

Exploring the Funkadelic Aesthetic: Intertextuality and Cosmic Philosophizing in Funkadelic's Album Covers and Liner Notes

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Much has been written about the power of Parliament-Funkadelic's music and stage shows,¹ two undeniably essential elements of the overall P-Funk package, but far less has been said about the significance of the album covers and liner notes in transmitting the group's philosophy of the funk,² an elaborate mythology that helped the band gain worldwide recognition and an almost cult-like following of Funkateers.³ The liner notes and cover art of the Funkadelic albums of the 1970s and early 1980s provide a window into the society and culture of that transformative era and a better understanding of how P-Funk as a collective produced a counterhegemonic aesthetic and philosophy that offered not only biting critiques of politics, society, and the record industry but also space to explore other controversial and complex elements of life, such as sex, religion, emotions, and the meaning of life.⁴ In particular, I elucidate the influence of one of the most significant P-Funk artists and writers—Pedro Bell—and consider the relationships among writing, visual art, music, and performance as well as the significance of intertextuality⁵—the way in which P-Funk's various texts relate or speak to one another to provide greater coherence and meaning. The characters who collectively exist as the “Parliafunkadelicment Thang” speak to one another through their music, stage shows, cover artwork, and liner notes, forming interconnected cultural productions in various mediums to produce a coherent worldview. By exploring the album covers as texts worthy to be analyzed as one would fine art, literature, or media, and as historical artifacts

that tell us about the time and place in which they appeared (or were imagined), I hope to demonstrate how P-Funk, and Bell specifically, successfully used both humor and myth to create a carnivalesque image and cosmological philosophy that helped elevate the group from an obscure funk band to mass popularity and legendary influence by transforming an explicitly black working-class style into an universal “Funkadelic aesthetic.”⁶ In addition, I explore the complicated nature of the band as a collective of artists and their varied experiences in the music industry; the members have experienced both the extreme lows of poverty and the highs of international success at different stages throughout their careers.

Why Album Covers?

Parliament-Funkadelic’s album covers and liner notes deserve attention not only because they consist of amazing cosmic, comic artwork and creative philosophical liner notes that bend the English language in new and weird ways that helped the band reach a mass audience but also because at the time, album covers were an essential form of communication between musicians and their listeners. As visual artist and Funkateer Tym Stevens, explains: “In 1973, there was no MTV, no internet, no VCRs, no marketing strobe in all media. An act toured, they put out an album once a year, and they were lucky to get a TV appearance lip-synching a hit. . . . As a fan, almost your whole involvement with the band came through the album cover.”⁷ There was a brief window in the 1960s and early 1970s when the album reigned supreme—between the era of the 45s, with their plain, white covers, and the advent first of the eight-track tape and later the compact cassette tape, neither of which left room for expression. The introduction of compact disc sleeves provided plenty of space, but in a miniature and therefore somewhat less engaging format than an album cover. In addition, the advent of gatefold record sleeves, which appeared in the mid-1960s, allowed more space to connect images and words with the music inside the package. Stevens recounts the power of the gatefold: “It was big . . . there were inserts and photos and posters. Sitting with your big ol’ headphones, you shut off the world and stared at every detail of the album art like they were paths to the other side, to the Escape.”⁸ In addition to providing a passage “to the other side,” Stevens remarks on how the 1960s and early 1970s was “an art era for an art audience. Posters, T-shirts, LPs. These were your subculture badge of honor, your spiritual battle cry, your middle finger to mediocrity.”⁹ While music fans engage with this art form in a variety of ways, it is obvious that the album covers and liner notes of this era were incredibly significant to some young people in enabling them to construct their identities and express their politics.

While fans express a powerful connection with the medium, scholars have had far less to say. However, Dean L. Biron challenges Elvis Costello’s popular quip that “writing about music is like dancing about architecture”¹⁰ and encourages music scholars to see the significance of studying not only the music

but also the album covers and liner notes to better understand how “different texts, genres and scenes relate to each other, and how music itself intersects with other art forms, including literature.”¹¹ Biron highlights key examples of both jazz and rock musicians from the 1960s that showed the intertextuality of art by fusing their music with art and writing through their use of cover art and liner notes.¹² He illustrates how the liner note essay “came of age in the early 1960s” and highlights five styles that developed during the era, including the “the propagandist liner note,” for which he uses Funkadelic’s *Maggot Brain* as an example.¹³ Biron goes on to encourage those who write about music to consider the intertextual discourse the album cover and liner notes can produce through “the dynamic and unpredictable relationship between author, text and recipient, combined with the polytextuality of the music album format” and to consider liner notes “on the basis of their literary qualities,” as I hope to do through the following analysis. British journalist Travis Elborough makes a bolder statement about the significance of the album as a medium for music, art, and writing. Elborough claims the long-playing record (LP) “revolutionised the way music was produced, packaged, marketed, sold, purchased, listened to and performed” and goes into a long list of the effects of the medium, including providing “a canvas for an entirely new visual language to blossom,” ushering in “life-shattering experiences in sound,” and even tempting “millions to try drugs, sleep with strangers, sport weird hairstyles and abandon perfectly good college courses and careers to embark on non-conformist journeys of self-discovery.”¹⁴ While P-Funk’s album covers did not usher in the “Age of Aquarius” as Elborough suggests of the power of the LP, their album covers and liner notes, along with their music and live performances, had a profound effect and are worthy of scholarly consideration.

When media was more limited than it is today, P-Funk’s album covers and liner notes were essential in communicating the group’s aesthetic and message. Stevens argues more forcefully than anyone else for the significance of P-Funk’s album covers, particularly those drawn by Bell:

Half the experience of Funkadelic was the actual music vibrating out of those wax grooves. The other half was reading the covers with a magnifying glass while you listened. There was always more to scrutinize, analyze, and strain your eyes. Funkadelic covers were a hedonistic landscape where sex coursed like energy, politics underlay every pun, and madness was just a bigger overview.¹⁵

Many recognize the power of the P-Funk aesthetic, such as Scot Hacker, who refers to the importance of “the cryptic, ridiculously bent versifying of the liner notes” and “the album sleeve art production (which narrated the genesis and mission of the band in a series of ongoing, albeit disjointed cartoons).” Yet, unlike Stevens, Hacker attributes the liner notes, cover art, and the entire

P-Funk philosophy to George Clinton alone, rather than recognizing the individuals who helped produce the artwork and liner notes. Whether the viewer realized who was responsible for the artwork or philosophizing, the intertextuality of the music, lyrics, liner notes, and cover art produced a coherent cosmological philosophy that Michael C. Ladd argues exists as “part of a tradition of elastic history fused with social critique fused with science fiction, from the Dogon ark to Elijah Muhammad’s beef with the mad scientist Yacub to Sun Ra. But Funkadelic got to people like a sales pitch, like an inside joke we could all get.”¹⁶ Funkadelic’s album covers helped sell records and articulate the band’s philosophy, but they had an even deeper effect on some fans.

There are numerous and widely different definitions of funk,¹⁷ but the one that is perhaps most relevant in understanding the power of the Funkadelic album covers is the emphasis on self-discovery, identity formation, and transcendence. These themes are echoed by many, but funk scholar Rickey Vincent says it best in his groundbreaking book: “The Funk is synonymous with finding *oneself*. . . . It is designed to empower the listener to obtain self-knowledge, rather than follow a certain lead, and the more graphic the knowledge, the more self-aware the individual. The nitty-gritty aspect of funk is thus a means of acknowledging the deeper, inner soul.”¹⁸ Several stories illustrate Vincent’s argument about the transformative nature of funk. Ladd provides the most creative expression of how transformative P-Funk’s entire package was in constructing his own identity as a young black man living in a “relatively conservative” black community in Cambridge, Massachusetts—“a slice of non-America in the middle of racist Boston.” Having discovered Sly and the Family Stone, he recounts how he was still striving for a funkier existence. Ladd anthropomorphizes a Funkadelic record, imagining it “giggling in the hide ‘n’ go seek closet, trying not to give itself away, thinking ‘Man, wait ‘till he finds us. It’s gonna be over.’” And it was. Ladd recounts how he “found *Cosmic Slop* at my cousins’. It did not save my life. It just gave me the map so I knew how.”¹⁹ As is true with much of the writing about P-Funk, Ladd incorporates the same feel and aesthetic in his own writing, both in terms of preaching the importance of the funk and interpreting it as self-actualization.

Poet Thomas Sayers Ellis takes his admiration to a new level of intertextuality by creating three poems written in homage to P-Funk that, like Ladd, signify the same P-Funk aesthetic.²⁰ The second in the trio, “Parliament/Funkadelic, Houston Summit (1976),” demonstrates the significance of both the cover art and other promotional materials in the young black man’s imagination. Sayers Ellis’s poem is preceded by a reproduction from a Parliament Tour book, which in an era far predating the Parents Music Research Center’s advisory system, satirically warns white parents about the dangers of P-Funk’s music and the group’s blackness while acknowledging that P-Funk was getting over with a white audience: “Notice! Stop! Help Save the Youth of America! Don’t Buy NEGRO RECORDS. The screaming, idiotic words, and savage music of these records are undermining the morals of our white youth in America. Call

the advertisers and the radio stations that play this type of music and complain to them!”²¹ The group simultaneously mocks themselves and the uptight society and record industry they were dealing with while calling out the racism that permeated popular music and society. What follows is what appears to be a poem dedicated to the album cover for *America Eats Its Young*, laced with both an elucidation of the P-Funk philosophy and a critique of the music industry’s treatment of the group:

We paid
 For the fly-
 ing saucers,
 Extra-
 terrestrial
 & maggots
 Our god-
 damn selves,
 Not an
 Album cover
 Penny from
 Casablanca,
 Not a fold-
 ed dollar
 Bill from
 Westbound . . .²²

The third poem in the series, “Photograph of Dr. Funkenstein,” is yet another homage to an album cover that is laced with highly graphic, erotic, bodily, nasty, funk images and linguistic turns that would match those of Bell, otherwise known as Sir Lleb.²³ Sayers Ellis provides perhaps the deepest expression of the power of intertextuality in the P-Funk aesthetic by signifying on already deep significations²⁴ to produce his own creative expression of how he relates to the group and their philosophy of funk.

The album covers and liner notes not only provided a crucial space for young black men to construct their identities, their sexualities,²⁵ and unique black aesthetics by opening up representations of blackness but also helped their listeners to think critically and interpret art—in its many forms. Recounting the story of poet Kenneth Carroll, Francesca Royster demonstrates how P-Funk’s album covers enabled young black men to experience the equivalent of black feminist scholar bell hooks’s “oppositional gaze,” which Royster summarizes as “the practice of critical looking (and listening) as a form of pleasure and power, the key to a decolonized mind.”²⁶ Carroll recounts:

Guys who literally could not read would be interpreting the pictures, the art work . . . for a lot of us in the inner city, they

literally kind of opened the world up. . . . That you can literally exist as a Child of the Universe somewhere, where color and class and none of that really matters. That people could be something else besides, you know, po' niggas.²⁷

The quote demonstrates the power of the P-Funk aesthetic, whether through their aural or visual art—to represent so intensely a working-class black aesthetic and at the same time provide transcendence into a utopian reality where the forces of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, imperialism, and all the other -isms do not exist. Funk scholars like Vincent and Michael V. O'Neal have also recognized the power of the Parliament-Funkadelic iconography to bust stereotypes of poor and working-class black people and create a powerful counterdiscourse by providing young black kids with otherwise largely unavailable positive images of black people²⁸—both on Earth and in the farthest reaches of a bizarre outer-space existence. The following analysis tries to elucidate the meaning and development of the Funkadelic aesthetic and philosophy through the cover art and liner notes of several Funkadelic albums.²⁹

“Mommy, What’s a Funkadelic?”: The Birth of the Funkadelic Aesthetic

The first incarnation of P-Funk was as the Parliaments, a community doo-wop band based out of the Silk Palace barbershop in Plainfield, New Jersey, that in 1967 hit the charts with “I Wanna Testify” and made their premier appearance at the Apollo Theater. Shortly after, the band moved to Detroit, and in doing so, ended up experiencing two of the worst urban riots in US history. Once in Detroit, the band experienced the full forces of deindustrialization, automation, unemployment, urban blight, and white flight, as well as continued contact with the grim effects of the Vietnam War on working-class communities of color. With their sights set on Hitsville, USA, the band enjoyed a short stint on Jobete, a Motown subsidiary, but in 1968 Clinton lost the rights to the name and the band went with a new label—Westbound Records—and headed in a new direction. With a new name, label, and additions to the lineup from a younger, more radical generation of players, like Billy “Bass” Nelson, guitar genius Eddie Hazel, drummer Tiki Fulwood, and guitarist Tawl Ross, the group ditched the Motown look of slick hair and tight suits; amped up their sound, in part due to the influence of local white rockers MC5; and expanded their minds through the use of psychedelic drugs. Thus, Funkadelic was born.³⁰

Funkadelic represented the harder psychedelic sound of the P-Funk conglomeration. Their first release was a 45 single titled “Music for My Mother,”³¹ which peaked at number 50 on the US rhythm and blues (R&B) charts,³² released on the newly formed Westbound. But given the form of the 45, there was no visual or written expression of the group’s aesthetic until their first full album in 1970, *Funkadelic*. The group’s first album cover art emphasized the

band's counterculture connections and black roots with a psychedelic kaleidoscope image of a black face with "Funkadelic" above in bubble lettering similar to that used in the iconic Woodstock poster, as well as so many other posters and album covers of the era.³³ While there was little in the album cover to entice a new listener other than the connections with psychedelia and funk, as soon as listeners heard the first track, "Mommy, What's a Funkadelic?" they were pushed into self-exploration ("If you will suck my soul, I will lick your funky emotions"), told of the band's otherworldly nature ("I am Funkadelic, I am not of your world"), and asked to join in and "fly on."³⁴ From the beginning, Funkadelic presented an out-of-this-world sound and aesthetic that asked their fans to join in the funkified, intergalactic experience.³⁵ By the end of the album, listeners heard another fundamental piece of the P-Funk philosophy—the celebration of the profane, of sex, of earthy funkiness: "all that is good is nasty."³⁶

Funkadelic's next release that same year on Westbound expanded the band's connections with the counterculture's trinity of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll while highlighting soul music's celebration of black pride by picturing a naked, black woman with a large Afro on the album cover, which was becoming increasingly popular among several black artists of the era. The band recorded the entire album on lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) and rocked harder than ever before. The album's title, written in the same bubble font, announced the essence of the group's philosophy of self-discovery, transcendence, and liberation through music: *Free Your Mind . . . And Your Ass Will Follow*. The album found a receptive audience, peaking at number 11 on the Billboard Top R&B Albums Chart and at number 92 on the Billboard pop charts.³⁷ While some might see the use of a black woman's nude body as sexist or exploitative, I interpret the cover image, produced by famed rock photographer Joel Brodsky, as a celebration of the black woman's body and pride in her natural hair. Funkadelic was not alone in the use of such images, as evidenced by Miles Davis's cover for the jazz great's highly popular album *Bitches Brew*, released the same year, which featured the artwork of surrealist painter Mati Klarwein depicting several images of the black female body in a surrealistic landscape.³⁸ Royster, who delves deep into P-Funk's relationship with sexuality and representation, argues that while much of "P-Funk's album cover artwork provocatively represents black women's bodies as contested territories, and as the locus for political psychic frustration," these representations are indicative of the group's overall "rejection of fear, loathing and shame of the black body and the embrace of sexual and imaginative freedom."³⁹ The image of the naked, black female would reappear on virtually all of Funkadelic's subsequent albums in new and more imagined forms. While the album cover expressed an explicitly black aesthetic, the album title encourages the band's followers, regardless of race, class, or gender, to find their funky selves through mental release and transcendence through dance and has become a lasting moniker for the P-Funk brand. Not everyone tolerated the celebration of black female sexuality and prohallucinatory consciousness: The promotional tour posters that accompanied the album were

censored when the group toured England, forcing the band to remove the “And Your Ass Will Follow.”⁴⁰ While some saw P-Funk as too outlandish and far out, their next album would push that image even further with its expressions of the darker side of the early 1970s experience and the pain and anguish the population they represented was experiencing.

The next album still paid homage to the black woman and her Afro, but the cover of *Maggot Brain* also demonstrated the darker side of Funkadelic. The woman pictured dons a tight, shiny Afro that blends into the background, which appears to be maggots feasting on rotting bones. The woman’s eyes are tightly closed, with her mouth hanging wide open in what could be a scream but also resembles a woman belting out some deep, funky soul. Noting the intertextuality the band produced on their first coherent album, Royster sees the cover image as an “icon of frustration and disease explored in the songs—the visual equivalent of Eddie Hazel’s crying guitar . . . an image of collective frustration and struggle.”⁴¹ As the promises of the 1960s waned in the Nixon era, there was a sense of collective frustration, and Funkadelic expressed the sense of desperation and despair through all elements of their cultural production—image, sound, and philosophy.⁴² Despite the album’s dark tone, it was well received, debuting on the Billboard Top R&B Albums Chart, where it remained for twenty-four weeks, peaking at number 14.⁴³

While the cover image is captivating, the album’s back cover and liner notes made Funkadelic appear dark and even threatening. The image of what is presumably the woman’s maggot-eaten skull surrounded by smaller discarded bones, combined with the band’s use of the Process Church of the Final Judgment’s writings for liner notes, created an intimidating and, for some, downright scary vibe. P-Funk cover artist Ronald “Stozo” Edwards recounts the fear and suspicion of Funkadelic in the black community: “Niggas have always been scared of Funkadelic. My cousin bought that *Maggot Brain* album, it was the scariest shit I had ever heard. You had to be, like, a freak to be into them.”⁴⁴ While the liner notes basically call for ridding oneself of fear, claiming that fear is the root of destruction, violence, and even poverty, the writing does get into some rather sacrilegious territory. Still, the Process Church’s cultlike status and wrongful association with the Charles Manson clan left many with a distaste for the band’s use of the dark imagery and message.⁴⁵ It appears that the band’s manager, Ron Scribner, introduced Clinton to the texts from the Process Church, but that was the extent of Clinton’s connection to the group. Scribner explains, “There was never any grand plan that I can recall. He saw those as things that related to him. They were in the same space in his mind as taking sayings and taking principles and putting them into music.”⁴⁶ Clinton basically shrugs off the critiques, claiming that he never meant to be taken so seriously: “I guess when we took acid, we really did get loony and didn’t know it. ‘Cause we was goofing for the most part, and then we realized that people was really into it.”⁴⁷ Yet the use of the obscure cult’s writings, combined with the disturbing images, scared some listeners off and gave the impression that Funkadelic

was “a death-worshipping black rock band.”⁴⁸ The band’s next album would do nothing to dissuade the negative reactions.

A double album recorded on Westbound in 1972, *America Eats Its Young* was the most intensely and explicitly political Funkadelic album in terms of its album cover image, liner notes, and title. Despite its cover image and content, the album charted well, debuting on the Billboard Top R&B Albums Chart, where it remained for nine weeks, peaking at number 22.⁴⁹ Clinton felt the dark nature of the album was an accurate and warranted “reflection of what was going on in my life and generally everywhere around at that time. You saw a lot of sad people at the end of that era.”⁵⁰ While much of the music on the album is upbeat and positive, the album cover and liner notes represent a darker mood. The cover art is attributed to Paul Weldon, but the album cover concept is credited to both Clinton and Scribner, who obviously borrowed from the Beatles’ censored *Yesterday and Today* album cover.⁵¹

America Eats Its Young demonstrates the band’s first use of the gatefold album cover, which gave them more space to visually represent the band’s message. When laid out, the full outer portion of the album cover depicts the backside of a dollar bill, and it is no accident that it is the one-dollar bill, because in funk, both rhythmically and spiritually, there is an emphasis on the One.⁵² Along with small yet interesting and meaningful modifications to the back of the dollar bill, the eyes are drawn to the center where in place of the ONE with “In God We Trust” above it, there appears the Statue of Liberty dressed in a fraying American flag with blood-red eyes holding a blazing red flame in her right hand and an interracial group of babies in her left hand—four white babies (one missing an arm that is dangling from the fangs Lady Liberty’s blood-drooling mouth, another missing the front lobe of her head, and a third with no head), a brown baby, a yellow baby, and a black baby. The babies of color are interestingly off to the far right and unharmed, while all but one of the white babies is missing body parts. The side panel of the pyramid with the eye above it is unchanged, except for the Latin writing.⁵³ In place of the olive branch and thirteen arrows held in the eagle’s claws, there is a hypodermic syringe in the left claw and what appears to be a naked child with a distended belly. On the bottom of each panel, the words “The Great Seal” on the left and “of the United States” on the right are replaced here with “Fac Ita Esse Quod Est,” which on the inside cover reads, “As It Is, So Be It.” In addition, the number for this dollar bill is 1984, which I assume is a reference to George Orwell’s dystopian novel. As a band that represented a working-class black aesthetic, the use of money in this context can be read as a critique of US capitalism and the economic inequality many Americans were experiencing.

The inside liner notes deepened the dark and political tone of the album cover even further. Taken from more writings from the Process Church, the liner notes make a strong political appeal for listeners and readers not only to care about the deteriorating state of America but also to take responsibility and action:

America eats its young. But we eat America, pollute it, abuse it, rape it, take from it, destroy it. As we give so do we receive. . . . America is racked with conflict; our conflict; the conflict of rich and poor, have and have not, black and white, male and female, order and chaos, hawk and dove, love and hate, old and young, right and left. . . . The question is: Does what we are doing from our particular side have positive or negative effects? Is what we are doing aimed at reconciliation of the conflict, or just getting our way at the other side's expense?⁵⁴

The message presented here is a direct echo of the more philosophical tracks on the album, such as “If You Don’t Like the Effects, Don’t Produce the Cause” and “Biological Speculation.” Clinton reflects on how the band’s over-the-top reputation gave them freedom: “That was one good thing about playing in Funkadelic, they never took us seriously about anything, not even when we were political. We said things that you couldn’t possibly say.”⁵⁵ While much of what the Process Church had to offer was quite engaging and even enlightening, the liner notes get into sketchier territory when it goes on to promote loving our enemies, including Satan, which was amplified further with tracks like “Miss Lucifer’s Love.”⁵⁶ Bell recounts how Clinton encouraged him to take a different approach when he joined the P-Funk conglomerate to produce the next album cover and liner notes, saying, “We really don’t need to have any more of that Process Church stuff. People are beginning to get the wrong idea about us.”⁵⁷ The introduction of an artistic influence helped the group head in a new direction and achieve greater mass appeal.

Bell and the Funkadelic Aesthetic

Bell served as the chief artistic director for Funkadelic’s mid-1970s albums *Cosmic Slop*, *Standing on the Verge of Getting It On*, and *Let’s Take It to the Stage*, and he produced a more consistent, intertextual message and aesthetic through all their various mediums. Clinton recounts how at this point the band began to perfect the Funkadelic sound and reach a more diverse audience: “We knew just about how funky to be to get on black radio. And we was getting on a lot of white radio at that time, too. . . . Those three albums, we was bringing it to the norm.”⁵⁸ But the sound was just one element. While previous album covers enhanced the meaning of Funkadelic’s developing philosophy and politics, particularly *Maggot Brain* and *America Eats Its Young*, the introduction of Bell’s chaotic, otherworldly cover art and crazy stream-of-consciousness liner notes elevated the P-Funk philosophy to another level and created a cohesive Funkadelic aesthetic. Vincent explains that pressure from Westbound led to the hiring of Bell to oversee the art production but that Bell’s “scatological landscapes” and “scandalous contributions . . . were by no means a capitulation to

the censors” and that his “mutant portraits of the players became part of the Funkadelic experience.”⁵⁹ No one expresses the power of the Funkadelic aesthetic and Bell’s artwork better than Stevens, who has paid homage to Bell in his own art:

What Bell had done was invert psychedelia through the ghetto. Like an urban Hieronymus Bosch, he cross-sectioned the sublime and the hideous to jarring effect. Insect pimps, distorted minxes, alien gladiators, sexual perversions. It was a thrill, it was disturbing. Like a florid virus, his marked mutations spilled around the inside and outside covers in sordid details that had to be breaking at least seven state laws.⁶⁰

While Stevens finds Bell’s artwork significant, he argues that the “writer/artist”⁶¹ had an even greater impact through his liner notes, which many who write about P-Funk try to replicate:

More crucially, his stream-of-contagion text rewrote the whole game. He single-handedly defined the P-Funk collective as sci-fi superheroes fighting the ills of the heart, society, and the cosmos. Funk wasn’t just a music, it was a philosophy, a way of seeing and being, a way for the tired spirit to hold faith and dance yourself into another day. As much as Clinton’s lyrics, Bell’s crazoid words created the mythos of the band and bonded the audience together.⁶²

Stevens is one of the few to give Bell full credit. Although Clinton has commented on the influence of the cover art on Funkadelic’s staying power—“Believe me, that’s one thing that makes this stuff stay around so long. I got more pictures on the wall in my house, I could start a museum—people that draw and wanted to become artists because of Pedro”⁶³—he has been less inclined to acknowledge the significance of Bell’s liner notes and his overall influence on developing P-Funk’s philosophy.

Bell started drawing at the age of four or five, inspired by his father who he describes as “a frustrated artist.”⁶⁴ Although his drawings are in the style of comic books,⁶⁵ he recounts that his mother was anti-comic book but that he had seen *Sergeant Rock* at a young age and read a lot of science fiction, like Ray Bradbury and Harlan Ellison.⁶⁶ Other early influences included a fascination with dinosaurs, Genesis and Revelations from the Bible, and some early hallucinogenic trips due to an allergic reaction to penicillin. Bell recounts that “this hallucinogenic effect ha[d] created all these overlaid images that have nothing to do with reality, but, from your mind’s eye, you cannot see the difference . . . the Age of Aquarius, the LSD and the mushroom stuff, it was like no big deal to me.”⁶⁷ Bell explains that while his artwork can be called psychedelic, that it has

a different vibe from the artwork of the 1960s: “unlike psychedelia, which is basically peaceful images—peace signs, flower power, and all that—hey, we’re out here in the ghet-to, and things ain’t like that.”⁶⁸ While Bell was able to put an explicitly black, working-class aesthetic in his art that echoed the sound, look, and performances P-Funk produced, he combined that with the sensationalism and sci-fi elements of white underground comic book artists and the wild art of Big Daddy Roth and Robert Williams that accompanied his introduction to custom cars in the late 1950s. The combination of Bell’s early introduction to psychedelia and his penchant for white acid rock made him primed to become Funkadelic’s artistic director.

Bell recounts first learning of the group when he heard a DJ test “Mommy, What’s a Funkadelic?” on the air without having listened to it first. She pulled the record, listened to it during a commercial, played it again on air, and Bell was hooked for life: “Because this was everything I had been leading up to, but instead of being on the White side, this was on the Black side. And I was like, ‘Holy Shit!’ So right away, I bought that record and started trying to send letters to George Clinton in my famous illustrated envelopes.”⁶⁹ Bell was hired first as a promotion artist and press-kit writer but made his big break with the album cover for *Cosmic Slop*. Having never drawn an album cover before, and with little guidance from Clinton other than to “Do that stuff that you did on all those envelopes. The more out the better,”⁷⁰ Bell confronted the challenge of not just a typical album cover but using the entire space for the band’s second gatefold cover. Bell rose to the occasion and produced a lasting piece that helped introduce new legions of Funkateers to the philosophy of P-Funk.

The central image on the album cover is of yet another naked black woman, but this one is an otherworldly, grotesque version with missing body parts, fangs, and machinery incorporated into her body. Her breasts and nipples are of particular interest. The one pictured on the left side of the album is surrounded by what might be interpreted as a rough sketch of North and South America, with the woman’s nipple serving as the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean; the nipple on the right side of the cover is not human but mechanical, what appears to be the volume dial from a guitar, which reappears on several subsequent albums.⁷¹ While the image is explicit, it is such an atypical representation of the female body and its inherent sexuality that the graphicness of the image has a different effect. Royster argues that Parliament-Funkadelic creates “an important space for improvising and performing non-normative sexual desires for black men. Although these moments are at times inchoate and contradictory in terms of a critique of sexism and homophobia, they do at least advance an ‘elsewhere’—a fantasy space for new formations of self.”⁷² The images Bell employs are less sexualized than they are illustrative of the overall fantasy world he seeks to create, but they might be read by some as exploitative.

As one flips the album to the other side and follows the woman’s body down to her pelvis, one sees another woman’s body with a heart-shaped head and blue face under which bare breasts are lactating a stream of milk. The milk

is flowing off of what appears to be a venue of some sort called the Cosmic Slop. Below the marquis, we see a cityscape in the background, with signs atop like “Hustle Loan Company: Your Ass Will Belong to Us,” “Blasto War Toys,” and “Pimpco Gas, Almost Pollution Free,” and in the foreground we see what appear to be alien versions of pimps and prostitutes. Royster identifies P-Funk’s recurrent use of the pimp “as both site of great style and cool and figure of economic oppression . . . as a trouble-spot to negotiate.” She highlights the recurrent themes of sexual fluidity and moral ambiguity in P-Funk’s work, explaining that “[r]ather than settle these moments of contradiction in black sexual politics and desire, the group embraces moments of ambiguity in black life.”⁷³ On the inside cover, Bell provides visual clues to the meaning of each of the song titles through humorous yet slightly grotesque, sexualized, Afro-futuristic images, but as Hacker explains, they intentionally kept the message a bit murky: “Like good gnostic Bacchanalians, P-Funk had the good epistemological taste not to define their vision of the great beyond too specifically.”⁷⁴ Clinton repeatedly indicates that he desired some level of ambiguity in the cover art, liner notes, and lyrics to keep fans engaged and guessing at their meaning.

While most of the album cover images are timeless, set in the farthest reaches of the cosmos, at the bottom of the album cover is the image of a green, reptilian-looking alien woman with money in her hands whose hair and dress are created from a mix of color and black-and-white images that help locate the lost Funkateer back in the culture and politics of the 1970s, including multiple photographs of protesters donning swastikas and holding signs saying “White Power,” offset by an image of Ron O’Neal, aka Superfly; tanks rolling through; Sammy Davis Jr. hugging Nixon from behind; and Bert from *Sesame Street*. To the side of this figure is a street post with a banner wrapped around it saying, “Since when, is Mother Nature obligated to whore for our sins?” In terms of images, this is as explicitly political as Bell gets, but the liner notes provide more of a framework for the developing philosophy of funk.

The liner notes for *Cosmic Slop* provide Bell and Clinton’s collaborative attempt to create a uniquely funky, black, working-class, yet expansive and often otherworldly worldview. Bell critiques everything from war—“The napalm-jelly and barbecue sandwich of war has become the ghoul/soul food of those who profit from the eternal conflicts as suppliers of the grisly table utensils of war machines, make the bloody feasts more ‘polite’”—to capitalism—“Premature ecological doom through the reactionary efforts of POLLUTING ENTERPRISES of capitalistic pimpism foreshadow Earth’s demise. These cachectic mumruffians of madness continue to hasten total biological Armageddon for the ‘benefit’ of consumerism.”⁷⁵ The antidote to all of these earthly problems is to “dance your way out of your constrictions”⁷⁶ with Funkadelic’s sound and philosophy as your guide. Ladd proves that the group had their desired effect. When Ladd describes his first confrontation with racism abroad, he signifies on the liner notes from *Cosmic Slop* to elucidate the meaning of the situation:

The colorless monster of RACISM is gleefully unchained by garroted gibbons and hirsute hooligans, whose abbreviated mentalities cripple their own minds. I thought, “Damn, I travel 12,000 miles to get called nigger by a kid darker than me.” I was beat by Hollywood: “Specific inspissated ignoramuses of cankerous audacity [. . .] engage professionally and/or morally in the unique practice of PIMPIFICATION.” There is no better language for dealing with such bullshit. The philosophy carried by this lingua funkadelica was crucial to how my worldview revamped in the Himalayan foothills. Funkadelic focused on flight but not escape.⁷⁷

At the end of the liner notes, Bell demonstrates the themes of flight and personal transcendence by announcing the arrival of the P-Funk philosophy or cosmology on Earth from the cosmos: “FUNKADELIA IS UPON THEE! VERILY, those soulfulifically jaded swashbucklers of agitproptic burnbabydom—FUNKADELIA—have descended from the Original Galaxy Ghetto to cleanse the wayward souls THROUGH MUSIC worth of the immortals themselves!”⁷⁸ Bell also warns that there are dire consequences for ignoring the funk: “Earth remains as this solar system’s space strumpet . . . sour milk from the breast of MOTHER NATURE!” While Funkadelic followers will “ascend to the heavens,” the “wayward masses left behind will be further reduced by their own pimp games into the lunatic fringe of extinction. Unerringly, they will cease to exist, and after this forsaken firmament is pumped unto COSMIC SLOP . . . the rats and roaches will once again become the dominant Lords of Earth!”⁷⁹ While some readers must have felt they missed the proverbial intergalactic boat, others found the writings of Sir Lleb favorable to the dark tone of the borrowed writings used on the previous two albums.⁸⁰

With the 1974 release of *Standing on the Verge of Getting It On*, Bell followed through with more Afro futuristic images, this time set in a watery, intergalactic battle landscape. Bell heightened the intertextuality of the cover art and liner notes by providing a more coherent narrative, explaining the cosmic scene painted across the album cover, and by making references to earlier expressions of the Funkadelic aesthetic. The colorful landscape is dotted with images of the naked black female body, as seen on most Funkadelic albums. Here we have the woman from the *Cosmic Slop* cover looking on from the bottom right corner as the profunk forces ride their giant space chariot—“the speediest booglerizer, the PARLIAFUNKADELICMENT THANG,” the back of which looks like a bodacious booty and breasts topped by an eaglelike headpiece—across the album cover and take out the unfunky aliens. The liner notes suggest that the giant, naked, black woman, in a huge Afro with her face painted white in the style of a geisha, watching the scene from behind a cliff is the “Cosmic Strumpet” who called on the forces of Funkadelia to rescue her from the “NIXON-OUS HEATHENS,” and who Sir Lleb is “Standing on the Verge of Getting It On” with if

he is able to defeat the “mongrel hordes of kung-fu crab carriers, karate-kitted kangeroosters and sapidless streakers,” as well as the other “targets attacked from within dank, ghetto corridors; various supertrys, halshafts, rambunctious niggaphites, slackmacks, and clodfathers,” the “bourgeoisie nefarious neegrows who sought to escape doom in befouled, leather-topped, white-walled mopodil-lacs,” and “blasphemous malodorified legions of maggot-coloured honkiteers!” While most of the album is not highly political, in this short refrain Bell calls out stereotypical representations of blacks in Blaxploitation films, middle-class blacks who abandoned their communities, and, rather than invoking the Nation of Islam’s “white devils,” the white maggots, “Guarding their reeking nest, the PIT OF PENTAGON, the foam flecked degenerates filled the very air with Watergate buggers and ensnarling webs of mysterian tape reels.”⁸¹ The liner notes are laid atop yet another pair of disembodied bare breasts, with the right nipple again pictured as a volume dial and the left nipple plugged into what I am assuming is an unpictured amp or stereo, topped this time with the Funkadelic skull. On the other inside panel, Bell provided psychedelic interpretations of the images of each of the band members set on top of a collage of comic sketches and images of popular figures of 1970s culture, such as Nixon, the Brat Pack, Bruce Lee, and Clinton, solidifying P-Funk’s place among the era’s popular culture icons. Bell fan and blogger Adrienne Crew suggests that “Bell’s work conflates the spiritual with the physical by offering new ideas of what aliens look like” through his use of a colorful palette and range of body shapes and sizes. Crew notes that Bell’s alien-inspired images of the band members were created “without regard to ethnic heritage, thus offering his predominantly African American audience an opportunity to try on the idea of transcending their own skin color, an idea Afrofuturism literature frequently explores.”⁸² Bell continued to have almost complete freedom with the album cover and liner notes and used that freedom to create a wild, chaotic yet consistent Funkadelic aesthetic. While *Standing on the Verge of Getting It On* included some heavy messages, like “Good Thoughts, Bad Thoughts,” which summarizes much of Clinton’s worldview, the rest of the album focused on lighter subjects like sex and relationships.

The next Funkadelic album presented darker images and a more focused critique of other funk bands. From my perspective, the cover for *Let’s Take It to the Stage* is the most menacing of all Funkadelic album covers. It depicts the Funkadelic skull hanging above a Hulk-ish, green figure with empty black eyes and white dotted pupils. The creature’s orange button-up shirt is unbuttoned to reveal the album title on the figure’s belly. The backside of the album cover depicts crumbling brick towers in the left upper corner next to what appears to be yet again the breast from the *Cosmic Slop* cover with the volume dial serving as a nipple, but in this scene the breast’s orientation makes it appear like a mountain, with the woman presumably lying down. Below this, one sees an intergalactic funk band, and if you think the band in the bar in *Star Wars* seemed weird, you ain’t seen nothin’ yet. A mixture of sci-fi martians and references

to Egyptian sculpture mix with cyborgs, much like the original figure on the *Cosmic Slop* cover. The inside right cover pictures the Funkadelic logo and the “Main Invasion Force”—Bell’s alien versions of the most recent lineup in the band. Above the Funkadelic logo is a collage of a Hollywood western hero above a picture of Muhammad Ali knocking out George Foreman during the “Rumble in the Jungle.” The inside left panel depicts yet another naked black woman, this time in an erotic pose, thrust into a bass guitar where the images of the woman and the instrument merge as one, the separation of the figures only made clear with the nipple that sticks out along the bass neck and the strings and dials on the bass that glide along the side of her body. As Royster notes, “the melding of human and machine and sometimes with it, the festishization of nonhuman objects as sites of desire” is present not only in the cover art but also in P-Funk’s live shows.⁸³

The next installment of Bell’s “Sub-Linear Noxious Liner Notations & Cryptic Gibberish” by his Funkadelic alter ego, Sir Lleb of Funkadelia, appear atop the black, brown, and tan patterned surface of the bass woman. The liner notes for *Let’s Take It to the Stage* are an interesting hodgepodge of topics that begins with a declaration of Funkadelic’s place in the broader cosmos: “and it came to pass, that the concept of FUNKATIZATION was declared a Universal Law by Mother Nature, and therefore—exempt from control by the Forces of Good, and those of Evil. Full & forceful uponst man it was, Eternal Funk was nastily maintained to endure the skillions of Time.” The notes quickly move into a critique of US imperialism: “A former vanguard land of liberty and freedom turned bogardistic, and the star-spangled Kong of Babylon was unleashed to bully tidbit morsels of faraway lands.” Bell moves on to specifically critique the Vietnam War, declaring that Kong was trying to confront “the Commie Crudzilla” and acquire its “new prize (a minute Far East Land)” and that when the Commies refused, Kong “sent forth armoured goons, accompanied by outstanding nasties as: Doctor Napalm, Professor Claymore and Reverend No-Grow” but “the black pajama mojo men arose from the people’s hears . . . and countervamped with hellhonnik fury,” which sent “the mammoth Kong back homeward reeling and smoking into worldwide breakface!” Bell then moves into an harangue protesting the treatment of Ali after his refusal to fight in the Vietnam War and celebrating his subsequent rise after regaining his title and knocking out other competitors, making an intertextual connection with the picture of the Ali–Foreman fight on the inside album cover. The liner notes then move into the more specific area of the album’s actual content, the playful battles between various funk bands and Funkadelic’s declaration of their dominance in the realm of funk: “Behindst the scenes, turbulent conflicts hath arisen; various Lands going heads-up over the issue of ‘you-go-first-isms.’” Bell is describing the conflict P-Funk had with other bigger-named acts of the time about who would outdo who, to which Funkadelic replies, “Let’s Take It to the Stage.”

The final album on Westbound was the 1976 *Tales of Kidd Funkadelic*, which peaked at number 14 on the Billboard Top R&B Albums Chart and number 103 on the Billboard 200.⁸⁴ The title represents the nickname for P-Funk's latest addition, guitar prodigy Michael Hampton. The cover is in the same style as the previous albums and represents what Vincent dubs "Bell at his Daliesque best."⁸⁵ Kidd Funkadelic is pictured at the center, standing next to his guitar and wearing a green do-rag, a wifebeater, and tighty-whities⁸⁶ monogrammed with "KF." To his right is another dark-skinned female cyborg with distorted breasts and eyes, her crotch ablaze. Above Kidd Funkadelic hangs a skull with one blood-red teary eye and the other picturing two black figures headed down a yellow brick road toward a setting sun. Along with more colorful alien figures, other notable elements include images on the back cover of a green monster with huge breasts bearing dollar signs as nipples and just below it a small black-and-white photograph of a murder victim, possibly one of the Manson murders, with a grim warning pointing at the picture that reads, "See This? Don't believe in PARLIAFUNKADELICMENTATION, and you'll end up like this."⁸⁷ While these elements presented a darker vibe and expanded the band's ongoing critique of materialism, the liner notes were simply focused on Kidd Funkadelic's pursuits of "Tuesday Mae Jollyrogers Jones." Bell's essay ends on a somewhat defeatist note, suggesting the writer/artist was less than pleased with his final product and the band was frustrated with their final stint with Westbound; the entire album seeming a bit tossed off: "And besides mothafunkers that chump-change you amassed for this album *don't* automatically entitle your ashy butts to free storybook jollies! Just play the ma' fockin' vinyl & be satisfied with the jammin' grooves."⁸⁸ Along with the ongoing funklore, Bell included another reimagining of the band members in colorful alien forms, dubbed as the "Funkadelic Invasion Force." Bell was instrumental in constructing aliases and descriptive identities for the various and ever-rotating cast of characters that made up the P-Funk mob.

Bell continued to have almost complete artistic freedom on the next Funkadelic album, *Hardcore Jollies*, which was the band's first major label release on Warner Brothers. The album brought greater commercial success for Funkadelic, peaking at number 12 on the Billboard Top R&B Albums Chart and number 96 on the Billboard 200.⁸⁹ The album's success might have been the result of the content, but it might also have been the result of being on a bigger, more established label that could better promote the album. Bell recounts that the only request Clinton made for the cover art was to introduce the branding of "US Funk Mob," which appears under the band's name on the front cover and in the liner notes. The artwork and liner notes both replicated images and themes introduced in previous albums. Despite being Funkadelic's first major label release, the album cover included some of the most sexually graphic images to date, including the band's name branded between a female figure's spread legs, a more explicitly exploitative use of female sexuality than on past albums, and some black nude female forms in the more ambiguous mechanized

mutant image introduced on *Cosmic Slop*, along with the same alien bubble print used on that album. The liner notes blend the previous album's critique of other funk bands with their main target here—their former Westbound label mates, the Ohio Players: “The evile, serpentine leader of the galaxy-feared Pizoid Prianaha Players” introduced as “Tillard Tat.” The competition between the two bands might be one reason the images were more explicitly sexual, given that the Ohio Players consistently used the naked black female form on their album covers in the 1970s, often in more explicitly sexualized and commercialized ways than Funkadelic.⁹⁰ The mission is the same as the one presented in the liner notes of *Standing on the Verge of Getting It On*: to protect a desired female figure, here “Queen Freakalene,” who rewards the Funkateers by knighting them as “overseers and DISCIPLES of INTERGALACTIC FUNK” as “representatives of the U.S. FUNK MOB—a supreme and singular distinction of the highest musical life form on Earth!”⁹¹ The ending lines of the notes provided a nice transition into the next album, which extended the connections between the earthly and the otherworldly.

Funkadelic's *One Nation Under a Groove* delivered the funk back to the Earth and hit it big with a mass audience. The title track spent fourteen weeks on Billboard's Hot 100 chart, peaking at number 28,⁹² and hit number 1 on Billboard's R&B chart, where it stayed for six weeks and was honored as *Jet Magazine's* Song-of-the-Year.⁹³ The album was Funkadelic's most commercially successful yet and the first to reach platinum; it peaked at number 1 on the Billboard Top R&B Albums Chart and at number 16 on the Billboard 200 and was ranked by Rolling Stone Magazine as number 177 of their 500 Greatest Albums of All Time.⁹⁴ Clinton continued to provide little direction for Bell, other than wanting “R&B” to appear on the cover. Otherwise, Bell explains, “I don't think we really needed to communicate much about the covers and the liner notes, because I shared a lot of my ideas with George and we was on the same wavelength.”⁹⁵ Bell's cover art for this album was much less chaotic and represented a black nationalist vibe with both male and female figures, both alien and human, planting a red, black, and green flag with R&B in the top left corner and a multicolored flag in the bottom right corner that displayed the band's current catch phrases, like “Think, it ain't illegal yet,” “Rhythm and Business,” and “A mind is a terrible thing to waste.” The back cover depicted a tough black male figure with fists raised ready to beam the funk through a shining ring on his right hand. With another gatefold cover, Bell had plenty of room on the inside for more of his comic art and to illustrate P-Funk's national takeover, listing the places where the funk had taken over, such as Chicago, the West, the South, the Big Apple, and even the “Funknilla Suburbs.” The liner notes, set on top of the catch phrase “Think, it ain't illegal yet,” tell the tale of the “Funk Wars,” dated as 1984 BC, another Orwellian reference. The notes are in the same vein as previous discussions of Funkadelic's interplanetary warfare—to spread the funk and combat the unfunky, this time with a lot signifying on popular *Star Wars* figures.⁹⁶ This album enhanced the intertextuality of the newest version of

the band's funklore by elucidating the subject further in one of the most noted tracks on the album, "Promentalshitbackwashpsychosisenemasquad (The Doo Doo Chasers)," which demonstrates P-Funk's penchant for the nasty and the profane in an otherwise rather deep song about getting past one's ego.

The 1979 release of *Uncle Jam Wants You*, which also experienced commercial success, peaking at number 2 on the Billboard Top R&B Albums Chart and at number 18 on the Billboard 200,⁹⁷ continued with the same nationalist imagery and themes but only included Bell's artwork on the inside and the back cover. The cover pictured Clinton sitting in a huge wicker chair in military garb donning a red beret, signifying on the iconic image of Black Panther Party founder and leader Huey P. Newton.⁹⁸ But rather than posing in a tough, macho stance, as Newton does, Clinton appears laidback; he wears big white sunglasses, has a cigarette or joint dangling from his lips, and crosses his legs at the knees above his knee-high white moon boots. This image exemplifies P-Funk's, and Clinton's, ability to represent "seemingly normative male spaces . . . as places for more fluid sexual and gender self-fashioning, identification and desire,"⁹⁹ which can be seen not only in this photography of Clinton but also in Bell's artwork on several Funkadelic albums. The inside cover, which Bell drew, is quite simple compared to most of the rest of his work and pictures a caricatured version of Clinton as Uncle Jam in an intergalactic setting. Despite Bell's scaled down canvas, British music critic Jon Wall recognized the coherence and intertextuality not only among the liner notes, cover art, and music but also with the band's previous albums: "The album's artwork suggest it's a 'Son of One Nation . . . '—more of the same crazy cartoons on the gatefold and an oath of loyalty ('In Funk We Trust'). The music completes the impression."¹⁰⁰

The nationalistic theme and focus on war continued with Funkadelic's 1981 release of *The Electric Spanking of War Babies*,¹⁰¹ but despite the political nature of the album, the cover was critiqued for its images of naked women that some argued was pornography. While there are numerous images of naked black women—some human, some mutant—scattered across Funkadelic's album covers, I argue that the cover for *The Electric Spanking of War Babies* undoubtedly has the most explicitly and graphically sexual images of all of the highly sexualized album covers the band produced. Women Against Pornography boycotted the cover and convinced Warner Brothers to censor it, but the record company allowed the band to use a "peepshow" approach, giving glimpses at what lay beneath the cover.¹⁰² What lay beneath the cover was a phallic space machine with a naked black woman shackled inside and what appears to be mechanical paddles spanking her bare ass; a masculine-looking alien is sitting above her directing the machine. While Royster argues that P-Funk's aesthetic produces "new spaces for nonnormative heterosexuality and creative production" that has provided black male fans with "a sense of imaginative freedom" and a "new queer space for black heterosexual men," this album cover, and in particular, the uncensored inside cover, gives her pause. She explains that it "skirts the line between critiquing and exploiting the objectification of women's

bodies. The back of the album depicts a nude black woman (or cyborg?) on all fours, transformed into a machine in which money goes in and sound comes out. Her body is punctured with knobs, wires and bolts.” While this image, aside from the woman being on all fours, is quite typical of Bell’s previous work, the problem for Royster is that the image is too ambiguous: “Is she meant to be the personification of the exploitation of black people? A ‘tarbaby’ produced by the powers that be to distract us all from our own exploitation? Is she a gullible customer?”¹⁰³ We need look no further than Bell’s liner notes for the answer:

[T]he “war babies” are you and me and “electric spanking” is mass-media mind-control. This is the state’s way of keeping people in line without having to waste a bunch of them in war, which is undesirable—mostly because they are needed as consumers. The antidote to electric spanking is “splanking,” which can be defined as a “positive stroke” of any sort: boycotting vanity products is splank, for example as is turning someone on to some good weed, or playing them a P-Funk album.¹⁰⁴

Bell explains that the original inspiration for the album came from Clinton talking to him a great deal about the aftermath of World War II and the United States dropping the atomic bombs, which Bell had already explored, along with recent scientific concepts in *Popular Science* and sci-fi literature.¹⁰⁵

In addition to the sexualized images of black women and a sci-fi setting, some versions of the album have more pointed and explicit critiques of politics and culture as the nation moved into the 1980s. There are multiple versions of the album, but both the compact disc version and a rerelease of the LP by a British label called Charly Groove include the cover image surrounded by more of Bell’s tiny comic strips, bursting with insight, and another use of a collage of recent images as a border for the top of the image, which included a range of images of the era, from Superman, to a tongue with full lips licking an American Express credit card, to a hooded Ku Klux Klansman, to a screaming Vietnamese or Cambodian soldier pointing a gun at the viewer. The cartoons around the central drawing also contain several political and cultural references to the era, with images critiquing the Three-Mile Island disaster, inflation, and sorry choices in the 1980 election: “I’d rather pick my nose, than pick Jerky Carter or Clownald Ray Gun!”¹⁰⁶ The back cover fits with the more political liner notes, picturing the United Funk Mob in their khaki militaristic garb under the multi-colored flag in triumph over alien forces. While in previous albums Bell played with the racial identity of the P-Funk crew by picturing them as aliens, here they appear as a group of black militants in the style of the Black Panther Party.¹⁰⁷

Bell’s Black Power politics, penchant for naked black female figures, interest in science fiction and machines, and philosophical worldview ensured that

his influence went beyond his cover art and liner notes. He claims he was Clinton's key source for information on sci-fi and futuristic concepts but acknowledges that Clinton was able to take those concepts and make them mainstream and popular without Bell's influence on the Parliament albums. He was also a huge influence on the other dominant creative force for P-Funk's album covers, artist and designer Overton Loyd, who did many of the late 1970s Parliament albums.

The Legacy of the Funkadelic Aesthetic

Today, the Parliament-Funkadelic philosophy remains alive and well in the band's myriad cultural productions; in their current live performances; in the millions of beats, lyrics, and styles that P-Funk produced and that the hip-hop generation endlessly samples; and in the increasing amount of both scholarly and popular writing that has emerged to help expose, translate, and even promote the Parliafunkadelicment Thang. But while Clinton and the P-Funk All-Stars experienced a dramatic resurgence in the mid-1990s that has lasted to this day, not everyone in the P-Funk mob has been so lucky. Clinton preaches the philosophy of the One, a humble philosophy that sees ego as its enemy, but he has had a harder time translating that vision into a reality for all of the players and artists in his collective. There are plenty of bitter feelings and absent figures due to problems with contracts, credits, and most importantly, cash. Bell had a falling out with Clinton more than a decade and a half ago,¹⁰⁸ and despite his undeniable influence in creating the P-Funk aesthetic, he has since fallen on hard times. Bell continued to work with Clinton through most of his solo albums, and Stevens declared that it was Bell's artwork that "gave the P-Funk identity to George Clinton's albums"¹⁰⁹ when P-Funk was on hiatus during the 1980s and early 1990s. But during the 1990s, Bell fell on ill health, including the loss of sight in one eye, and has since been struggling to make ends meet and has even faced the possibility of having to sell his entire collection.¹¹⁰ In 2009, P-Funk's legendary keyboardist Bernie Worrell helped organize a fundraiser for Bell—the "Miracle for a Maggot" benefit—featuring performances by the Black Rock Coalition, a nonprofit collective of black musicians.¹¹¹ Despite his current grim circumstances, Bell¹¹² has played a significant role in both the music and the art worlds. Bell feels his greatest legacy is being the first black artist to popularize a style similar to that of his early influences—white artists like Williams and Big Daddy Roth—as well as his ability to expand the knowledge of young blacks and give pride to those who had never had access to information about Egyptian civilization or who had never seen black comic book characters.¹¹³ The P-Funk aesthetic can be seen in all its various mediums in a range of contemporary artistic expressions, from funk-rock groups like the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Fishbone, and Weapon of Choice to countless hip-hop acts but in particular to early conscious rappers like Public Enemy, De La Soul, and A Tribe Called Quest; g-funk artists like Ice Cube and Dr. Dre; and more recent artists like OutKast and

Erykah Badu. The power of the P-Funk aesthetic is that while it was expressed in myriad forms and visions, the various mediums and expressions spoke to one another and created a cohesive, intertextual experience that appeals to an incredibly diverse audience to this day.

Notes

1. There are several quality sources on P-Funk's music and myth, the best of which include the two chapters in Rickey Vincent's seminal work on funk: *Funk: The Music, the People, and the Rhythm of the One* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1996). My own work on P-Funk is one of the more focused treatments on the band's work. See Amy Nathan Wright, "A Philosophy of Funk: The Politics and Pleasure of a Parliafunkadelic Thang!" in *The Funk Era and Beyond: New Perspectives on Black Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 33–50. Two works that do an excellent job of considering P-Funk in relation to other musicians who have used similar aesthetics are John Corbett, "Brother from Another Planet: The Space Madness of Lee Scratch Perry, Sun Ra, and George Clinton," in *Extended Play: Sounding off from John Cage to Dr. Funkenstein* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 7–24, and Ann Danielsen, *Presence and Pleasures: The Funk Grooves of James Brown and Parliament* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006).

For other short but quality pieces from experts in the field, see Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 350–58, and Craig Werner, "P-Funkentelechy," in *A Change Is Gonna Come: Music, Race, & the Soul of America* (New York: Plume, 1998), 226–30. For more creative and personal yet less scholarly approaches, see Scot Hacker, "Can You Get to That? The Cosmology of P-Funk," *Stuck Between Stations*, January 11, 2011, <http://stuckbetweenstations.org/2011/01/11/cosmology-of-pfunk/>, Accessed October 31, 2013, and Michael C. Ladd, "Hard-core Jollies in the Himalayas, Staring at the Cosmic Slop: The Mothership Connection Between Triple and Quadruple Consciousness," in *Rip It Up: The Black Experience in Rock 'n Roll* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 71–83. Francesca T. Royster provides a recent, well-theorized scholarly piece on P-Funk's effect on black masculinity in "Here's a Chance to Dance Our Way out of Our Constrictions: P-Funk's Black Masculinity and the Performance of Imaginative Freedom," *Poro! 7*, no. 2 (2011), <http://ir.uiowa.edu/poroi>.

2. While several scholars touch on the significance of the album covers and liner notes, no one has produced an article focused exclusively on these aspects of P-Funk's cultural productions, and even fewer recognize influential artists like Bell and Loyd, who created the work in these mediums. Vincent, Royster, and Hacker all discuss both forms in some detail. Unfortunately, I was unable to secure permission to reproduce any of the album covers discussed here. For a quick glimpse at all of P-Funk's album covers, see "Discography," on George Clinton Parliament Funkadelic's official website, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://georgeclinton.com/discography/>. To truly explore the album covers and liner notes, one must purchase the albums, which are readily available and well worth the investment.

3. Funkateers are similar to the Dead Heads who followed the Grateful Dead throughout their existence.

4. Wright, "A Philosophy of Funk," made a similar argument but focused more on the band's music, lyrics, and live performances. I hope to expand on this earlier piece by focusing almost exclusively on the group's album covers and liner notes and by highlighting how these amplified the elements previously discussed.

5. *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v. "intertextuality," <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intertextuality>: "the complex interrelationship between a text and other texts taken as basic to the creation or interpretation of the text."

6. By the "Funkadelic aesthetic," I mean the coherent style, message, and philosophy P-Funk produced in their many cultural productions. I use the term to define the cultural production of Funkadelic and focus particularly on the album covers that Bell created. I am building on the work of Tony Bolden, who establishes the concept of the "Funk impulse" in his introduction to his edited collection: "Theorizing the Funk: An Introduction" in *The Funk Era and Beyond: New Perspectives on Black Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 13–29. Bolden establishes that the "elasticity of the funk impulse is essential to the syncretism that characterizes African American culture. While pleasure and performance are often presumed to be mutually exclusive of intellectuality, funk offers immense possibilities for a new critical rubric because . . . the funk impulse is reflected in myriad forms and contexts, including the avant-garde." Bolden, "Theorizing the Funk," 26. While P-Funk is part of the broader Funk impulse, I argue that their extensive body of work and complex mythology and philosophy expressed through various mediums constitutes a

more specific Funkadelic aesthetic. Vincent cites Michael V. O'Neal, "P-Funk Aesthetic," (master's thesis, UCLA, 1987), as using a similar phrase.

7. Tym Stevens, "BEYOND COOL: Pedro Bell, Funkadelic's visionary!" *Tym Stevens Blog*, January 27, 2010, <http://tymstevens.blogspot.com/2010/01/beyond-cool-pedro-bell-funkadelics.html>.

8. Stevens, "BEYOND COOL." Stevens goes on to identify some of the key album covers of the era before delving into a celebration of Bell's artwork: "Who were all those people in the 'Sgt. Pepper' crowd?; what alternate reality were artists Roger Dean (Yes) and Mati Klarwein (Santana, Miles Davis) from?; why are the burning businessmen shaking hands?; is it an African woman standing or a lion's face?; does it say 'American Reality' or 'American Beauty' or both?"

9. Stevens, "BEYOND COOL." Stevens elaborates on how powerful these music-related products were for one's countercultural identity and defense against the mainstream world: "Your LP was a shield, your T-shirt was armor. They got you expelled, ostracised, beat up. They scared the living hell out of the straights around you . . . and you loved that. It reaffirmed your faith that you were into something good, something unique."

10. Dean L. Biron, "Writing and Music: Album Liner Notes," *PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 8, no. 1 (2011): 3.

11. Biron, "Writing and Music," 12.

12. Biron focuses his attention largely on jazz artists, like Ornette Coleman, who reproduced Jackson Pollock's *White Light* on his 1961 *Free Jazz* to highlight the artists' similar use of improvisation in different mediums, or Charles Mingus, who included a review he commissioned from his clinical psychologist in his liner notes for the brilliant 1963 *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* in an attempt to get someone who understood his subconscious to connect his innermost thoughts with his largely instrumental jazz. Another example mentioned as an important influence for artists of the era, including Bell and Clinton, is Frank Zappa, who took total control of his artistic production, including writing his liner notes. See Biron, "Writing and Music," for Zappa's overall influence. For influence on Bell, see Edward Hill, "Comic Genius: Artist Pedro Bell Explored Funkadelic's Darker Dimensions" (interview), *Waxpoetics* no. 18 (Aug/Sept 2006).

On the broader significance of the album, see Travis Elborough, *The Long-Player Goodbye: The Album from Vinyl to iPod and Back Again* (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2009). Biron provides a more focused discussion of the transformations in the medium, while Elborough's work is a love affair with the LP. He describes the goal of his book as "an attempt to step back and consider—to remember and to celebrate—just how radical the LP was in its day. Because the long-playing vinyl record really did change . . . everything." For more on the significance of the LP, other key transformations in the music industry in the 1970s, and their effects on the music of the era, see Kim Simpson, *Early '70s Radio: The American Format Revolution* (New York: Continuum Books, 2011).

13. Biron, "Writing and Music," 4–12. Biron's types include the following: 1) the literary liner note, in which "contributors fashion art from writing that is inspired by music," such as the combination of Klarewin's painting, Ralph Gleason's narrative with the brilliant music on Davis's 1970 *Bitches Brew*, or Greil Marcus's now legendary liner notes for Bob Dylan and the Band's *The Basement Tapes*; 2) the tangential liner note, which has little to do with the music; 3) the expository liner note, which outlines the origins and production of the album; 4) the propagandist liner note, which espouses "political or quasi-political views that may or may not also be prevalent in the accompanying music" (Funkadelic's *Maggot Brain* is used as the example, but as we will see, there are better representations of their political views); and 5) the retrospective liner note.

14. Elborough, *The Long-Player*, 5–6.

15. Stevens, "BEYOND COOL." While it is impossible to know to what extent other fans embraced the album covers in the way Stevens describes, my husband's entrance into the world of P-Funk came explicitly from checking out the music after seeing the album artwork on Parliament's *Funkentelechy vs. the Placebo Syndrome*, which he followed up with Funkadelic's *Free Your Mind . . . And Your Ass Will Follow*, again due to the album cover. I'm sure many others discovered P-Funk in similar ways.

16. Ladd, "Hardcore Jollies," 75.

17. For scholarly considerations on the definition of funk, see Vincent, *Funk*; Bolden, "Theorizing the Funk"; and Portia K. Maultsby, "Funk," in *African American Music: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 293–314. For definitions of funk from a range of musicians, see Michael Rozek, "What Is Funk?" *High Fidelity Magazine* 28 (October 1978): 160–62.

In Wright, "A Philosophy of Funk," I argue that the band's style was an expression of black working-class and poor life; Keshia Morant extends this argument to all of funk, which she defines as "the social protest discourse of poor and working-class Black youth after the euphoria of the civil rights movement faded in 'the decade of the detached'" and one that represents a post-civil rights approach by abandoning the language of the oppressor versus the oppressed. Keshia Morant, "Language in Action: Funk Music as the Critical Voice of a Post-Civil Rights Movement Counterculture," *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 1 (2011): 71–82. As a revisionist scholar of the

Black Freedom Struggle, I take issue with the term “post-civil rights” and argue that there was still substantial protest activity during the early 1970s when P-Funk produced their most political work and that the movement lives on today, but Morant makes a compelling argument about the shift in racial and political discourse during the 1970s. I argue that P-Funk exemplifies her argument in terms of funk as an abandonment of a victim mentality, which fits with the Black Power movement as a whole. Royster quotes Clinton from a 1994 interview in which he too defines funk as being explicitly rooted in a working-class experience, one in which the struggle for survival trumps the desire to be spiritually fit. Within it is an obvious critique of the black church’s class status: “Soul is from Church. But funk came from the people who didn’t have enough money to buy shoes to go to church, and had to work on Sunday.” Royster, “Here’s a Chance,” 15; quoted originally in Tony Green, “Tracing Funk’s Sources,” *St. Petersburg Times* (FL), November 27, 1994, page 1F.

18. Vincent, *Funk*, 251.

19. Ladd, “Hardcore Jollies,” 72–73.

20. Thomas Sayers Ellis, “The Black Silk Palace, Plainfield, New Jersey (1964–1970),” *Grand Street* 15, no. 1 (1996): 35–36. The first is a poetic history of the band’s early roots in a Plainfield barbershop that Sayers Ellis invokes as “The Uptown Tonsorial Parlor,” where George Clinton reigned supreme as “The Man with the Manic Fingers” in “The Black Silk Palace, Plainfield, New Jersey (1964–1970).”

21. Thomas Sayers Ellis, “Parliament/Funkadelic, Houston Summit (1976),” *Grand Street* 15, no. 1 (1996): 37–39.

22. Sayers Ellis, “Parliament/Funkadelic,” 39. The poem ends with Sayers Ellis’s warning, “Pay attention . . . IN FUNK WE TRUST NO ONE EXCEPT THE ONE.”

23. Thomas Sayers Ellis, “Photograph of Dr. Funkenstein,” *Grand Street* 15, no. 1 (1996): 40.

24. For an explanation of significance in black cultural productions, see the groundbreaking work of literary scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

25. Royster, “Here’s a Chance.” Royster makes a compelling argument about P-Funk’s effect on the construction of black men’s sexual identities, but I argue that her argument could be extended to all gender expressions, sexual preferences, and races and ethnicities.

26. Royster, “Here’s a Chance,” 38. See also bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze,” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 115–31.

27. Royster, “Here’s a Chance,” 38.

28. Vincent, *Funk*, 257. Vincent cites O’Neal, “P-Funk Aesthetic,” 89.

29. I have chosen to focus on Funkadelic album covers rather than Parliament album covers for two reasons. First, the Funkadelic covers, particularly those by Bell, are more intricate, and in my opinion, more interesting than the Parliament covers. There has also been a great deal more written about the Parliament album covers, particularly *Motherhip Connection*. See, for example, Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Culture* (London: Serpent’s Tail Press, 1992), and Horace J. Maxile Jr., “Extensions on a Black Musical Topology: From Trains to the Motherhip (and Beyond),” *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 4 (2011): 593–608.

30. For more on the early years of P-Funk, see Wright, “A Philosophy of Funk”; Vincent, *Funk*; and Dave Marsh, ed., *For the Record—George Clinton and P-Funk: An Oral History* (New York: Avon Books, 1998), 1–33.

In addition to the influence of local white rock acts like MC5 and Iggy Pop and the Stooges, Nelson recounts the influence of borrowing Vanilla Fudge’s double stack of Marshall amps, the bass player’s triple stack of SVTs, and the drummer’s oversized fiberglass drums. Nelson insists that using the amplification is “when we really changed from rhythm and blues, Motown wannabes into what we evolved into: the real Funkadelic.” Marsh, *For the Record*, 33.

31. The sound of “Music for My Mother” demonstrated the group’s roots in gospel, blues, and soul, despite the lyrics labeling it as sounding “a little raw funk, to me.” The first single also announced the group’s use of lyrical protest to racial oppression, with references to “keep runnin’ Mississippi,” as well as their reverence for black pride and soul brother number 1, James Brown, as the track ends with significations on “Say It Loud.” For more, see Wright, “A Philosophy of Funk,” 36.

32. “Parliament/Funkadelic Songs: Top Songs/Chart Singles Discography,” MusicVF.com, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://www.musicvf.com/songs.php?page=artist&artist=Parliament%2FFunkadelic&tab=songchartstab>.

33. For more on the history of music poster art and the psychedelic art of the 1960s and 1970s, see Paul D. Grushkin, *The Art of Rock: Posters from Presley to Punk* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1987).

34. Funkadelic, “Mommy, What’s a Funkadelic?” *Funkadelic*, Westbound Records WB-2000, 1970, cassette tape. While this song didn’t make the charts, others did, such as “I’ll Bet You,” which peaked at number 22 on the US R&B charts and number 63 on the US rock charts, and “I Got a Thing/You Got a Thing,” which reached number 30 on the US R&B charts. “Parliament/Funkadelic Songs: Top Songs/Chart Singles Discography,” MusicVF.com, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://www.musicvf.com/songs.php?page=artist&artist=Parliament%2FFunkadelic&tab=songchartstab>.

35. Wright, "A Philosophy of Funk." At the same time, other tracks announce the explicitly black, working-class roots of the band.

36. Funkadelic, "What Is Soul?" *Funkadelic*, Westbound Records WB-2000, 1970, cassette tape.

37. Dean Rudland, "Free Your Mind . . . And Your Ass Will Follow reissue liner notes." Westbound Records, 2005, 3.

38. "Mati Klarwein Gallery—Bitches Brew," [MatiKlarweinArt.com](http://www.matiklarweinart.com/en/gallery/bitches-brew-1970.htm), accessed September 27, 2013, <http://www.matiklarweinart.com/en/gallery/bitches-brew-1970.htm>.

39. Royster, "Here's a Chance," 25, 22.

40. "Funkadelic Advertising Is Censored," *Melody Maker* 46 (March 27, 1971): 3. Along with the celebration of black sexuality and mind-expanding music, the band introduced the genre-bending and mind-blowing styles of the classically trained keyboardist Bernie Worrell on this album, as well as some the band's earliest antimaterialist critiques through songs like "Funky Dollar Bill" and "Eulogy and Light," which fit with Worrell's definition of Funkadelic: "Funkadelic is—the absence of plus this or plus that. Absence of bourgeoisie bullshit. Why spend money just because you have some money?" "Free Your Mind—And Your Accountant Will Follow," *Melody Maker*, November 25, 1978, 39.

41. Royster, "Here's a Chance," 25. Vincent also provides insight into the possible meaning of the cover image, album and song title, and lyrics, alluding to rumors that Clinton found his "brother's decomposed dead body, skull cracked, in a Chicago apartment," although Clinton denies this. Regardless of the lore, Clinton provided a dark aesthetic for the track by telling guitarist Hazel to "to play like your mother just died." Vincent, *Funk*, 236.

42. Funkadelic, "Maggot Brain," *Maggot Brain*, Westbound Records WB-2007, 1971, cassette tape. The clearest expression of their philosophy comes not in the liner notes but with the few spoken lines in the otherwise instrumental title track:

Mother Earth is pregnant for the third time
For y'all have knocked her up.
I have tasted the maggots in the mind of the universe
I was not offended
For I knew I had to rise above it all
Or drown in my own shit.

The language is graphic, and the images presented are disturbing, but the message is one of transcendence and liberation.

43. "Billboards R&B Album Debuts Today's (7 August) Billboard R&B Album Chart Debut(s): Funkadelic—*Maggot Brain* from 1971," [SoulandFunkMusic.com](http://www.soulandfunkmusic.com/billboards-rab-album-debuts/1313.html), accessed September 27, 2013, <http://www.soulandfunkmusic.com/billboards-rab-album-debuts/1313.html>.

44. Edwards in Marsh, *For the Record*, 73.

45. Funkadelic, *Maggot Brain*, Westbound Records WB-2007, 1971, liner notes. The peach writing on a gray-and-white background makes it incredibly difficult to read the liner notes, and the message seems relatively harmless by today's standards, but the association with Manson made the group's use of the Process Church's message all the more disturbing. See Vincent, *Funk*, 236.

46. Scribner in Marsh, *For the Record*, 54.

47. Clinton in Marsh, *For the Record*, 54.

48. Vincent, *Funk*, 236.

49. "Billboards R&B Album Debuts Today's (24 June) Billboard R&B Album Chart Debut(s): Funkadelic—*America Eats Its Young* from 1972," [SoulandFunkMusic.com](http://www.soulandfunkmusic.com/billboards-rab-album-debuts/1218.html), accessed September 27, 2013, <http://www.soulandfunkmusic.com/billboards-rab-album-debuts/1218.html>.

50. *VH1 Legends: George Clinton*. New York: VH1 Productions, 1999.

51. Vincent, *Funk*, 237. The Beatles are pictured with mop tops in doctor's coats holding bloodied doll parts and slabs of meat. In comparison, the Funkadelic cover is, from my perspective, less disturbing.

52. See Vincent, *Funk*, 258–59, for more on the significance of the One.

53. Above the eye of the pyramid, instead of "Annuit Coeptis" (He [God] has favored our undertakings) it reads "Unusquisque Nunc Demum Eventurus Est," which a fan blog post translates as: "something like 'Each one now at last shall come to be' (maybe this is the same as 'Everybody is going to make it this time', the final cut on side one)." Below the pyramid, rather than *Novus Ordo Seclorum*, (A new order of the ages), it reads "Te Exsuscita Commutato which the fan translated as "Wake up, transformed." In place of the "E Pluribus Unum" (Out of Many, One) on the banner the eagle holds in its mouth it reads "In Praesentia Futurorum Vive," which the same fan translates as "All of you, live in the presence of your futures" (combined and simplified, these are the opening couplet of the final song "Wake Up"). See "U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing-FAQ Library," U.S. Department of the Treasury, <http://moneyfactory.gov/faqlibrary.html>, Accessed October 31, 2013. For Latin translations of what is on a typical dollar bill. For the fan's translations of the

altered Latin phrases on the dollar bill, see the following blog entry see Nate Patrin, "Teaching mark s a *LESSON* response three: FUNKADELIC, Funkadelic/Miss Lucifer's Love (America Eats its Young)" <http://www.ilxor.com/ILX/ThreadSelectedControllerServlet?boardid=41&threadid=18122>, Accessed October 31, 2013.

54. Funkadelic, *America Eats Its Young*, Westbound Records WB-2020, 1972, liner notes.

55. Helen Kolawe, "The Voice Interview: Return of the Funkateer," *The Voice*, 705 (June 4, 1996): 17.

56. Robert Christgau, "Funkadelic," Robert Christgau: Dean of American Rock Critics, accessed July 28, 2012, http://www.robertchristgau.com/get_artist.php?name=Funkadelic. For rock critic Christgau, the use of the Process Church's writing for the liner notes was the lynchpin for Christgau's negative review of the album, giving it a measly C+:

Their racial hostility is much preferable to the brotherhood bromides of that other Detroit label, but their taste in white people is suspect: it's one thing to put down those who 'picket this and protest that' from their 'semi-first-class seat,' another to let the Process Church of the Final Judgment provide liner notes on two successive albums. I overlooked it on *Maggot Brain* because the music was so difficult to resist, but here the strings (told you about their taste in white people), long-windedness (another double-LP that should be a single), and programmatic lyrics ('Miss Lucifer's Love' inspires me to mention that while satanism is a great antinomian metaphor it often leads to murder, rape, etc.) leave me free to exercise my prejudices.

57. Bell in Marsh, *For the Record*, 83.

58. Clinton in Marsh, *For the Record*, 81. Despite Clinton's depiction of their growing audience, the first of the mid-1970s albums, *Cosmic Slop*, failed to make the Billboard charts with any singles. It spent twenty weeks on Billboard's R&B charts and peaked at number 21 on the Billboard Top R&B Albums Chart but only made it to number 112 on the Billboard 200. It has since won wider recognition from music critics. See "Funkadelic, *Cosmic Slop*: Awards," AllMusic.Com, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://www.allmusic.com/album/cosmic-slop-mw0000675383/awards>, and "Standing on the Verge of Getting It On: Funkadelic," Ace Records, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://acerecords.co.uk/standing-on-the-verge-of-getting-it-on>.

Standing on the Verge of Getting It On did not appear on the Billboard charts, but has since been reviewed by several sites as a top album of 1974 and of all time. See "Standing On The Verge Of Getting It On (album) by Funkadelic," BestAlbumsEver.com, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://www.besteveralbums.com/thechart.php?a=1877>, and "Standing On The Verge Of Getting It On: Funkadelic," RateYourMusic.com, accessed September 27, 2013, http://rateyourmusic.com/release/album/funkadelic/standing_on_the_verge_of_getting_it_on/.

The next release, *Let's Take It to the Stage*, did better, reaching number 14 on the Billboard Top R&B Albums Chart and number 102 on the Billboard 200, and it has since been sampled multiple times by hip-hop artists, whose singles including samples from the album charted well. See "Hip Hop Tracks That Sample Funkadelic's *Let's Take It to the Stage*," Yahoo! Music, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://music.yahoo.com/blogs/yradish/hip-hop-tracks-sample-funkadelic-let-stage-164946178.html>.

While Funkadelic had moderate commercial success with these albums, they are crucial examples of the group's mid-1970s sound and aesthetic. P-Funk gained more commercial appeal with audiences of Parliament, which was reformed and released *Up for the Down Stroke* on Casablanca Records in 1974, scoring its most successful single with the title track, which reached number 63 on Billboard's pop charts and number 10 on Billboard's R&B charts. See "Parliament-Funkadelic Biography," *Rolling Stone* Artists, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/artists/parliament-funkadelic/biography>.

59. Vincent, *Funk*, 237–38.

60. See Stephens, "Beyond Cool."

61. Abdel Shakur, "The Natural Way to Dro (Part I)" (interview), June 30, 2009, *Mistra Knowitall*, <http://misstraknowitall.blogspot.com/2009/06/natural-way-to-dro-part-i.html>. Bell refers to himself in an interview as a "writer/artist," emphasizing that he sees his liner notes and his contribution to constructing the P-Funk philosophy as even more significant than his artwork.

62. Stevens, "BEYOND COOL." Vincent uses a similarly artistic and adoring expression to sum up Bell's style as "a bizarre, Afro-centric mythology" that "complemented his felt-tip-marker-drawn mutant-scapes of urban black life. Bell's visual imagery had the seamless layering of twisted symbols from the unconscious that Salvador Dali was known for, while Bell's dark ghetto eroticism and hyperbolic grammar forged a new realm of black language." Vincent, *Funk*, 255.

63. Clinton in Marsh, *For the Record*, 84.

64. Edward Hill, "Comic Genius: Artist Pedro Bell Explored Funkadelic's Darker Dimensions" (interview) *Waxpoetics* No. 18 (Aug/Sept 2006): 85.

65. The popularity of the comic book style appears in the album covers of other prominent black artists of the era. Particularly notable is Davis's use of Corky McCoy's comic book-inspired artwork for the covers of Davis's *On the Corner* (1972), *In Concert: Live at the Philharmonic Hall* (1973), *Big Fun* (1974), and *Water Babies* (1976). McCoy's comic book approach, while an expression of black working-class life, is more rooted in reality than Bell's more sci-fi approach. See "Miles Davis—On the Corner," Miles Davis Online, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://milesdavis.wordpress.com/2010/04/18/miles-davis-on-the-corner/>, and "Corky McCoy Discography," Discogs, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://www.discogs.com/artist/Corky+McCoy>.

66. Edward Hill, "Comic Genius: Artist Pedro Bell Explored Funkadelic's Darker Dimensions" (interview), *Waxpoetics* no. 18 (Aug/Sept 2006): 85, and "Corky McCoy Discography."

67. Hill, "Comic Genius," 87.

68. Bell in Marsh, *For the Record*, 84.

69. Hill "Comic Genius," 89. Bell explains that he decorated the outside of envelopes and by doing so caught the attention of companies he wanted stuff from, as well as famous musicians like Zappa and Sun Ra.

70. Hill "Comic Genius," 89.

71. *Maggot Brain's* image of a screaming woman surrounded by maggots is coming out of the even more maggotlike hair of the central figure in this wildly chaotic, sci-fi piece. Around her neck is a tight chain of bells connected to a multicolored necklace from which hangs a shieldlike ornament that has another image of a naked female body from the shoulders down to the pelvis. Across the shoulders and breasts it reads, "Law Four of Cosmic Slop," and below the navel it reads, "Gangster only what you can't afford to buy." The central figure's left shoulder seems to be destroyed or possibly eaten away by an alien figure with a spaceship shooting out a yellow stream of interplanetary smoke. On top of this yellow banner, Bell spells out the album title using multiple colorful, bizarre, sci-fi images within each puffy letter. Below this banner, we see a fetus coming out of the arm on the left side of the album cover and another yellow stream, which might be interpreted as the fetus' urine, stretching across the woman's waist and floating back up and over another watery looking planet that is mounted by a pink alien. Along the yellow stream up to the planet, Bell chooses to drop his name. For a slightly different description and interpretation, see Francesca Royster, "Here's a Chance," 25.

72. Royster, "Here's a Chance," 17.

73. Royster, "Here's a Chance," 27. For more on the problematic use of the pimp trope, see Bolden, "Theorizing the Funk," 22.

74. Hacker, "Can You Get to That?"

75. Funkadelic, *Cosmic Slop*, Westbound Records WB-2022, 1973, liner notes.

76. Funkadelic, "One Nation under a Groove," *One Nation under a Groove*, Warner Brothers Records, 1978, lyrics.

77. Ladd, "Hardcore Jollies," 74. As mentioned earlier in this article, Ladd, along with funk scholar Vincent (*Funk*, 261), recognize how deeply introspective P-Funk's philosophy is and that it is necessary to take flight rather than to escape, because the goal is only to see one's reality with new eyes, not to leave that reality all together:

In order to make sense of Funkadelic's Afro-futurism, it is important to note that it is born out of a science fiction very dedicated to home (down home in particular). Not just a place of origin, but how one was grown in that place of origin; and then how that pertains to the intergalactic window dressing....

What one fantasizes to be totally out-of-body psychedelic experience is, at the end of the trip, completely about the body. It is about the body you came from. It is about your grandmama's body. It is about my mother's kitchen and the women in it. Ladd, "Hardcore Jollies," 80.

78. See note 75.

79. Funkadelic, *Cosmic Slop*, liner notes.

80. Christgau, "Funkadelic." Rock critic Christgau gives the album a B, largely due to the change in the liner notes: "Thank, well, Whomever, the 'maladroited message of doom' inside the doublefold comes not from Brother Malachi but from Sir Lleb."

81. Funkadelic, *Standing on the Verge of Getting It On*, Westbound Records WB-1001, 1974.

82. Adrienne Crew, "P-AFROFUTURISM (3): ALIENS," *HiLobrow Blog*, Readouts, July 18, 2011, <http://hilobrow.com/2011/07/18/p-afrofuturism-aliens/>.

83. Royster, "Here's a Chance," 28. Royster cites the example of Clinton performing "a gyrating dance with a huge flashlight in a 1978 stagershow in Houston."

84. "Funkadelic, *Tales of Kidd Funkadelic*: Awards," AllMusic.com, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://www.allmusic.com/album/tales-of-kidd-funkadelic-mw0000108436/awards>.

85. Vincent, *Funk*, 243.

86. Wifebeaters are white, ribbed tank tops. “Tighty-whities” refers to males’ white brief underwear.

87. Funkadelic, *Tales of Kidd Funkadelic*, Westbound Records W227, 1976, liner notes.

88. Funkadelic, *Tales of Kidd Funkadelic*.

89. “Funkadelic, *Hardcore Jollies*: Awards,” AllMusic.com, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://www.allmusic.com/album/hardcore-jollies-mw0000107247/awards>.

90. The first use of the black female body on the Ohio Players’ album covers appears on their 1972 release, *Pain*, in which photographer Brodsky features his first of several images of model Pat Evans in sadomasochism attire donning a bald head. Evans appears again on their early and mid-1970s Westbound albums, *Pleasure* (1972), *Ecstasy* (1973), *Climax* (1974), *Rattlesnake* (1975), and *Greatest Hits* (1975), some of which have more disturbing images, such as *Climax*, which depicts Evans thrusting a knife into a man’s back, and *Greatest Hits*, which depicts Evans with a noose around her neck.

Just SOul You Know blogger and African American Studies Ph.D. candidate Travis Lacy traces the Ohio Players’ evolution in album covers and argues that while the images of Evans depicted a strong, defiant, black woman, once they moved to a bigger label, Mercury Records, the album covers “lost the image of [a] strong black woman” but retained “the sexy, sensual, and alluring body as the object of desire and muse for the album’s music,” referring to the band’s covers in the mid- to late 1970s, all of which depict nude or partially nude black women in more traditionally objectified positions. The most noteworthy album cover is the Players’ 1975 *Honey*, which depicts a nude black woman dripping honey into her mouth with the band hovering over her left leg. As Lacy explains, the album is steeped in urban legend “of hot honey, a deathly scream, and a studio murder, which may or may not have involved the model on the cover Ester Cordet.” Travis Lacy, “Ohio Players: Black Body Politics & Honey,” *Just SOul You Know*, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://justsoulyouknow.wordpress.com/2012/05/08/ohio-players-black-body-politics-honey/>.

91. Funkadelic, *Hardcore Jollies*, Warner Brothers Records, 1976, liner notes.

92. Song-database.com, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://www.song-database.com/chhist.php?sid=10956>.

93. “Thursday Throwback: Funkadelic” SoulTrain.com, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://soultrain.com/2012/11/01/thursday-throwback-funkadelic-2/>.

94. “Funkadelic, *One Nation under a Groove*: Awards,” AllMusic.com, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://www.allmusic.com/album/one-nation-under-a-groove-mw0000106837/awards>, and “500 Greatest Albums of All Time,” RollingStone.com, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/500-greatest-albums-of-all-time-20120531/funkadelic-one-nation-under-a-groove-20120524>.

95. Hill, “Comic Genius,” 90.

96. Funkadelic, *One Nation under a Groove*, liner notes. For instance, “Barf! Vada,” takes the place of the more well-known villain Darth Vader as “the ruthless fuzziest of the enslaving MEDULA OBLONGATA DOODOOS. Armed with stinkfying Dookie Stick Blight Sabers, the DooDooos kept the population of several planets under their rule.” However, the Doo-Doo Chasers come to the rescue and unite “Planet Splurge” as “One Nation under a Groove, getting down for the funk of it.”

97. “Funkadelic, *Uncle Jam Wants You*: Awards,” AllMusic.com, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://www.allmusic.com/album/uncle-jam-wants-you-mw0000622326/awards>.

98. One can see the image of Newton at the Oakland Museum of California’s website: <http://collections.museumca.org/?q=collection-item/201081>. Clinton is also holding up his index finger to represent the One, and on the left side of his image, in place of the gun Newtown holds in the original image, Clinton has a giant flashlight, signifying on Parliament’s hit track off the 1977 *Funkentelechy vs. the Placebo Syndrome*.

99. Royster, “Here’s a Chance,” 17. Werner also acknowledges P-Funk’s unique ability to present a fluid gender expression and sexuality: “Almost alone among male-led musical groups, P-Funk plays with a feminine sexual energy. It isn’t about reaching a climax and moving on; it’s about building it up, relaxing, riding the wave, climaxing, and doing it all some more.” Werner, “P-Funkentelechy,” 229.

100. Jon Wall, “Ol’ Maggot Brain, Funkadelic: ‘Uncle Jam Wants You,’” *Melody Maker* 54 (November 17, 1979): 28.

101. “Funkadelic, *The Electric Spanking of War Babies*: Awards,” AllMusic.com, accessed September 27, 2013, <http://www.allmusic.com/album/the-electric-spanking-of-war-babies-mw0000109146/awards>. The album charted but did not experience the same level of commercial success as the previous two albums, peaking at number 41 on Billboard’s R&B chart and number 105 on the Billboard 200.

102. Royster, “Here’s a Chance,” 26.

103. Royster, “Here’s a Chance,” 13, 26. Royster’s own answer: “In my reading, the cover seems to extend its critique of the institution of slavery to consider how the exploitation of black bodies and labor continues through the music industry, in particular the example of the music machine of the motor city, Motown.”

104. John Morthland, "Funkadelic Hangs On," *The Village Voice* 26 (September 2–8, 1981).
105. Hill, "Comic Genius," 90.
106. Funkadelic, *The Electric Spanking of War Babies*, Charly Groove—GRLP 102, 1981, reissue, liner notes.
107. Abdel Shakur, "The Natural Way to Dro (Part III)" (interview), July 5, 2009, *Mistra Knowitall*, <http://misstraknowitall.blogspot.com/2009/07/natural-way-to-dro-part-iii.html>. The use of a Black Power aesthetic was not new to Bell, who did some artwork for the Black Panther Party in Chicago and produced a piece called "Motherhood in Red Black and Green," which Bells's friend and fan, blogger Shajur, describes as "a mother and son wearing thick brown Afros and defiant glares, their outlines suggestive of the African continent's shape." The piece was part of *Indiana Review's* Funk feature and is one of the few Bell still has from that period.
108. "P-Funk (Pedro Bell Interview)," *Roctober Magazine* 11 (1994), <http://www.roctober.com/roctober/greatness/pfunk.html>.
109. Stevens, "BEYOND COOL."
110. Jay Babcock, "Ailing, poverty-stricken Funkadelic artist PEDRO BELL is looking to sell his originals . . ." *Arthur Magazine Archive*, November 15, 2009, <http://www.arthurmag.com/2009/11/15/ailing-poverty-stricken-funkadelic-artist-pedro-bell-is-looking-to-sell-his-originals/>.
111. "Miracle for a Maggot: Fundraiser for Funkadelic graphic artist Pedro Bell," *Bold as Love Magazine: Bold Is the New Black*, December 31, 2009, <http://www.boldaslove.us/2009/12/31/miracle-for-a-maggot-fundraiser-for-funkadelic-graphic-artist-pedro-bell/>. The Black Rock Coalition dubs themselves "the nation's premier support 501c3 nonprofit for alternative music artists of color."
112. Along with Bell, several other artists have been influential in producing the P-Funk aesthetic, including Loyd, Edwards, and Diem Jones. For a complete list of the various P-Funk artists and their productions, see "P-Funk Cover Art Discography," The Motherpage, <http://www.duke.edu/~tmc/motherpage/coverart.html>.
113. Hill, "Comic Genius," 90.

