

SNOOP DOGGY DOGG: BAD TO THE BONE

SPIN

NIRVANA

The Confessions of
Kurt Cobain

Plus: Primus, William Gibson,
Dazed and Confused, The Fall,
Hip Hop in Japan, Suede Live

OCTOBER 1993

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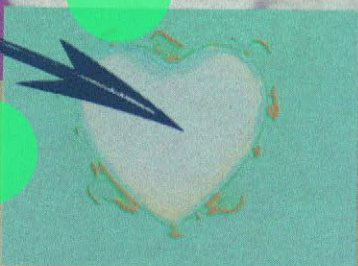
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IT'S THE HYUNDAI TOP 20 CHART

Check out what

SPIN

readers are listening
to this month!

1. **ENUFF ZNUFF** *Animals With Human Intelligence*
2. **PEARL JAM** *Ten*
3. **AEROSMITH** *Get A Grip*
4. **BABES IN TOYLAND** *Painkillers (EP)*
5. **DINOSAUR JR.** *Where You Been*
6. **STONE TEMPLE PILOTS** *Core*
7. **RADIOHEAD** *Pablo Honey*
8. **PORNO FOR PYROS** *Porno For Pyros*
9. **RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE** *Rage Against The Machine*
10. **ALICE IN CHAINS** *Dirt*
11. **SONIC YOUTH** *Dirty*
12. **SOUL ASYLUM** *Grave Dancers Union*
13. **NIRVANA** *Incesticide*
14. **PRIMUS** *Pork Soda*
15. **DEPECHE MODE** *Songs Of Faith And Devotion*
16. **BLIND MELON** *Blind Melon*
17. **BELLY** *Star*
18. **U2** *Zooropa*
19. **SHONEN KNIFE** *Let's Knife*
20. **LENNY KRAVITZ** *Are You Gonna Go My Way*

What are you listening to? Each month, call the number listed below and vote for your three current favorite recordings.

Then, SPIN adds your choices to those of all our callers. The titles that get the most votes are charted here as the Hyundai Top 20.

There's no cost for the call other than the regular long-distance fee. So get in on it! Call today and vote for the hits!

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HYUNDAI
Cars that make sense.

Recently, a writer pitched a piece on Snoop to a mainstream mag by saying enthusiastically, "He's cool—he looks like a homeless guy."

And that voice: playfully impudent, edging toward existential natty dread, but always pulling chains, disarming your expectations. His most exhilarating lyrical tag—"Bow wow wow yippee-yo yippie-yay / Doggy Dogg's in the motherfuckin' heee-ooouse!"—is, of course, memorable for *how* he says it (Dre: "If he's rappin' about bakin' a motherfuckin' cake, and it's workin', then I'll change my name to Dolly Madison, know what I'm sayin'?). And then, there's the Snoop drawl, the deepest ever in hip hop, sticking the deterred-dream migration of black families from South to West (and now, quite often, back South) right up in your face. He insinuates a complexity that's, at times, maddening.

Recently, a writer pitched a piece on Snoop to a mainstream consumer mag by saying, enthusiastically: "He's cool—he looks like a homeless guy." I guess that rootless, gangsta mythology shit is always an easy sell (as Dre knows well). But the day we talked, Snoop wore a fashionably baggy, plaid sweater-shirt, nylon sweat pants, pricey black leather boots, and matching gold earring and pinky ring of happy-sad theater masks. Though his hair was plaited haphazardly, he carried himself more carefully than anyone else at the studio, like an artist, daresay. Lanky at six feet four, he fleshed out the casual charisma implied when he flickered by, a figure lurking in the background of videos for "Deep Cover," "Nuthin' But a 'G' Thang," and "Dre Day."

"I wanted to be a mystery," he explains. "Like, 'Why doesn't he look at the camera?' Then when I finally do, it'll be, 'All right, he's rockin' now.' It won't be Dr. Dre, and you don't see my name on the TV. It'll be my name, my TV, then I'll give you all of me."

But what exactly *is* all of Snoop? Why is this savvy, artistic kid looked upon as possibly the purest product of gangsta rap culture—and, as a result, the latest poster child for the "real" experience of the young, black male in "AmeriKKKa," to quote the last such icon, Ice Cube, another Dre protégé? Is it because he felt he had to choose gang life to survive? Is it because he fell prey to gang life, despite having other options? Is it because he intentionally immersed himself in the gang scenario so he could become a real hip-hop spokesman for his homies on the street?

Like Ice Cube, Snoop exploits the language and imagery of gangsta rap, no matter how hurtful or irresponsible, to communicate with black kids. He sincerely yearns to be a benefactor of his neighborhood. But like most pop stars, he's not sure how.

What you gonna do when you grow up and have to face responsibility?

—Donny Hathaway, "Little Ghetto Boy," 1972
—Dr. Dre and Snoop Doggy Dogg, "Lil' Ghetto Boy," 1992

The time it took for Donny Hathaway to ask that question, and for Dr. Dre to sample it, is the story of Snoop Doggy Dogg's life. Born Cordavar Varnado in 1972, unleashed on the public as Dre's alter ego in 1992, he took the caution seriously as a kid, but fell into the "ghetto" trap anyway—running with a Crips gang in Long Beach, and going to jail three times for selling drugs. Now, even though he looks back on his "hustlin'" days as if they were a given initiation—"It's there, every day you wake up to it; either you run away from it, or you run to it"—he's an adult challenging kids not to make the same mistakes. The irony's not lost on him. But is asking the same questions good enough anymore?

"Shit, it's hard, man," says Snoop, shaking his head, as if he's been trying to figure an answer for all of his 21 years. "The song ['Lil' Ghetto Boy'] goes deeper than that, if you let it. I'll put it like this: I've lived the life those kids are livin'—shootin' people up, gang-bangin', slangin' dope, I already did all that shit, and the outcome is either death or jail. I went to jail, but you might not be blessed to get that chance, so peep my shit and learn from me. That's the positive side of being a 'gangsta' in life. That's taking control of your life."

Although his parents never married, and his dad never lived at home, Snoop (short for "Snoopy," because he "had a lot of hair on his head as a baby and looked like a little dog," according to his dad) profited from a supportive extended family, including a host of aunts, cousins, and friends. A talented child, he played piano and was active in his local church, Golgotha Trinity Baptist, where he taught Sunday school, sang in the choir, and acted in plays. He was also a skilled basketball player who received recruiting letters from top college programs (North Carolina, UNLV, Syracuse).

"Snoop was always extraordinary," says his dad, Vernell Varnado, 44, a postal carrier in Detroit who had a short-lived gospel career in the early '80s with his four brothers (the Varnado Bros. recorded two 45s on a small label in their native Mississippi). "I thought he was a genius. Even when he was like six or seven, if music came on, he'd jump up and dance and perform all the hand movements." Of Snoop's hoop abilities, Vernell juices up the paternal hyperbole: "He could've been another Magic Johnson." An assessment rebutted by his son: "He's outta hand with all that old shit. I was all right, but it wasn't to where I wanted to stop rapping. I wasn't going to be the bomb in basketball."

Vernell, not a hip-hop fan, thinks "Lil' Ghetto Boy" is his son's finest song. And it *is* Snoop at his best, chatting up the kids like a big brother. It's also where Snoop feels he earns his trash-talk and gangsta pose—the baiting of "bitches" and "punk-ass niggas," the dyke jokes. Waking up in a jail cell, arrested