



dr Lidia Książ-Hunek

MARIA CURIE-SKŁODOWSKA UNIVERSITY, POLAND

LIDIA.KNIAZ-HUNEK@MAIL.UMCS.PL

[HTTPS://ORCID.ORG/0000-0002-6804-4750](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6804-4750)

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## The Politics of Healthcare Marketization and Medical Fetishism in Parliament’s “I’m Gon Make U Sick O’Me”

**Abstract.** This article examines Parliament’s music video “I’m Gon Make U Sick O’Me” (2018) as a satirical and Afrofuturist critique of the American healthcare system and the pharmaceutical industry. Released as part of the concept album *Medicaid Fraud Dogg*, the video engages with broader concerns about the commodification of medicine, the profit motives embedded in healthcare delivery, and the racial politics of medical access and trust. The study situates the video in the cultural and historical context of Afrofuturism, a framework that blends speculative aesthetics with critiques of anti-Blackness, capitalism, and systemic oppression. Using methods drawn from visual culture analysis and critical theory, the article explores how Parliament’s retro-futuristic funk aesthetic and surreal medical imagery work together to produce a layered commentary on contemporary healthcare systems. Central to this analysis is the portrayal of Big Pharma as a seductive and manipulative force, embodied by hyper-stylized characters such as a fetishized nurse, a dazed patient (played by George Clinton), and a flamboyant Dr. Feel Good (portrayed by Scarface). These figures symbolize the eroticization of medical authority and the normalization of pharmaceutical overuse, exposing how illness is constructed and consumed within a capitalist framework. The video’s psychedelic visuals, paired with funk’s destabilizing rhythms, challenge viewers to question not only the marketing of medicine but also the broader systems of racial and economic inequality that shape access to care. The article finds that the video critiques the entanglement of healthcare and desire, drawing attention to how Black communities have been historically marginalized, exploited, and overmedicated. Ultimately, it argues that Parliament’s Afrofuturist vision turns funk into both a mode of critique and a site of healing: one that confronts the violence of medical capitalism while imagining alternative futures grounded in resistance, sonic liberation, and cultural memory.

**Keywords:** Afrofuturism; funk; Big Pharma; medical fetishism; Parliament-Funkadelic; healthcare marketization; George Clinton; visual culture; pharmaceutical critique; racial health disparities.

“I’m Gon Make U Sick O’Me” is a single released by Parliament – a funk group led by a prominent Afrofuturist artist, George Clinton, who is also the frontman of Parliament’s sister-group, Funkadelic.<sup>1</sup> “I’m Gon Make U Sick O’Me” was the promotional song for Parliament’s first album in 38 years,<sup>2</sup> *Medicaid Fraud Dog* (2018), and features guest appearance by rapper Scarface and singer/songwriter/percussionist Mudbone. Even though music-wise Parliament significantly differs from Funkadelic – Parliament is known for their funkier soul and R&B, drawing inspiration from the musical style of James Brown and Sly Stone (Bush), while Funkadelic is associated with acid, psychedelic rock and blues – they were often treated as one Parliament-Funkadelic band and as such were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1997. In 2019, the group received the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. Parliament-Funkadelic released critically acclaimed albums like *Maggot Brain* (1971), *Mothership Connection* (1975), and *One Nation Under a Groove* (1978) and is known for such hit singles as “Tear The Roof Off The Sucker (Give Up The Funk)” (1976), “One Nation Under a Groove” (1978), and “Flash Light” (1978). The groups’ charismatic leader George Clinton is regarded as one of the three pioneers of Afrofuturism along with Sun Ra and Octavia Butler. Clinton’s futuristic imagination by all means influenced Parliament-Funkadelic’s sound and aesthetics, yet its prominent members such as bassist Bootsy Collins, keyboardist Bernie Worrell, and guitarists Eddie Hazel, Garry “Diaperman” Shider, and Michael Hampton also had a substantial impact on the twin groups, particularly in the 1970s.

Aesthetically, both Parliament and Funkadelic draw on imagery associated with low-budget science fiction films, surrealism, and psychedelic counterculture. The mythology created by the group, featuring a roster of characters appearing repeatedly throughout the albums, is one of the leading elements that propelled the development of Afrofuturism. Like Sun Ra, Clinton imagines locating Black people in unexpected places, including the cosmos:

[w]e had put Black people in situations nobody ever thought they would be in, like the White House. I figured another place you wouldn’t think Black people would be was in outer space. I was a big fan of Star Trek, so we did a thing with a pimp sitting in a spaceship shaped like a Cadillac, and we did all these James Brown-type grooves, but with street talk and ghetto slang. (qtd. in Wilson 176)

In the quote above, George Clinton refers to the rap/funk single “Paint the White House Black” from his 1993 solo album *Hey, Man, Smell My Finger*. The song imagining the

<sup>1</sup> As a funk music collective comprising a group of rotating musicians, Parliament-Funkadelic primarily consisted of two distinct bands, Parliament and Funkadelic, which were founded in 1968. Both groups were the only big bands in the history of the genre – in some periods the number of musicians reached several dozen.

<sup>2</sup> The group dissolved in 1980 after the release of *Trombipulation*.

White House filled with Black individuals is particularly meaningful considering not only the fact that another man named Clinton (Bill) served as the 42nd President of the United States (1993–2001) but also that the White House was inhabited by a Black President, Barack Obama (in office from January 20, 2009, to January 20, 2017).

It is not exclusively its visionary potential but rather the deployment of science-fiction-inspired scenography during stage performances, including giant spaceships on-stage, as well as the choice of futuristic costumes, that constitute the backbone of the groups' character. In the case of Parliament-Funkadelic, sound and image are inseparable as both are rooted in Afrofuturist imagination. This relation is manifested in such music videos as Parliament's "I'm Gon Make U Sick O'Me" as well as Funkadelic's "Ain't That Funkin' Kinda Hard on You?" featuring Kendrick Lamar, Ice Cube (dir. Video God, 2016) and George Clinton's classic, cartoon-animation-infused "Atomic Dog" (dir. Peter Conn, 1982).

"I'm Gon Make U Sick O'Me" was released to promote *Medicaid Fraud Dogg* album released on May 22, 2018, through the record label Clinton founded in 2003, C Kunspruhzy Records. Guest artists on the album include Scarface, Mudbone, Fred Wesley, and Pee Wee Ellis. *Medicaid Fraud Dogg* can be regarded as a concept album that revolves around the topic of healthcare and its link with the pharmaceutical industry, addressing related contemporary concerns such as drug abuse, mental health problems and insurance fraud.<sup>3</sup>

*Medicaid Fraud Dogg* caricatures the pharmaceutical industry and characterizes Big Pharma as "an untamable, parasitic beast, and everyone with a prescription regimen as members of a dazed zombie horde" (Pearce). In an interview for *Forbes*, Clinton famously referred to Americans as "one nation under sedation"<sup>4</sup> since "everybody is getting high on something" (Baltin). Clinton's perspective is of particular importance given the widespread use of prescription drugs among American citizens (Martin et al.).<sup>5</sup> The video's storyline develops this theme and expresses George Clinton's criticism of the pharmaceutical industry.

The music video for "I'm Gon Make U Sick O'Me" corresponds with the song's lyrics. "I'm gonna make you sick / I'm gonna make you sick of me / Then I'm gonna give you the antidote / Something to make you feel better" pledges to make one sick and provide the remedy for this very illness, making the song "a satire of malicious pharma practices designed to keep people medicated and dependent" (Pearce). In con-

<sup>3</sup> *Medicaid Fraud Dogg* is not the only concept album recorded by Parliament. *Funkentelechy vs. the Placebo Syndrome* (1977) is another one, warning against the so called "Placebo Syndrome" of consumerism associated with the choice of disco music instead of funk due to its commercial potential.

<sup>4</sup> "One nation under sedation" is a wordplay on Parliament's hit song "One Nation Under a Groove" (1978).

<sup>5</sup> National Center for Health Statistics reports that in 2015–2016, 45.8% of the U.S. population used prescription drugs in the past 30 days.

trast to Big Pharma practices, Parliament regards music in general and their cosmic funk in particular as the antidote.

The opening credits intertwine with a series of shots presenting George Clinton on the desert in futuristic attire, Parliament members in a white studio, as well as character named Dr. Feel Good (played by the rapper Scarface) walking down the health center corridor. Due to the music video's editing (it features multiple quick shots), it is difficult to chronologically describe the narrative emerging from the video. Typically of contemporary music videos, "I'm Gon Make U Sick O'Me" consists of a series of "moments" situated in four main locations: the desert (which predominantly features images of George Clinton next to a colorful spaceship), the white studio (where the whole group gathers), the health center (with Dr. Feel Good, a sexy nurse, and George Clinton being the most prominent characters), and the mysterious space with a multi-colored lighting, repeatedly juxtaposed with the shots from the health center so as to highlight the contrast between the real and the dreamlike. After the interlude, featuring Mudbone, the video focuses on the narrative in the health center.

In hallucinatory sequences that recur in the video, the character depicting the nurse from the medical center is portrayed as an angel dressed in a white costume resembling those worn by samba dancers.<sup>6</sup> Her jewel-encrusted bikini and white sky-high headdress are accompanied by feathered wings and heeled boots. The color white, juxtaposed with colorful strokes of light, highlights the innocence of an angelic creature who is seductively dancing around the main characters. One scene that deserves particular attention revolves around Clinton entering the MRI scan machine – the colors employed to portray the scanning process correspond with ones from the dreamy sequences. This scene is directly linked to the song's interlude, during which Mudbone is sitting in a chair in phantasmagoric, colorful space that resembles a hair salon, with characteristic hair dryers. George Clinton is sitting next to Mudbone under one such dryer. He opens his eyes and starts singing only after he becomes scanned by the MRI machine in another shot from the medical center. This indicates that the MRI scan machine is able to teleport health center patients to another dimension. In the following scenes, the nurse is seducing George Clinton, who is in hospital bed. She kisses him and dances around him provocatively. During Scarface's rap part, the rapper impersonating Dr. Feel Good administers an intramuscular injection to Clinton (which causes Parliament's leader to have green laser-like gaze), measures his blood pressure, and works on his computer in another room. This is also where Scarface is seduced by the very same angelic nurse. The video concludes with a series of short shots parallel to those from the beginning of the production.

"I'm Gon Make U Sick O'Me" is stylized as a retro-futuristic, with 1970s-style fonts in the opening credits, visual glitches, and amateur-like editing akin to early music videos. Aesthetically, it features spaceships and desert landscapes, alluding to pulp science fiction. It also operates on the dichotomy between real and imagined space.

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<sup>6</sup> It could also be said that she resembles a model from Victoria's Secret show.

The contrast is achieved by incorporating split screens, with the images of the nurse on the one side and the hypersexualized angel played by the very same actress on the other. Thus, the main concept behind the video is that “the goofy hospital sequences (...) interspersed with some quintessentially trippy visuals” (Blisten) send a strong social and political message. In addition, they resonate with trippiness associated with the psychedelic culture of the 1970s, which originated within Black artistic circles – such as Clinton’s Parliament and Funkadelic – alongside with Afrofuturism.

The music video addresses medical fetishism by including staff members who are either seducing (the nurse) or sedating (Dr. Feel Good) their patients. Medical fetishism (also known as medfet) has been discussed by Love (1992), McClintock (1993), Brame et al. (1996), Midori (2005), Aggrawal (2008), and Brickley (2015). It refers to several fetishes in which participants derive sexual pleasure from enacting various medical scenarios. These might include objects, practices, places, and situations of a medical nature. While medical fetishism can become a sexual role play, with partners assuming the roles of doctors, nurses, or patients to act out specific or general medical fetishes, Parliament’s music video may be seen as projecting a medical fantasy. The vision does not necessarily involve pornography or explicit sexual activities but rather draws attention to the sinister practices of healthcare industry aimed at patients vulnerable to a particular type of imagery connected to healthcare.

In “I’m Gon Make U Sick O’Me,” the nurse from the medical center is particularly significant as, along with George Clinton, she plays the key role in the narrative. She is wearing only the top of her scrubs, beige fishnet tights, and high heels. Her face is covered with heavy makeup. She is wearing excessive jewelry and has a long blonde wig. She does not resemble other staff members who are dressed in appropriate work uniforms. Her main task at this job seems to involve seducing the patients and distracting health professionals from doing their job.

The doctor played by Scarface is involved in the process of numbing Clinton. Apart from pursuing actions associated with his professional duties such as administering injections or making MRI scans (Clinton), he also allows the nurse to take action and seduce the leader of Parliament. When the nurse is giving Clinton a lap dance and the doctor catches her in the act, he simply ignores the situation and allows her to continue. Catching the two in a compromising situation in a way embarrasses the doctor but he is not interrupted by this. The shot alludes to a scene in *Space is the Place*, where one of the main characters, Jimmy Fey, finds himself in an ICU hospital bed. He is examined by the film’s antagonist, “the Overseer,” who pretends to be his doctor. At some point in the scene, “the Overseer” invites the nurse to “party” with him. She leaves the room and after a while returns with a nurse colleague. Jimmy Fey then observes them stripping in front of him and the doctor. In the music video, it is George Clinton who is being entertained. Importantly, at some point in the video the doctor is also seduced by the nurse who is dancing around him. This is when he loses consciousness, and the nurse defibrillates him. After the doctor awakens, however, the nurse continues twerking. Apart from being a visual reference to an Afrofuturist classic – particularly

through the recurring character of a seductive nurse in a hallucinatory setting – this scene reminds the audience that health professionals can be also victims of the corrupted system and may be manipulated by the industry.

Healthcare fetishism can be also identified in the interlude and corresponding shots. Mudbone sings: “No need to read, no need to read / The label warning, uh / Just take two of me, girl / And promise you’ll funk me in the morning.” The singer appears in a phantasmagoric sequence that indicates he has already undergone the treatment, like Clinton. He might be a doctor prescribing medicine to a woman or simply a patient talking to his female partner. He sings that the labels informing about the side effects can be ignored and that with appropriate dosage, the woman would “funk” Mudbone. The word “funk” here functions as a euphemism for sexual intercourse.<sup>7</sup> During the interlude, the sexy angelic nurse is dancing around Mudbone and Clinton, which suggests that Mudbone has also been seduced by the nurse. This disorienting transmission draws attention to corrupt practices in the pharmaceutical industry, e.g., over-prescribing drugs improving one’s sexual performance rather than providing cures to more serious medical conditions. The attitude towards so-called “lifestyle drugs”<sup>8</sup> might be one of the reasons why the pharmaceutical industry is critically regarded by Americans, according to the Gallup annual poll (“Business and Industry Sector Ratings”). The use of manipulative techniques by healthcare professionals, especially ones that are seductive and sexualized, violates ethical principles.

After watching the clip, one may draw the conclusion that Americans have become not only seduced but also sedated and effectively disoriented by continuous use of medications. This message is achieved via visual effects employed in the video, including the color palette, filters, and camera shots. All these make the video like “footage” from a hallucinatory and phantasmagoric fantasy. Blurred colors and vibrating visual effects added in post-production create an effect of trippiness and numbness associated with consciousness-altering drugs.

<sup>7</sup> The use of the word „funk” in the context of its erotic implications is analyzed in detail in LaMonda Horton Stallings’s *Funk the Erotic: Transaesthetics and Black Sexual Cultures* (2015). In her book, Stallings uses the term “funk” to theorize sexuality, culture and Western hegemony.

<sup>8</sup> Lifestyle drugs are known as medications treating non-life-threatening and non-painful conditions such as baldness, wrinkles, erectile dysfunction, or acne (Gilbert et al.; Mitrany; Ashworth et al.; Flower). According to Rahman et al., examples of lifestyle drugs include such medications as Viagra (Sildenafil citrate), height increase pills, caffeine, amphetamine, melatonin, as well as vitamin supplements (409–13). Lifestyle drugs are sometimes confused with recreational drugs such as alcohol, cannabis, nicotine, and various, more addictive drugs including heroin, cocaine, LSD, and psilocybin mushrooms, whose purpose is to induce an altered state of consciousness either for pleasure or for other purposes (Crocq 355). The distinction between lifestyle and recreational drugs is especially relevant given the fact that “[i]t is the particular use of a drug, rather than its inherent properties, that determines whether it is called a lifestyle drug” (Mitrany 441). Thus, methamphetamine may be perceived as a lifestyle drug when it is used for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and obesity and as a recreational drug when used for its quality as a stimulant.

Interestingly, the music video's imagery corresponds with the single cover, which portrays the character of Sir Nose d'Voidoffunk (known from P-funk mythology) camouflaged as a doctor prescribing the "Nozitol – Extra Stench" medicine on the cover of the single.<sup>9</sup> On the prescription he writes "Then I'm gonna give you the antidote" which refers to providing antidotes for invented symptoms. Nozitol is supposed to provide "mad relief of: heartache, fame, funk." This provides an interesting reference to Bootsy's Rubber Band and their "Pinocchio Theory," according to which "if you fake the funk, your nose will grow" (*P-Funk*, 1977). Side effects listed on the single's cover include: "frantic depression, headache and prissiness, empathy deficit disorder, and trumpinosis," a neologism that might indicate the condition of being hypnotized as a result of Donald Trump's administration. In the music video, the band member representing Sir Nose d'Voidoffunk also appears throughout.

Both the music video and the single cover art allude to the pharmaceutical industry which prioritizes sales over patient welfare. In so doing, they position Sir Nose as an allegory for the indomitable pharmaceutical industry. Clinton expresses his antipathy for the Big Pharma and condemns endless cycles of addiction. His album and the music video examine the blurring of boundaries between legitimate treatment of medical conditions and the use of pharmaceuticals as lifestyle and recreational drugs. Relying on the infectious power of funk and groove, the music video revolves around the topic of privatized healthcare and draws attention to the ways in which medicine has been commercialized.

"I'm Gon Make U Sick O'Me" is particularly significant in the ways in which it refers to the rhetoric of the pharmaceutical industry. It fetishizes hospital staff as providers of erotically charged entertainment. By means of selling sickness with the use of sex, it shows a tainted picture of the industry which aims at providing remedies to "invented" conditions and putting patients in hospitals and providing them with treatments resulting in the development of other medical symptoms. The music video mocks the Big Pharma and criticizes the ways in which medical staff has become sexualized. Parliament expresses skepticism towards the industry by highlighting the ways in which Big Pharma's medications are sold as objects of desire. It is particularly visible in sequences that feature the seductive nurse.

The music video expresses deep distrust of sinister Big Pharma practices, camouflaged as noble clinical goals and professional healthcare. Although not explicitly addressed, "monopoly pricing, blocking generics and biosimilars, spending heavily on political lobbying, an arguably relentless focus on profit" (Lo) are undoubtedly affecting such patients as George Clinton, who at the time when the music video was released was 77 years old. Creating a concept album devoted to the impact of Western medicine on Americans might be seen as a way to address his real-life concerns.

<sup>9</sup> Sir Nose d'Voidoffunk from Parliament's album *Funkentelechy Vs. The Placebo Syndrome* (1977), who claims to be "the subliminal seducer" and "devoid of funk," is a reappearing character in P-funk mythology.

The portrayal of the pharmaceutical industry emerging from the video is entirely negative and shows deep distrust of the public health system. The lack of trust towards Western medicine is rooted in the Black communities' experiences, often based on the principles that might be seen as a form of medical racism. Consequently, the representation of the healthcare system in the video has also been affected by Parliament's attitude towards Western medicine, which has a long history of experimentation on Black people, traceable back to the times of the Middle Passage (Ash et al. 2). The medical experimentation on Blacks has multiple contemporary manifestations, including the infamous Tuskegee study (1932–1972)<sup>10</sup> which has had lasting effects on Black Americans, including their distrust of Western medicine and unwillingness to participate in medical research.

The problem is also related to the treatment of such medical conditions prevalent among Black Americans as Type 2 diabetes (T2D), heart disease, and increased blood pressure. Many Black Americans with limited access to quality healthcare tend to postpone their treatment until their symptoms become burdensome. Still, it is early diagnosis and immediate treatment that decrease the negative effects of the above-mentioned conditions. Finally, racial disparities have been particularly profound during the COVID-19 pandemic, which “has disproportionately impacted communities of color and highlighted longstanding racial health inequities” (Ash et al. 1).

In addition, Parliament's mistrust of the pharmaceutical industry is a result of the deeply anti-capitalist stance that the group has developed over the decades. Even though the group has not been explicitly involved in actions of political nature, by highlighting the absurdities of contemporary American political and social systems they indirectly present their political views about certain contentious matters. Although the music video was released during the presidency of Donald Trump, the lack of access to public healthcare (significantly affecting Black communities) has been a thorny issue for almost every administration in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. The link between healthcare marketization and capitalism is thus of particular significance in the American context. Being one of the results of America's current healthcare crisis, the topic of addiction to prescription drugs is one of the themes recurring throughout the album.

Pearce notes that “Insurance Man,” another *Medicaid Fraud Dogg's* song, directly stands with Obamacare and rebukes Trump's opposition to programs like Planned Parenthood. The album's title directly refers to Medicaid – a government insurance program for persons of all ages, which partially covers healthcare costs for residents

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<sup>10</sup> The Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis (1932–1972) was a U.S. Public Health Service experiment in Macon County, Alabama, involving about 600 Black American men, most of whom were poor sharecroppers. Roughly 400 had syphilis, yet they were misled and denied effective treatment, even after penicillin became available in the 1940s. Researchers observed the disease's progression instead, leading to severe health consequences for the men, their partners, and children. When exposed in 1972, the study sparked national outrage and became a defining example of unethical medical research.

with low income and limited financial resources. Medicaid is characterized by complicated eligibility policies that vary on state level. The album seems to criticize the fact that representatives of companies in pharmaceuticals and biomedicine engage in powerful lobbying. American politicians regard healthcare as a major factor in US public spending, finding it hard not to play by the rules laid by the Big Pharma companies who often fund political campaigns.

According to Pearce, on their latest album the band “proposes that funk is the panacea” (Pearce). Parliament’s funk thus symbolizes a radical political stance. Drawing on Nielsen, who uses the notion of “Afrofuturizing the funk” while referring to Eshun’s writing on Parliament’s style (54), Afrofuturist aesthetic expands the political potential of funk. Thus, funk not only becomes a source of entertainment but also serves political goals. With such lyrics as “the bigger the headache, the bigger the pill” (*Dr. Funkenstein*, 1976), Parliament-Funkadelic draw attention to the existential dread that has caused Americans to become addicted to pharmaceutical drugs. Both the song and the accompanying music video function as a commentary on American healthcare and wellness industries, and Big Pharma in particular. Clinton and his group criticize the fact that the pharmaceutical industry sells treatments and cures for health issues caused by the use of other medications.

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