen and pay attention to where they find their enthusiasms. These days it’s on YouTube. They

spend hours looking for the silliest thing, and that's what they decide to admire. That's what they decide to imitate. And it's that world where P-Funk is resurfacing now. We have a channel there. We have videos of songs, new ones and old ones, serious performances and comedy.

Surface, submerge, surface again. The last few years have been some of the best years of my life. It's not 1970, being turned out in Boston by topless girls bearing acid. It's not 1978, with *Motor Booty Affair* rocketing up the chart and side projects bursting brightly around us like fireworks. It's not even the mid-nineties, when you could hear our songs coming out of every lowrider in Los Angeles, cut and pasted into rap anthems. I live in Tallahassee. I record. I tour. I spend as much time as possible with my family. And I'm trying new things all the time. In the last year, we've developed and sold a reality show. There's comedy and drama in it, but there's also a specific argument about the pitfalls of the record business. I want my kids and grandkids to understand what I went through. I can't lecture them from a whining stance, cry about how I was on dope and fucked up. But I can impress upon them that whether or not there's dope, you have to have each other's backs. I want to leave them with a concrete understanding of the realities of how things work, and what to do when they don't.

The other day I did a session with the rapper Kendrick Lamar. My grandkids were hyping me up on him, and I listened to his record. Even before I met him I was laughing at "Bitch, Don't Kill My Vibe," which had the same silly-serious tone we tried for in Funkadelic. He came down to Tallahassee to record with me, and it was beautiful. We did about four songs together and he took some tracks with him, and when we weren't recording, we

just talked. We talked about everything. We talked about nothing. I found myself running my mouth more than I ordinarily do because he was so interested in discussing it all: the record industry, social engineering, the function of art. He acts like he's about fifty with all his theories. When I met Sly Stone, he knew of P-Funk because he heard those records himself, as they came out. When I met Rakim, he knew of P-Funk because he listened to his brother's records. With Kendrick, it was his parents' records. He didn't just know the hits. He knew the deepest of the deep cuts. When you talk about your old work with a young man with an old mind, the work feels less old. We talked about my old songs and they were renewed. When the past comes rushing into the present that way, I can see clearly that artwork is a living thing. Younger artists teach me that I taught them. That's why I'm grateful to Kendrick Lamar, and to anyone who is carrying on the P-Funk tradition, which itself carried on the tradition of Louis Jordan, the Beatles, Cream, James Brown, Smokey Robinson, Frankie Lymon. We talked about everything. We talked about nothing. We talked about my old songs and they were renewed. We talked about my old songs and we were renewed.