Funk
- Funk comes from R&B and Soul
- Same instrument line up

- By late 1960s, funk takes over from Soul as the dominant African American musical style

Term **funk**:
- Odor, smell
- Used as musical term in early 1900s before funk music.
- Syncopation, danceable groove
Elements of Funk

1. Minimal or no chord changes
2. Riffs and Polyrhythms
3. Emphasizing beat 1
4. Focus on rhythm
   – Voice and other melodic instruments used like percussion instruments
   – Length of songs, focus on groove
1. Chord Changes

• What is a chord?

• Typical pop music harmonies (4 chord song), verse-chorus structure and chord changes:
  Ex: Ben E. King - “Stand By Me” (1961)

• One chord songs:
  Ex: Aretha Franklin - “Chain of Fools” (1968)
Mid 1960s, beginnings of Funk

• Some artists started emphasizing rhythm over melody and harmony.

• What is melody?

• Drums are the most purely rhythmic instrument because they don’t usually play melodies or chords (although they can)

Demo: drum on guitar/table
2. Riffs and Polyrhythms

**Riff**: Short, repeated rhythm or musical idea (demo)

- Funk rhythms were often *polyrhythmic* in structure, which means that each instrument would play a short, simple idea (riff) over and over.
- Syncopation

**Demo**: group interlocking patterns, table, claps, etc.
2. Riffs and Polyrhythms

• The interest of the music comes from the way in which these simple parts fit together to make a complex overall effect, and also the way this can be manipulated to explore nuances of groove.

• Non-percussion instruments can play like drums to create this same effect: focus on rhythm

Ex: James Brown – “In The Middle, Pt. 1” (1968)
2. Riffs and Polyrhythms

• Short repeated patterns as basis for funk songs

• OR, Rhythm as basis for a song (vs. melody)

Ex: James Brown – “Go On Now” (1968)
3. Emphasizing Beat “One”

• Most popular music is grouped into 4-beat bars

• Blues, R&B, Soul, Rock n Roll generally emphasize the backbeat (2+4):
  Ex: Al Green – “Here I Am (Come and Take Me)” (1973)

• The “One”:
  Ex: James Brown – “Make It Funky” (1971)
Compared to soul:
• Less melodic vocals (voice as percussion)
• Percussive *riffs* (short repeated patterns)
• Rhythm is central
• Polyrhythms (West African drumming)
• Pop and Gospel references gone
• Slow or no chord changes
• Length to keep groove (7+ minutes)
• Similar to minimalism, stripped down basics

Ex: James Brown - “Cold Sweat” (1967)
James Brown (1933-2006)

• b. South Carolina, raised in Augusta, Georgia
• Godfather of Soul
• Control-freak musical mastermind
• Eye (ear?) for talent
Ex: James Brown – “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag” (1965)

- Often considered the first funk song (along with “Cold Sweat”)
- Militaristic rehearsals, road life
- Fines
- New bands
Maceo and all the King’s Men

- Former-James Brown band members
- Maceo Parker (sax)
- Jimmy Nolan (guitar)

Ex: Maceo and all the King’s Men
- “Maceo” (1970)

- Emphasis on groove leaves lots of room for improvisation
Parliament (and/or) Funkadelic

- Late 60s to present (P-Funk), collective
- George Clinton
- Former members of James Brown’s bands
- Bootsy Collins
Ex: Parliament – “Flash Light” (1977)
• Repeated chants
Socio-cultural aspects of Funk

• Civil Right Movement: optimism for integration

• Split of Martin Luther King pacifism and Black Panther militant Islam

• Funk represents a “Blacker” style of music
Socio-cultural aspects of Funk

• Why was funk seen as being “blacker” than other kinds of music?

1. In removing pop elements that had been in soul music, funk seemed to be distancing itself from typically white musical forms.

2. Unlike soul, funk did not have crossover appeal at first. James Brown, who had many white fans as a soul artist, mostly lost that part of his audience when he changed over to funk.
Socio-cultural aspects of Funk

3. Specific musical features of funk strongly parallel aspects of traditional African music (polyrhythmic structures, static harmony, etc.)

• In general, more committed 1960s black nationalists often chose to dress in African-inspired clothes, adopt African names, etc., and funk could serve as an aural equivalent of those gestures
Socio-cultural aspects of Funk

• Most commercial funk artists seemed sympathetic to these political developments in a general way, but also generally avoided strong political commitments.

• James Brown, especially, became an important community figurehead and frequently expressed a pro-black perspective, without ever being as publicly radical as, for example, the Black Panthers or the Nation of Islam.

Ex: James Brown – “Say It Loud (I’m Black And I’m Proud)” (1968)
Other elements of Funk

1. Slap Bass style (demo)

2. Extended chords on guitar (demo)

3. Horn stabs or horn shots:
   Ex: James Brown - “Gittin’ a Little Hipper” (1969)
Sly & The Family Stone

• San Francisco collective, psychedelic
• 1967-1983

Ex: Sly & The Family Stone

– “Thank You (Falettin Me Be Mice Elf Again)” (1970)
Too many artists, too little time...

The Meters (New Orleans)
Ex: “Just Kissed My Baby” (1974)
  • Wah wah

Chaka Khan (Chicago)
  • band Rufus, Queen of Funk
Ex: “Tell Me Something Good” (1974)

Kool & The Gang
War
Tower of Power
The Commodores
Funk influences on other genres

Funk Rock:
Ex: Red Hot Chili Peppers - “If You Have to Ask” (1991)

G-Funk:
Ex: Snoop Dogg – “Snoopafella” (1999)
• Sample of Brick – “Dazz” (1977)
• Often samples P-Funk
• Many other hip hop groups sample funk, especially James Brown

Pop-Funk:
Ex: Prince - “Kiss” (1986)