

#1 BESTSELLER IN NORWEGIAN BEEF PATTY SHOPS

J-ZONE



Root For the **VILLAIN**

RAP, BULLSHIT, AND A CELEBRATION OF FAILURE

"MR. ZONE'S BOOK IS A WIRK OF GENEUS! TAKE IT FROM US, WE'RE SOUPER SMERT."

- ANDY SAMBERG, JORMA TACCONI, and AKIVA SCHÄFFER

(SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE, THE LONELY ISLAND)

10. LEGAL ACTION FROM A PIMP

I never cower from the fact that I'm a 90 percent sample-based producer. Creative copyright infringement makes my dick hard. From the moment EPMD's "You Gots to Chill" came on *Yo! MTV Raps* that afternoon in 1989, sampling has been the bait that has hooked me to hip-hop. Vinyl, cassettes, my endless collection of VHS tapes that have been stuffed to the lead out strips with old TV shows, infomercials, and obscure movies - they all inspired my entire aesthetic and got thoroughly raided when I was putting my trademark wall of sound style together. There's nothing like watching an episode of *Bewitched!* and hearing Dick York say something in his nerdy voice, then flipping his phrase out of context into something x-rated or weaving it into a rap song about whoopin' somebody's ass. Sampling allows that type of contrast, and contrary to criticism, it takes a hell of an ear to hear Mr. Wilson say something on *Dennis the Menace* and imagine it dead smack in the middle of a rap song about blow jobs.

In the '90s, artists got jack-hammered with legal action for copyright infringement to no end, even those not on major labels. Everyone was petro; someone could really piss on your picnic retroactively if you made some money.

Technically, anything you pilfer without permission can land your ass in hot water if you're caught, regardless of your level of success. Gilbert O'Sullivan took Biz Markie to trial for an uncleared sample circa 1991, forever changing the art form of sampling. Artists and producers had their records snatched off shelves and their royalties recouped for decades because a publisher or an ex-artist turned crack head got desperate. The artists, publishers, and labels that own the rights to the sources that we sample throw all types of cockamamie charges into infringement lawsuits - religious reasons, disagreement with the lyrical content that we put over the samples - and it's all a bunch of shit. For the right price, nine out of ten muthafuckas will back off, but if you wondered why that incredible Ghostface Killah song that leaked on the internet didn't make his album or why a release was delayed for an extra five months, blame the costly and headache-inducing process of sample clearance.

That artistic barricade never stopped me from sampling. I never gave

a shit. Why? There was one unwritten rule that turned sampling from an egregious and costly taboo into a calculated business risk in the eyes of many - if they can't catch it, they can't catch you. Here are the ways you can go about not getting your ass taken to Judge Wapner for samples:

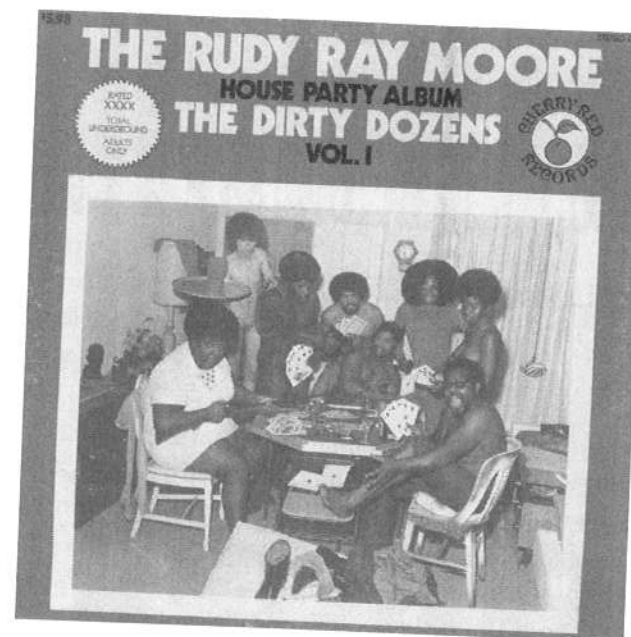
1. Get permission and clear 'em.
2. Alter 'em beyond recognition to the average ear.
3. Have paltry record sales and make sofa change money. You'll soar below the radar of lawyers, snitches, musicologists, and the washed up artist you sampled. Pinning legal action on someone who isn't making much money is a waste of time and funds.
4. Sample shit that's so obscure, that the likelihood of anyone identifying it is equal to being black, broke, and meeting your dream girl in New York City.

Options 2-4 applied to me, so I always felt it was worth the risk. One time in particular, I felt wrong. When I got the e-mail on the night DJ Jam Master Jay was murdered, my mood was already in the toilet.

"You gotta be shittin' me!" I screamed loud enough to awaken my slurring, denture-less grandmother. I was being threatened with a lawsuit from Rudy Ray Moore (aka Dolemite), the pimped-out and x-rated comedian that I had admired since I found his record in my pops' collection in 1990. His manager wanted roughly 25 percent of my total income for the year of 2002 in damages for an uncleared sample that I used on my album, *Pimps Don't Pay Taxes*. Apparently, someone wrote an online review of the album and noted the sample; a quick internet search of Mr. Moore's name by his manager was enough to catch me by the ankles.

I was shocked, petrified, flattered, and saddened when I opened that e-mail. The shock came from me realizing that my obscurity outside of indie rap circles wasn't so extreme that I couldn't get nailed. The fear was that these folks would wipe me out completely for the fuck of it. I was flattered that I had made it that far onto the radar for anyone to care. The sadness came from being threatened with legal action by someone I had idolized for more than half of my life. It's like being a Michael Jordan fan, then he sues you because you used one of his moves without permission and said, "You better eat your Wheaties" afterward, then uploaded it to YouTube. I couldn't be mad though; sampling is technically illegal and I knew it.

After settling out of court, you'd probably assume I stopped sampling.



Caught! Can i get a witness?

Fuck that, I just adhered to rules 2-4 harder than ever before and did my best to take the art of the sample flip and the tedious process of sample searching to levels never done before. I did attempt the first rule once, when I produced "Santana DVX" (featuring E-40) for the Lonely Island, a rapping trio of comedic geniuses from *Saturday Night Live*. Due to the fact that Lonely Island were on Universal Records and featured Justin Timberlake, T-Pain, and a host of other artists that were far more notable than I on their album, Universal threw away the dice and cleared all samples. The process delayed the shit out of everything. After forking up a hefty sum of upfront money and surrendering my entire share of the publishing to the guy I sampled, I understood why artists on major labels used crappy keyboard beats with no samples for so long. I don't give a fuck though, I'll still sample your shit and you won't be able to tell.

Mr. Rudy Ray Moore passed away in 2008, and all jokes on my being busted aside, the black comedy world lost an icon when he left this Earth. I just hope that some of my money went to my hero and not to the legal eagles that don't respect sampling as a legitimate and creative approach to making music.