

Discography: Parliament-Funkadelic: Up for the Down Stroke

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This is where Funkadelic molts into Parliament. *Up for the Down Stroke* takes the filth and sex obsession of the first two Funkadelic albums and scrubs the caked sludge down to nice layer of slime. There's a clarity of detail that makes it a little easier to tell what's going on; instead of the nasty bits being blurred, they're pumping and thrusting in front of your eyes.

There's something serpentine about the album. On "Up for the Down Stroke," Bootsy Collins's bass moves in perfect, stepping eighth-notes, forming a staircase down which everyone else parades, and the same thing happens on "I Can Move You (If You Let Me)" with the vocals. The girls on the cover seem to parade single-file past a vignette of George Clinton in Dracula drag dominating another woman. Passing casually by scenes of decadence is the order of the day; it's like *The Shining* if the guy in the bear suit were behind every door.

Some grouse about the endless outro to "The Goose," but it's pleasingly repulsive as it slithers by, and the five-note guitar figure that comes in about halfway through always reminded me of someone picking their own ass. On "Testify," the phaser on Clinton's

voice sounds like nothing so much as a wet finger sliding down a pane of glass. There's always *something*, and it's even more perverse when you know both of the aforementioned came from Clinton's old band the Parliaments.

The Parliaments recorded "The Goose" and "Testify" in 1967 alongside "All Your Goodies Are Gone," which also appears here. ("That Was My Girl" from *America Eats Its Young* is a Parliaments cut, too.) Clinton had a nasty sense of humor even back then. Both "The Goose" and "That Was My Girl" rely on unsavory animal metaphors, and the former has one of the most brazen double entendres I've ever heard; the lyrics tell me he's saying "I'm nuts all over you," but it sounds like something else—something that wouldn't have been lost on a band with as lick-my-doo a sense of humor as this one.

If you know a song down pat and have ever tried to play it drunk, you know how weird that shit can come out sometimes; just look at Screamin' Jay Hawkins' "I Put a Spell on You." Having a familiarity with the physical motions of the song must've helped the acid-addled Parliament players focus on where they could take it next: submerging them in liquid. Clinton seems to retract inside his own vocals and push himself back out again, as if singing through some kind of frog-like dewlap. Instead of suave soul professionalism, Clinton sounds extremely uncomfortable in his own skin. It's the hyper-awareness of one's own body, especially the sweaty bits, that's an unpleasant side effect of psychedelics.

The title track, "Testify," "The Goose," and "I Can Move You" comprise side A. Side B opens with "I Just Got Back," dominated by the best whistle solo between "Dock of the Bay" and "Young Folks." It's funny because George is vague about where he's been but disarmingly specific about why he came back: he wants to help his girl raise her kids. (The way he sings the word "kids" is something to be savored.)

The rest is dregs. "All Your Goodies" is an immature, sexist rip-off of "Like a Rolling Stone" that foretells the doom of a loose woman. "Presence of a Brain" is a go-nowhere two-chord vamp. "Whatever Makes My Baby Feel Good" is a nice, slow blues dirge, but it lacks the viscous quality of the album's strongest songs. It's this latter half that keeps *Up for the Down Stroke* from belonging in the top tier of P-Funk projects, and it's actually more disappointing for how much the album sounds like the best thing ever for its first five songs.

With Funkadelic in a minor slump, *Up for the Down Stroke* signaled the reins being shifted to the Parliament project. 1975's *Chocolate City* keeps the demented vocal takes and stepping Bootsy bass but eliminates the slime that makes *Down Stroke* so appealing, establishing the spit-shined quality that would define Parliament from then on. It took small steps to get to the mythopoeic rebirth of Parliament's pantheon era—*Mothership Connection*, the Sir Nose saga and so on. But if *Up for the Down Stroke* is transitional, it's in the same way as a snake dragging its own skin.



<https://youtu.be/i01fYbRQjWM>