



Lecture 5: Antecedents of Rap

MUS 17: Hip-Hop

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Spring 2024, UC San Diego

Antecedents of Rap

Black Oral Traditions

Antecedents of Rap

- There is a huge legacy of rhythmic talking over beats that Hip-Hop is an extension of.
- For African Americans, the slang word “rap” was the measure of the way a person talked.
- To rap was to get a particular point across with style, perhaps make someone smile or laugh, or get a rise out of them.

The Dozens

- Competitive trading of insults (insult play), frequently rhymed
- "Yo mama" jokes are probably the most common variety
- Prevalent throughout African American communities in the US and probably traceable to West African practices
- Has been a staple of comedy performance since at least the 1920s, and probably earlier

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Vocal Blues
with Guitar
Accompaniment

THE TWELVES (THE DIRTY DOZEN)

(WOODS)

KOKOMO ARNOLD

7083 A

The Dozens in Early Blues and Rock n' Roll

Single Narration



Dialogue between two band members









Toasts

- Toasts are stock tales, generally recounted in rhyme. Most are bawdy, violent, highly stylized and funny.
- Many of the folkloric examples were collected in prisons, in military contexts, in barbershops, on street corners, etc.
- While there is a finite number of these stories, there's an infinite variety of ways of telling them.
- As with the dozens, some possibly trace their roots to West Africa.

Famous Toast Examples

- **The Signifying Monkey**
- Shine and the Titanic
- Stagger Lee
- Mexicana Rose
- the Freaks Ball

Toasts (Perry's Paper)

“The most likely candidate for a direct forebearer of modern rap is the toast, the rhymed monologue, an African American poetic form that typically recounts the adventures of a group of heroes who often position themselves against society either as so shrewd and powerful as to be superhuman, or so bad and nasty as to be subhuman.”

– John Szwed

Signifying

- Signifying, another element of black language that appears in Hip-Hop, is distinguished in African American culture from the dozens largely for its suggestive and subtextual critique, an expression of cleverness rather than overtness.
- Signifyin' is a way of saying one thing and meaning another
 - It's a reinterpretation, a metaphor for the revision of previous texts and figures
 - It is tropological thought, repetition with difference, the obscuring of meaning
 - All to achieve or reverse power, to improve situations, and to achieve pleasing results for the signifier.
- Recontextualizing someone else's sounds was, after all, how hip hop started. It is a signifying form in its origins.

8 Features of Signification

1. Indirection, circumlocution
2. Metaphorical-imagistic
3. Humorous, ironic
4. Rhythmic fluence and sound
5. Teachy but not preachy
6. Directed at person or persons usually present in the situational context
7. Punning, play on words
8. Introduction of the semantically or logically unexpected

Guest Lecture Next Week? (Maybe Week 8 or 10)

- Next week? we will have three guests in class. All of them are local Hip-Hop practitioners, including one DJ (record store owner), one MC, and one Hip-Hop dancer.
- There will be no quiz question during guest lecturing. You will have 2 review questions at the beginning of the lecture, and 4 questions after the guest lecture related to the topics covered by the guests.
- There will be a student question session where you can ask questions to the guests. More guests info will be sent out via Canvas announcement this week so stay tuned!

Comedy

- Both the dozens and toasts were mainstays of the repertory and technique of African American comedians, especially in the first half of the 20th century.
- Some of these performers had begun in vaudeville and wound up working what became known as the “*Chitlin’ Circuit*”
- The best known included Moms Mabley, **Pigmeat Markham**, Flip Wilson, Redd Foxx and **Rudy Ray Moore**



Dolemite “Signifying Monkey”

- Dolemite was a performative alter ego of comedian Rudy Ray Moore, who predominantly performed material based on toasts.
- He’s basically a kind of “bad man” persona from one of the toasts.
- His version of the *Signifying Monkey* was hugely influential within rap (see Schoolly D, ODB, etc)
- Though the comic aspect of rap is often underplayed, Dolemite was a potent influence across the country. Ice-T, the original West Coast gangsta, cited him as a model; New York’s Big Daddy Kane recorded a duet battle, “Big Daddy vs. Dolemite”.



vs.



Signifying Monkey

Story line:

Signifying Monkey tells the Lion that the Elephant has been insulting him. The furious Lion demands an apology from the Elephant, who refuses and roundly stomps him. Only then does the Lion realize his mistake of taking the Monkey's word.



Pigmeat Markham “Here Comes the Judge”

- Markham began performing on the vaudeville circuit in the early 20th century and continued well into the TV era.
- While African American, he performed in blackface well into the 1940s.
- Late in his career he became a regular on the “Laugh In” mostly in his judge character.
- This record is a cash-in on the TV character but comes close to presaging early rap.
- “Here Comes the Judge” was cited by early rappers as important.

PIGMEAT MARKHAM

HERE COME THE JUDGE



Radio Disc Jockeys

- Many of the most popular radio disc jockeys from the 50s through the 70s developed complex slang and styles of talking, often over the top of the music they were playing.
- The music was furious, funny, and often filthy, with rampant references to sex, about “rocking” and “rolling” all night long.
- **Doug "Jocko" Henderson** was a pioneering "rapping" deejay who began his career in 1950 at the Baltimore radio station WBAL before moving to Philadelphia station WHAT. He was best known for his shows on Philadelphia station WDAS, which he did simultaneously with shows for various New York stations.



RHYTHM TALK (12" VERSION)

JOCKO

PHILADELPHIA
INTERNATIONAL
RECORDS



12" mixes VOLUME 1

Frankie Crocker

- New York radio staple starting in the 1960s
- Super entertaining
- Nearly rapping to the beat
- Influenced the style of MCing in Hip-Hop



Muhammed Ali

- The boxer and activist, known worldwide as "The Greatest"
- He would hold court during press conferences, interviews, and public speaking engagements.
- His combination of brashness and boastfulness, delivered with a charismatic, clever rhyme, displayed a style and attitude emcees would adopt.



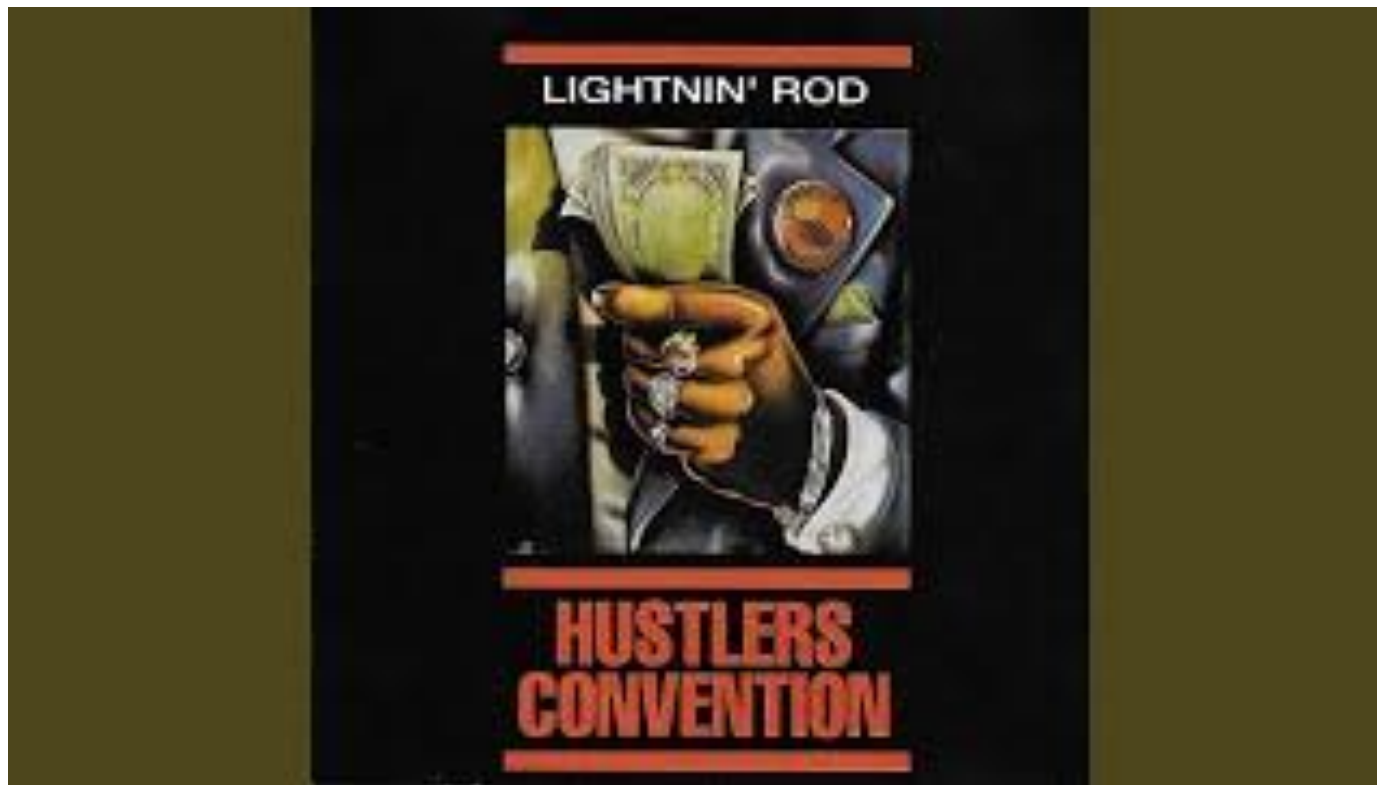
Hustler

- The ability to “talk shit” had always been prime currency in Black communities for the hustlers.
- The pimp, "playa," or hustler as a folklore icon, be it Iceberg Slim (Robert Beck), or Bishop Don "Magic" Juan, and their way of speaking and informing people (puttin' people up on game), is a huge part of the persona of some emcees (E-40, Too \$hort).

Hustlers Convention

- The record *Hustlers Convention*, created by Jalal Nuriddin, has been cited by numerous rappers as a well-executed example of rhyming over music.
- This record is basically an extended toast built around the "Players Ball" narrative.
- Jalal, who usually performs as one member of *The Last Poets*, uses an alter ego "Lightning Rod" when he performs non-political materials.
- Below, listen to the track "The Cafe Black Rose," with the hustler characters Spoon and Sport.

The Cafe Black Rose



The Last Poets

- The Last Poets were a radical performance poetry group that emerged from a writers workshop in Harlem, who took their name from a poem by South African poet and activist Keorapetse Kgositse.
- In the 1960s, with the rise of the Civil Rights movement, some African American artists became more explicitly politically active within their work, looking for new ways to express ideas about their lived circumstances.
- The main members were: Jalal Mansur Nuriddin (Alafia Pudim), Umar Bin Hassan, and Abiodun Oyewole.
- They generally declaimed their work over minimal percussion accompaniment.
- Notice the use of repeated phrases to musically and verbally structure this piece.



Jamaican Toasting

- The tradition of chatting on the mic over Jamaican riddims, in studio, or during a sound system session has had a large influence on Hip-Hop.
- Jamaican toasting is a precursor to American rap vocal stylings.
- The heavy use of reverb on vocals in Hip-Hop is a direct descendent of Jamaican musical practices.

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MUHAMMAD ALI

Dennis Alexpote
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Early Styles of Rhyming (Uptown: Harlem)

- Two of the early pioneers, Eddie Cheeba and DJ Hollywood, were rhythmic rapping DJs in Harlem who were not heavily involved in the 70s Bronx Hip-Hop scene.
- If you want to see DJ Hollywood play in a nightclub or disco, you needed a few things. You needed to be 18 years old or look it. You needed money to get inside. You needed clothes: nice shoes, good slacks, a dress shirt.
- In truth, these Harlem DJs focused on upscale establishments, where teenaged b-boys/b-girls were not welcomed.



Hip-Hop Evolution (30:30 - 39:30)

Early Styles of Rhyming (Downtown: Bronx)

- Many of the founders of the b-boy movement rejected disco, and with it the upscale, older rapping disco DJs like DJ Hollywood.
- The enmity toward the glitzy disco scene was the reason why they had become b-boys/b-girls in the first place.
- Figures like Afrika Bambaataa began using the term “Hip-Hop” to **distinguish themselves from disco** and to name an entire street culture that had, until then, been nameless.
- To them, Hip-Hop comprised four disparate but related activities – MCing, DJing, breaking, and graffiti writing.

Early Styles of Rhyming (Downtown: Bronx)

- **Coke La Rock** was the party rocker at DJ Kool Herc's rec room party, also considered [the first Hip-Hop MC](#). ([12:30 - 15:20](#))
- La Rock joined Kool Herc for his first party, in 1973, to celebrate Herc's sister Cindy's birthday.
- His original raps were usually shoutouts to friends, but gradually the poetry emerged. He originated such phrases as "You rock and you don't stop" and "Hotel, motel, you don't tell, we won't tell".
- His participation in Hip-Hop ended before he could record, but some of his rhymes was immortalized on the first Sugarhill Gang single "*Rapper's Delight*", although La Rock received no credit.



Hip-Hop Records

- Because it was an informal practice linked to live social occasions, most of the early DJs and MCs had no commercial musical aspirations.
- Sylvia Robinson, head of the Sugar Hill Records, made the first rap single “Rapper’s Delight”.
- Other important record labels include Paul Winley Records and Enjoy! Records.
- All of these label owners were African Americans veterans of the independent music business.

Sugarhill Gang - Rapper's Delight

- The first rap single and a huge hit, worldwide
- Was almost “fake” in that the group was put together just to make the record and consisted of relatives and friends of the label owner who were largely not involved in the Bronx scene
- Most of the rhymes of Big Bank Hank were a direct bite from Grandmaster Caz's rhymes.



Forbes

BRONX TO BILLIONS: The Forbes Guide To Hip-Hop History





What is Hip-Hop

- “Hip-Hop” was purist terminology. It was partly a backlash against the commercial sensibilities of the Sugar Hill Gang; and also against the bourgeois, mercenary attitudes of Sugar Hill Records’ proprietors.
- It delineates the tension between the polar impulses of rap and of Black America as a whole – upscale versus downscale, aspirational versus proletarian, **commercial versus street**, profit versus principle.

Funky 4 + 1 - Rappin and Rocking the House

- The first “real” rap single, released by Enjoy! Records
- The group were mainstays of the Bronx party scene
- The record is very much like a club performance just recorded to tape: lots of back and forth between the mc’s, rhymes not really deep and meaningful



A woman with long, dark, wavy hair is sitting on a dark blue leather couch. She is wearing a light blue button-down shirt. Her hands are clasped in her lap. The background is a blurred red wall with a white rectangular object on the right.

abc NEWS

[Doctor Ice]

You thought you had her roped, you thought you was Cupid
But EMD, your rap was plain stupid
I know you're educated, but when will you learn?
Not all girls want to be involved with bookworms
You gotta be strong in a way she can't resist
So educated rapper, huh, bust this



Roxanne Shante - Roxanne's Revenge

- “Answer” to UTFO’s “Roxanne, Roxanne”
- Single take freestyle by 14 year-old Lolita Shante Gooden
- Produced by Marley Marl, influential producer in the Queens
- Song became a hit via the Mr. Magic radio show
- These shows were the main radio outlet for Hip-Hop: Mr Magic, Red Alert, etc.

Rockin' on the beat-a that you can see
And every time I have a DJ like Ice
He ain't right, yeah, he ain't nice
Because a-everything he does is off-the-wall
Compared to my man Marley Marl
The way he gets on the tables, yes
Everyone knows that he is fresh
So, the UTFD crew, you know what you can do
Lemme tell you one for me, and then I'll tell you one for you
Every time you sayin' somethin' just-a like-a this-a
It ain't nothin' that I don't want to miss-a





Girls, you know you'd better watch out
Some guys, some guys are only about
That thing, that thing, that thing
That thing, that thing, that thing
Guys, you know you'd better watch out
'Cause girls, some girls are only about
That thing, that thing, that thing
That thing, that thing, that thing



Queen Latifah - Ladies First (feat. Monie Love)

- Queen Latifah was a later addition to the Native Tongues Collective, whose members drew on Afrocentric ideas without necessarily being explicitly nationalist or political.
- The music video runs through a series of images of historically important African American women before moving into the more staged part.
- The contemporary situation in South Africa is a significant backdrop element in the video. Protest against apartheid was a significant focus of activism in the US in the 1980s.



Ladies First!

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OCEANSIDE CA, 92054

APRIL 16, 2022

3PM-8PM (PRELIM STARTS 3:30)

*ALL PROFIT GOES TO SAN DIEGO DANCE COMMUNITY

Donation Entry

\$10 GENERAL ADMISSION

\$15 TO BATTLE

Prizes

CASH AND PRIZES

Vendors



All Female Battles

2V2 YOUTH (14 AND UNDER)

1V1 INTERNEWBIE

1V1 OPEN STYLES

Judges



HYBRD



MEL



TOYIN

MC

BGIRL MEL

DJ

NOVASOUL



@ladiesfirstjam

Controversy and Censorship

2 Live Crew

- 2 Live Crew were basically a party band/club act that featured Luke's smutty rhymes over up tempo, bass-heavy electro beats.
- Luke and DJ Mr. Mixx both had a thing for comedians like Redd Foxx and Rudy Ray Moore. To be different from other rappers (in NY), they did the adult comedian thing.
- They were key in the development of the regional style known as "*Miami Bass*".
- Their success was instrumental in shifting the balance of power in rap, turning the focus south and alerting record companies to the sales potential of nasty language.



2 Live Crew Obscenity Trial

- The legal basis of obscenity is “community standards”.
- In the first case against the band, the judge appoints themselves as guardian of “community standards” and rules against them.
- Upon appeal, the band’s management calls expert witnesses to argue for cultural/artistic merit, pushing back against legal notions of obscenity.

2 Live Crew Obscenity Testimony

- Main expert witness was Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr., an expert on African-American literature.
- Gates argued that when read in context of the history of deliberate exaggeration and bawdiness in African American traditions like toasts and the dozens the work of 2 Live Crew was not obscene.
- The original conviction was overturned.



vevo

From Henry Louis Gates

- There is no point in trying to whitewash a multifarious cultural heritage, casting it as a monolith of virtue.
- The question of obscenity and the First Amendment - cannot even be addressed until those who would answer them become literate in the vernacular traditions of African-Americans. To do less is to censor through the equivalent of intellectual prior restraint - and censorship is to art what lynching is to justice.

Henry Louis Gates's Arguments

- 2 Live Crew is engaged in heavy-handed parody, turning the stereotypes of black and white American culture on their heads. These young artists are acting out, to lively dance music, a parodic exaggeration of the age-old stereotypes of the oversexed black female and male.
- In the face of racist stereotypes about black sexuality, you can do one of two things: you can disavow them or explode them with exaggeration. 2 Live Crew, like many "hip-hop" groups, is engaged in sexual carnivalesque.
- 2 Live Crew must be interpreted within the context of black culture generally and of signifying specifically. Their novelty, and that of other adventuresome rap groups, is that their defiant rejection of euphemism now voices for the mainstream what before existed largely in the "race record" market.

Responses to Gates

- Gates argument was controversial in many quarters.
- Some conservative observers felt it was rationalizing problematic content and remained offended.
- Political columnist *George Will* staked out a case against the Crew, arguing that Nasty was misogynistic filth and characterizing their lyrics as a profoundly repugnant “combination of extreme infantilism and menace” that objectified black women and represented them as legitimate targets for sexual violence.
- Others, including feminist scholars and spokespeople in particular, felt that it wasn't an either or proposition: it is possible to understand the work in its context AND still find it objectionable.

Kimberlé W. Crenshaw

- Kimberlé W. Crenshaw is an influential legal scholar who coined the term "*intersectionality*" in discussing how racism and sexism impacted Black women.
- Trading in racial stereotypes and sexual hyperbole are well-rehearsed strategies for getting some laughs. 2 Live Crew departs from this tradition only in its attempt to up the ante through more outrageous boasts and more explicit manifestations of misogyny. Neither the intent to be funny, nor Gates's loftier explanations, negate the subordinating qualities of such humor.

Crenshaw's Argument 1

- Those of us who are concerned about the high rates of gender violence in our communities must be troubled by the possible connections between these images and tolerance for violence against women.
- Children and teenagers are listening to this music, and I am concerned that the range of acceptable behavior is being broadened by the constant propagation of anti-women imagery.

Perry's Paper

- That does not mean to say that Hip-Hop causes violence. Of the complex web of elements in play in the lives of adolescents, it seems that music would be rather low on the list of critical factors determining their behavior or values.
- Regardless of where it stands on the list, the idea that the music could cause a single act of violence or illegal activity is far from compelling.

Crenshaw's Argument 2

- I'm concerned, too, about young black women who, like young men, are learning that their value lies between their legs.
- Unlike men, however, their sexual value is a depletable commodity; by expanding it, girls become whores and boys become men.

Perry's Paper

- Hip-Hop music is a war of position, and the position one takes manifests itself in the performance or language.
- There are **multiple registers** in Hip-Hop. Access to these registers constitutes a test in familiarity with the artist and, for example, his or her socio-political or philosophical location.
- Sometimes the various registers conflict, so that the first level of text may actually affirm stereotypes of black men, for example, or appear to be misogynistic. Yet a deeper register of the text may then challenge the assumptions, describe feeling locked into the stereotype, reinterpret it to the advantage of the artist, or make fun of the holder of the stereotype.

Perry's Paper

- When registers conflict with each other, listeners find themselves in a quandary regarding the music's interpretation.
- A group of **black women students** expressed support for 2 live crew during a lecture at Spelman College in Atlanta: What the episode reveals, however, is that the female listeners clearly understood a regional cultural register that told them, “you can escape this misogynistic construction by not behaving in a certain manner” thereby possibly not identifying the misogyny with themselves.

Crenshaw's Argument 3

- I wanted to stand together with the brothers against a racist attack, but I wanted to stand against a frightening explosion of violent imagery directed at women like me.
- It's difficult to declare whether this statement is right or wrong, but at least I can provide more background information to complement the listeners' understanding of *Nasty*.





2 Live Crew - Put Her In The Buck



Dance Craze

- As the pop music market got bombed in the late 1950s, dance fads were commercialized and exploited.
- From the 1950s to the 1970s, new dance fads appeared almost every week. Many were popularized (or commercialized) versions of new styles or steps created by African-American dancers who frequented the clubs and discothèques in major U.S. cities like New York, Philadelphia and Detroit.
- Among these were the Madison, "The Swim", the "Mashed Potato", "The Twist", "The Frug", "The Watusi", "The Shake" and "The Hitch hike", etc.



Rap Old School
My Video



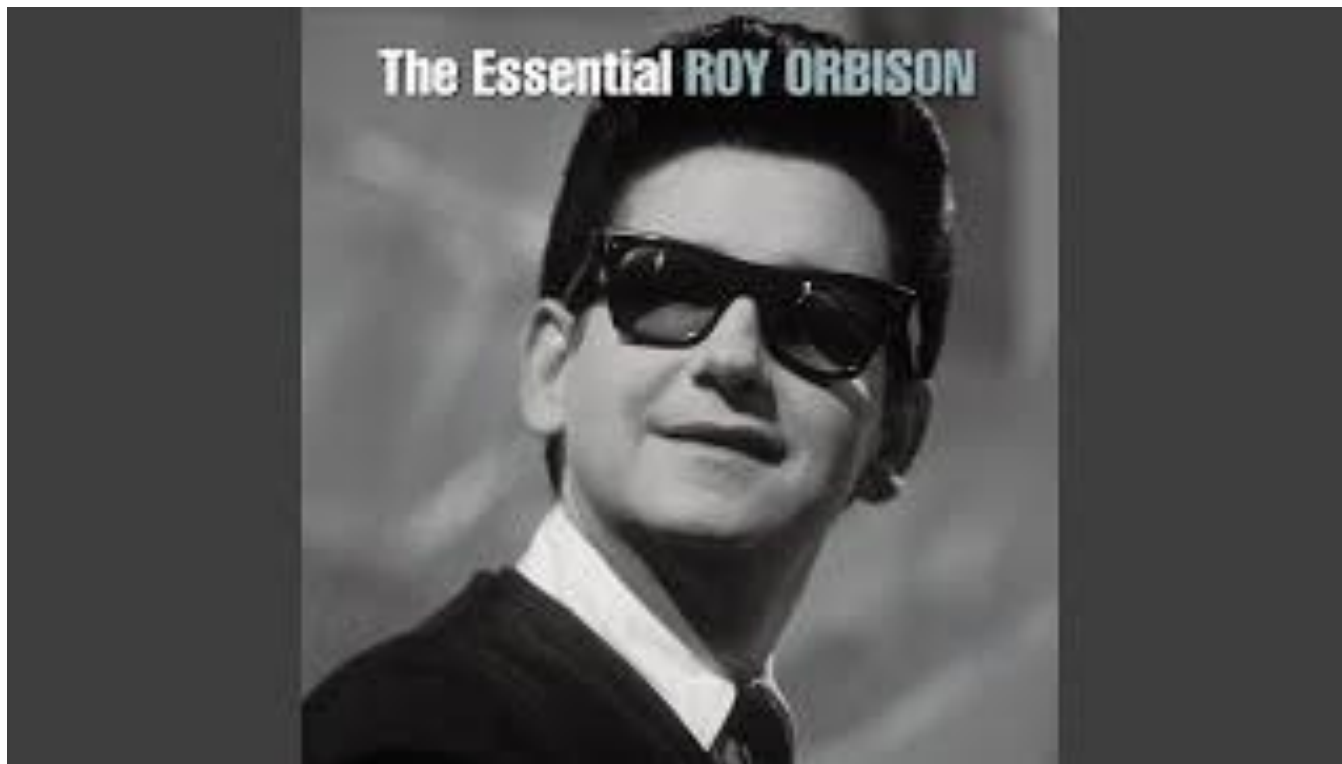
Parody

- To put it simply, a parody is a creative work designed to imitate, comment on, and/or mock its subject by means of satirical or ironic imitation.
- *The Buck* is a parody of the “novelty dance song” genre, except instead of imploring the listener to participate in a new dance craze, it’s a sexual position.
- *The Buck* follows the typical template of a novelty dance song: explain why you should do it, explain how to do it, describe it being done.

2 Live Crew - Put Her In The Buck



Roy Orbison - Oh, Pretty Woman



2 Live Crew – Pretty Woman



Questions raised by the 2 Live Crew case

- What are community standards? This is especially at issue when we can generally point to multiple overlapping communities.
- How does music communicate one community's standards to another? Can it? Is that even a reasonable question?
- If context determines the meaning of the music, how would regulating the music itself work?
- Was banning 2 Live Crew implicitly racist?
- Is legal sanction on cultural production ever OK? When?

Flipping Misogyny Away ([Life after Death](#) 4:50)

- One misunderstanding is that the nasty, violent, explicit language is exclusive to men.
- Sexuality can be represented by women and being well respected in Hip-Hop.
- Lil' Kim took misogyny away from men and represented the sexuality herself.
- Lil Kim's female narration of sexuality and violence went platinum and changed the game.
- Hip-Hop is largely a man's game but women have always been there.

Lil Kim - Queen Bitch





Thank You!