

# DIRTY SOUTH

OUTKAST, LIL WAYNE,  
SOULJA BOY, AND THE  
SOUTHERN RAPPERS WHO  
REINVENTED HIP-HOP

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Westhoff, Ben.

Dirty South : Outkast, Lil Wayne, Soulja Boy, and the Southern rappers who reinvented hip-hop / Ben Westhoff.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-56976-606-4 (pbk.)

1. Rap (Music)—Southern States—History and criticism. 2. Rap musicians—Southern States. I. Title.

ML3531.W47 2011

782.4216490975—dc22

2010053907

Cover and interior design: Jonathan Hahn

Cover photograph: Howard Huang/Contour by Getty Images

Portions of this book originally appeared in the *Village Voice*, the *Houston Press*, the *Dallas Observer*, *Miami New Times*, and *New Times Broward-Palm Beach*, which are all part of the Village Voice Media Holdings family of companies. They appear here with the kind permission of VVMH. Other portions originally appeared in Creative Loafing publications.

© 2011 by Ben Westhoff

All rights reserved

Published by Chicago Review Press, Incorporated

814 North Franklin Street

Chicago, Illinois 60610

ISBN 978-1-56976-606-4

Printed in the United States of America

5 4 3 2 1

# CONTENTS

Introduction . . . . .	1
<b>1</b> LUKE CAMPBELL ■ Bass and Booty . . . . .	19
<b>2</b> GETO BOYS ■ Paranoia, Insanity, and Rap-A-Lot Records . . . . .	39
<b>3</b> TRAE AND DJ SCREW ■ Rap Gets Screwed . . . . .	57
<b>4</b> UGK ■ From Country to Trill . . . . .	71
<b>5</b> EIGHTBALL & MJG AND THREE 6 MAFIA ■ Memphis Goes Hollywood . . . . .	83
<b>6</b> OUTKAST, GOODIE MOB, AND ORGANIZED NOIZE ■ The Dirty South Blooms . . . . .	95
<b>7</b> CASH MONEY, NO LIMIT, AND JUVENILE ■ Bling and Murder in New Orleans . . . . .	117
<b>8</b> NELLY ■ Forty Acres and a Pool . . . . .	141
<b>9</b> TIMBALAND AND THE NEPTUNES ■ Architects of Sound in Nowhere, Virginia . . . . .	157

<b>10</b>	LIL JON ■ Mosh Pit Hip-Hop . . . . .	173
<b>11</b>	DJ DRAMA AND T.I. ■ Mixtapes and Turf Wars in Atlanta. . . . .	185
<b>12</b>	PAUL WALL AND THE NEW H-TOWN MOVEMENT ■ Shining Diamonds . . . . .	201
<b>13</b>	T-PAIN AND HIS FLORIDA HITMAKERS ■ Rap Robots . . . . .	213
<b>14</b>	SOULJA BOY AND DJ SMURF ■ Dance, Dance Revolution . . . . .	229
<b>15</b>	LIL WAYNE ■ Gangster Weirdo . . . . .	243
<b>16</b>	GUCCI MANE ■ True Crime Rap . . . . .	255
	Acknowledgments . . . . .	271
	Recommended Listening . . . . .	273
	Recommended Reading . . . . .	275
	Index . . . . .	277

# INTRODUCTION

MS. PEACHEZ favors bright clown wigs, press-on nails, and pastel blouses over her beefy, middle-aged frame. In the video for her 2006 song, “Fry That Chicken,” she raps in a voice deeper than my uncle John’s. The fact that she is a man is just one of many things that are odd about “Fry That Chicken.”

Like many immediately catchy songs, it’s so dumb it’s genius. Something of a nursery rhyme crossed with a Mardi Gras march, its springy bass propels the beat along while high-register synth notes chime like Pavlov’s bell. “I got a pan, and I got a plan/ I’m a fry this chicken in my hand!” she raps. “Everybody want a piece of my chicken/ Southern fried chicken/ Finger lickin’.”

Its low-budget video takes place in the yard of a rural shack, surrounded by chicken coops. The scene is a good ol’ country barbeque, with Ms. Peachez holding raw chickens and taunting a group of hungry grade-school children. Peachez’s blue hair, and her T-shirt bearing an oversized peach, are nearly consumed by smoke from the grill, which heats a giant pan of bubbling, waiting grease. She passes thighs and legs through a bowl of flour, massaging them with her hands in time to the beat. After dropping the

segments into the pan, she shakes her hips and gets the hot sauce ready.

“Fry that chicken!” the kids demand, looking half-crazed as they pound on the picnic table and wave their arms. Peachez advises the kids to wash their hands, “’Cause you’re gon’ be lickin’ ’em!” When the food is ready the kids tear into it, eating with their fingers and then, yes, licking them.

There’s something innocent and funny about the video, and the song has a way of worming its way into your head. But there’s also something creepy. It vaguely recalls a nineteenth-century black-face skit, although none of the participants are white, and the production appears to have been made in earnest, rather than as an ironic joke.

But a jive-talking, cartoonish drag queen hypnotizing a group of children with her southern-fried bird, seriously? Could the video’s crafters possibly be unaware of its loaded stereotypes?

The oddness of the clip has been eclipsed only by its popularity. It’s been seen 3.6 million times, and still gets thousands of views per day. But as “Fry That Chicken” went viral, it somehow became one of the most politicized hip-hop documents in years. To many, it epitomized the troubling turn rap music was taking. Despite the fact that bloggers and other Internet commentators knew nothing about Ms. Peachez—she didn’t have a record deal and had never done an interview—they called her a degrading minstrel act that would set the civil rights movement back thirty years.

Even the *Washington Post* weighed in. Op-ed columnist Jabari Asim decried the antics of this “Aunt Jemima off her meds,” whose video “engages—no, embraces—racial stereotypes.” “Yes, it is the stuff of nightmares,” he asserted. He added that it reminded him of a scene from D. W. Griffith’s 1915 movie *The Birth of a Nation*, the granddaddy of American racial propaganda films, which warned of a Negro coup d’état and glorified the Ku Klux Klan.

“Maybe I’ve seen *Birth of a Nation* too many times, but it suddenly seemed mild when compared to ‘Fry That Chicken,’” Asim wrote, adding, “How can anyone explain black performers willingly—and apparently joyfully—perpetuating such foolishness in the 21st century?”

Such criticism only seemed to spur Peachez’s popularity, and she proceeded to release a series of follow-ups, each more outlandish than the last. Two and a half million more people watched her “In the Tub” video, a loose parody of 50 Cent’s “In da Club.” It finds her playing with rubber duckies and washing her bootie in an outdoor washbasin, her broad shoulders and flat chest exposed.

The most provocative in the series had to be “From da Country,” which opens with a nearly toothless midget named Uncle Shorty, who wears a curly blond wig and chows down on some watermelon. There’s a guy in a chicken suit, tractors, and Ms. Peachez showing off a plate of candied yams swarming with flies. Meanwhile, kids perform steps with names like “The Neck Bone,” “The Corn Bread,” and “The Collard Greens.”

HIP-HOP started in the Bronx, was dominated by New Yorkers in the 1980s, and felt its center of gravity pulled toward the West Coast the next decade, through the success of gangsta rap acts like N.W.A.

As southern rap gained popularity in the 2000s, fans of “true” hip-hop said it appealed to our most base, childish instincts. Nursery rhyme jingles, they claimed, would be the downfall of an art form that has evolved from the good-time rhymes of the Sugarhill Gang three decades ago to the enlightened compositions of Nas. By the mid-aughts this chorus reached a fever pitch.

The problem wasn’t just Ms. Peachez, who was presumed to be southern. There were plenty of other rappers to complain about, the ones responsible for the stripped-down, shucking-and-jiving

ditties that were taking over the radio. These were “minstrel show” MCs, an epithet pegged to crunk artists like Lil Jon, who had a mouth full of platinum and carried around a pimp chalice.

But crunk was fading, and so the culprits became a new crop of young, blinged-out rappers whose songs often instructed listeners to do a new dance. These included Atlanta rapper Young Dro, whose hit “Shoulder Lean” told you to “bounce right to left and let your shoulder lean,” and whose video features an older man dumping a bag of sugar directly into his pitcher of red Kool-Aid.

Then there was Atlanta group D4L (“Down for Life”), whose ubiquitous radio jam “Laffy Taffy” sounded mined from the presets of a child’s mini Casio, only not so complex. The song uses the wax-paper-wrapped confection of the title as a metaphor for a bulbous rear end. “I’m lookin’ fo’ Mrs. Bubble Gum/ I’m Mr. Chick-O-Stick/ I wanna dun dun dunt/ ’Cause you so thick . . . Shake that laffy taffy.”

Teenage Saint Louis rapper Jibbs earned his spot in this group for “Chain Hang Low,” another massive hit that was an ode to his diamond pendant. The track borrows its singsong melody from the 1830s-era folk song “Zip Coon,” which is also known as “Turkey in the Straw” and the ice cream truck jingle.

Do your chain hang low?  
Do it wobble to the floor?  
Do it shine in the light?  
Is it platinum, is it gold?

Critics argued that these artists—and their complicit record labels—were indulging in the worst black stereotypes for the entertainment of white people. “Record labels are rushing out to sign the most coon-like negros they can find,” declared popular hip-hop blogger Byron Crawford. Despite the fact that not all of the minstrel rappers were from the South, he insisted that the sub-genre “obviously has its origins in shitty southern hip-hop.”



Queens-bred rapper Nas, a charter member of New York's hip-hop elite, baited southern rappers with the title of his 2006 album *Hip Hop Is Dead*. Though he denied it was aimed specifically at them, it was easy to read between the lines, considering New York rap was declining and the southern style was ascendant. In 2009 he took a swipe at the alleged minstrel MCs, via an ostensible public service announcement known as "Eat That Watermelon."

The YouTube video begins with Nas narrating, in his most serious voice:

There is a period of great distress in the rap universe. There was a time when hip-hop was a form of empowerment. Now the corporate world is quickly diluting our culture for nothing more than profit. With the ever mounting forces of ridiculous dances, ignorant behavior, and general buffoonery, it's only a matter of time before hip-hop's permanent annihilation. This is what the future holds if it don't stop.

The clip cuts to a pair of black-faced, blinged-out rappers called Shuck and Jive, who in their best Sambo voices set out to please "massah" with their dancin' and banjo-pickin'. Played by MTV sketch comedians Nick Cannon and Affion Crockett, the characters proceed to chow down on a giant rind of watermelon.

The clip is funny, preposterous, and slightly horrific. But it hit close to home. Only higher production values—and a wee bit of self-awareness—seemed to separate it from "Fry That Chicken."

WHEN MOST people think hip-hop beef they think of the 1990s-era feud between the East and West Coasts, culminating in the murders of hip-hop icons Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac Shakur.

But more recently rappers from both coasts have ganged up on southern MCs. Less blood feud than ideological battle and culture

clash, it has nonetheless gotten nasty, particularly as southern artists began to dominate the charts.

New Yorkers have been voicing their strong displeasure with southern hip-hop since the 2 Live Crew. But the floodgates opened in 2007 when a teenage Atlanta rapper called Soulja Boy released a dance instructional called “Crank That,” which became a phenomenon. None other than gangsta rap founding father Ice-T proceeded to rail against the seventeen-year-old, accusing him of having “single-handedly killed hip-hop.”

Ice-T led a growing chorus of veteran coastal rappers who took umbrage with the South’s new stars and their methods of success. Venerable Long Beach rapper Snoop Dogg also dissed Soulja Boy, along with the New Orleans rapper Lil Wayne, while New York kingpin Jay-Z released “D.O.A. (Death of Auto-Tune),” which took aim at the voice modulation software popularized by Tallahassee singer T-Pain.

Lyrical Staten Island clique Wu-Tang Clan was probably the loudest, with crew leader RZA insisting that southerners were less intelligent. “The South has evolved later than us,” he told MTV News in 2010. He said southern students were likely to drop out of school early because of work obligations, poverty, or disinterest in the education system. “I got cousins out there that still live in the South,” he went on. “They have not picked up on the wavelength of where their mind should be.”

Other Wu-Tang members criticized “dance MCs.” Ghostface Killah mocked D4L and Arlington, Texas, rappers GS Boyz (they of the song “Stanky Legg”). He called current radio hip-hop “bullshit,” and contrasted it to the “real hip-hop” made by him and his New York brethren.

After Riverdale, Georgia, rapper Waka Flocka Flame claimed that lyricism wasn’t particularly important to him—“The niggas who they say is lyrical, they ain’t got no shows”—Wu-Tang’s Method Man predicted his quick demise. Said Meth, “The shit that these niggas is doin’ now ain’t hip-hop. That’s pop.”