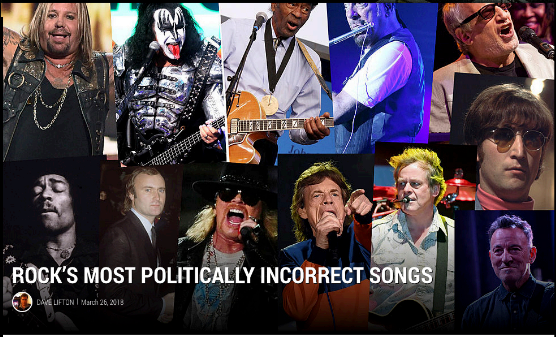


ROCK'S MOST POLITICALLY INCORRECT SONGS

DAVE LIFTON | March 26, 2018

Standards change with the times, and what may have seemed like a good lyrical idea 30 or 40 years ago ends up afoul of contemporary standards. These are the ones that make up our list of Rock's Most Politically Incorrect Songs.

To get an idea of what we're talking about, we'll look beyond the rock world for the holiday standard "Baby, It's Cold Outside." Nowadays, lyrics like "Say, what's in this drink?" and the narrator's persistence after being told that "the answer is no" sound like a date rape is about to happen. For decades, however, the song was considered a flirtatious back-and-forth between a man trying to use the weather as an excuse to get the woman to stay the night. How accepted was this? Check out this clip of June Carter Cash singing it with Homer & Jethro on *The Johnny Cash Show*, where it was played for comedic effect.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given rock's perpetual obsession with sex, a lot of these songs deal with people who prey on underage girls or boast about treating their women badly. There are also many that reveal unenlightened views on race and homosexuality, areas where rock musicians have traditionally been on the progressive side of things.

We're leaving out some tracks, like "Rednecks" and "Short People" by Randy Newman, and Dire Straits' "Money for Nothing," which were written in character with the intention of lampooning the ideas being put forth by their narrators. We've also kept out songs that advocate or promote drug use off the list -- otherwise it would go on forever. Check it all out below.

Chuck Berry, "Sweet Little Sixteen" (1958)

Because rock was originally for and about teenagers, we can forgive a lot of early rockers for singing about falling in love with underage girls. But we won't give Chuck Berry a pass for leering at the "*tight dresses and lipstick*" and high heels the girl in this song is wearing, because Berry was already in his early thirties when he wrote it.

Chuck Berry "Sweet Little Sixteen"

Ray Stevens, "Ahab the Arab" (1962)

If Ray Stevens' 1962 Top 5 hit had merely been a recitation of Arabic cliches, his silly story of a sheik who rides his camel every night to visit Fatima – a dancer in the Sultan's harem – could have been remembered in the same terms as the Tin Pan Alley standard "The Sheik of Araby." But he takes it a step too far by twice mimicking Middle Eastern ululations. Stevens has denied that the song is racist, **saying** that he pulled all his ideas from a book called *Arabian Nights* that his mother gave him when he was young.

You're Sixteen
Johnny Burnette
(third album)
STEREO
Plus
JOHNNY BURNETTE SINGS
THE DEFINITIVE REMASTERED EDITION

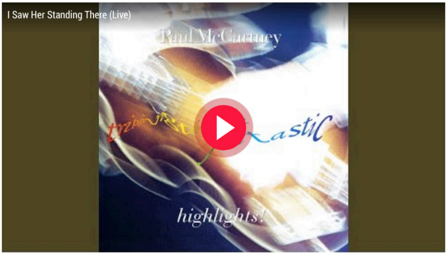
The Crystals, "He Hit Me (And It Felt Like a Kiss)" (1962)

Even in 1962, this **Phil Spector**-produced hit was cringe-worthy, and the girls in the Crystals later admitted that they were unhappy at having to record the Gerry Goffin-**Carole King** song. Goffin's lyrics were inspired by their babysitter, "The Loco-Motion" singer Little Eva, who had been abused by her boyfriend but stayed with him anyway. King, who penned the music, **later said**, "Obviously, I'm complicit in having written that song. I kind of wish I hadn't written any part of that."

He Hit Me (It Felt Like a Kiss)
da doo ron ron
the very best of
the crystals

The Beatles, "I Saw Her Standing There" (1963)

Paul McCartney has said that the the opening lines of "I Saw Her Standing There" was originally "*Well, she was just 17 / Never been a beauty queen*," but he and **John Lennon** decided to change it because that was demeaning. Instead, they


I Saw Her Standing There (Live)
Paul McCartney
highlights!

The Beatles, "Run for Your Life" (1965)

In "Getting Better," John Lennon admitted that he had hit his wife, but it doesn't make our list because at least that song is about trying to make amends for past mistakes. In "Run for Your Life," Lennon unapologetically threatens his partner if she cheats on him. And he's even less distressed about lifting the opening line -- "*I'd rather see you dead, little girl /*

Than to be with another man" -- from Elvis Presley's "Baby Let's Play House."

Beatles - Run For Your Life - Alternate Take - Correct Speed
RUBBER SOUL

The Rolling Stones, "Under My Thumb" (1966)

Three years after Betty Friedan kicked off the women's-rights movement with *The Feminine Mystique*, the Rolling Stones got into trouble with this song about a once-wild woman who has been since become subservient. It was released on *Aftermath* along with the similarly misogynistic "Stupid Girl" and "Out of Time."

Under My Thumb
AFTERMATH
the rolling stones

The Jimi Hendrix Experience, "Hey Joe" (1967)

The history of the blues is rife with songs about physically harming women who have strayed, and the category probably deserves a list of its own. In their place, we're submitting Jimi Hendrix's take on "Hey Joe." His groundbreaking guitar work added menace and violence to previously recorded versions, but his anguished vocal also gave it another layer of complexity.

The Jimi Hendrix Experience - Hey Joe (Audio)
EXPERIENCE
HENDRIX
vevo
www.jimihendrix.com

The Rolling Stones, "Stray Cat Blues" (1968)

"*I can see that you're 15 years old / No, I don't want your I.D.*," Mick Jagger snarls at a runaway on this *Beggars Banquet* deep cut, which was inspired by the Velvet Underground's "Heroin." Saying it's neither a "*hanging matter*" nor a "*capital crime*," he takes things a few steps deeper into the gutter by asking her to bring a friend along. If that's not bad enough, on the live *Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out*, Jagger changes her age to 13.

THE ROLLING STONES

Jethro Tull, "Aqualung" (1971)

Ian Anderson's compassion for a homeless man who has no one to help him is admirable. But it comes well after the dramatic opening lines in the Jethro Tull classic, in which we get to envision him "*eyeing little girls with bad intent*" and staring at lingerie drying on a clothesline.

Aqualung (2001 Remaster)
JETHRO TULL
THE VERY BEST OF

The Rolling Stones, "Brown Sugar" (1971)

The Rolling Stones loved black music, yet they displayed a shocking amount of cultural insensitivity toward African Americans here (and elsewhere on this list). A gleeful ode to the sadomasochistic sexual appetite of a slave owner, "Brown Sugar" was even written after Jagger had fathered a child with African-American model Marsha Hunt.

Brown Sugar
The Rolling Stones
Sticky Fingers

Kiss, "Goin' Blind" (1974)

Released on *Hotter Than Hell*, "Goin' Blind" -- "*I'm 93, you're 16*" pretty much says it all -- comes from Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley's pre-Kiss days in Wicked Lester. Simmons wrote it with guitarist Stephen Coronel, who was arrested for uploading child pornography from his computer in 2014. He was charged with five counts of sexual exploitation of a minor, and later sentenced to serve six years in jail.

Goin' Blind
GREATEST
KISS

Elton John, "Island Girl" (1975)

Just how popular was **Elton John** in the mid-'70s? "Island Girl," a song about a Jamaican prostitute in New York City who'll "*wrap herself around you like a well-worn tire*" spent three weeks at No. 1 in 1975. While John and lyricist **Bernie Taupin** were clearly attempting to empathize with her, albeit in an insensitive way, it's the singer's use of a cringing patois that puts "Island Girl" over the top. According to **Setlist.fm**, John hasn't performed the song since 1989.

Island Girl
Rock of the Westies
Elton John

Steely Dan, "Everyone's Gone to the Movies" (1975)

In case "Aqualung" wasn't enough of a pervert, meet Mr. LaPage, who lures teenagers into his house and shows them homemade porno movies with intentions of seducing them. But this being **Steely Dan**, it's all wrapped in such a sleek musical setting that its devious nature is sorta tough to notice.

Everyone's Gone To The Movies
CITIZEN
STEELY DAN
1972
1980

Sammy Hagar, "Cruisin' and Boozin" (1977)

Prior to the strengthening of anti-drunk driving laws in the '80s, knocking back a few and going for a ride to look for girls was a popular pastime. Drunk driving was treated so casually that **Sammy Hagar**'s 1977 song was even used as a punchline in an episode of ***Rhoda***.

Cruisin' & Boozin' (2002 Digital Remaster; 24-Bit Remastered)
CLASSIC MASTERS
SAMMY HAGAR

Bruce Springsteen, "Fire" (1977)

Bruce Springsteen wrote this ***Darkness on the Edge of Town***-era song for Elvis Presley, and its lyrics, "*I'm pullin' you close / You just say no / You say you don't like it / But, girl, I know you're a liar*," is a little too forceful. Presley died shortly after Springsteen sent the song to him, so he gave it to the **Pointer Sisters**, who changed the gender and turned it into a slightly less creepy take on a woman who's caught in an emotional web. It became one of their biggest hits, reaching No. 2 in 1979.

Bruce Springsteen - Fire (rare)

Kiss, "Christine Sixteen" (1977)

Once again, Gene Simmons' fixation on underage girls gets the best of him. Here, he discovers the object of his desires coming out of her school, and he's been tormented by her ever since. Even though he sang "Goin' Blind" three years earlier, he tells her that it's out of character for him. Even with the questionable subject matter, "Christine Sixteen" was pulled as the lead single from ***Love Gun***, and became the band's sixth Top 40 hit, peaking at No. 25 in 1977.

Christine Sixteen
GREATEST
KISS

The Knack, "Good Girls Don't" (1979)

If the **Knack**'s desires for the "*touch of the younger kind*" in "**My Sharona**" didn't turn people off, its follow-up single upped the ante. "Good Girls Don't" is a power-poppy blast of high-school horniness, as Doug Fieger gives the object of the boy's desires a little too much sexual confidence. Still, it made it to No. 11.

The Knack - "Good Girls Don't" - Official Video

The Vapors, "Turning Japanese" (1980)

Writing about a taboo like masturbation isn't enough to get on the list of Rock's Most Politically Incorrect Songs. So what sets this song apart from, say, "Pictures of Lily" by the Who? It's the depiction of an Asian stereotype about having narrow eyes as the track's chief metaphor, punctuated by a Japanese-style melody.

The Vapors - Turning Japanese (Official Music Video)

Josie Cotton, "Johnny, Are You Queer?" (1981)

After a date in which Johnny spends most of his time hanging out and dancing with the guys instead of making out with the singer, she comes to the conclusion that he might be gay. According to Cotton, the controversy over "Johnny, Are You Queer?" created a rare moment when the LGBTQ community and the religious right were up in arms over the same song. But she still performed it during the prom scene in the movie *Valley Girl*.

Johnny, Are You Queer?
JOSIE COTTON
CONVERTIBLE MUSIC

Genesis, "Illegal Alien" (1983)

Even Phil Collins, a man who has become synonymous with political correctness and sensitivity in the music business, can't escape scrutiny with this catchy but undeniably offensive single by Genesis. He's attempting to tell the story of a Mexican reduced to sneaking across the border when his paperwork is denied, but even if he wasn't pimping out his sister in the bridge (part of the song that was edited from the single version), Collins' fake-Latino accent is worse than any Speedy Gonzales cartoon. And then there's the video, where he dons a black wig and mustache, and brings a litany of negative Mexican stereotypes to life.

Genesis - Illegal Alien (1983)

Motley Crue, "All in the Name Of ... " (1987)

In which Motley Crue expand on the Rolling Stones' affinity for 15-year-old girls (see "Stray Cat Blues"). "*You say illegal / I say, legal's never been my scene*," Vince Neil sings, telling us about how, even at that young age, his prey has already posed nude and is willing to be subservient to his needs. But he does it for a higher purpose: "*All in the name of rock 'n' roll / For sex and sex I'd sell my soul*."

All In The Name Of... (International)
UNIVERSAL
CLASSIC
MÖTLEY CRÜE
The Universal Masters Collection

Guns N' Roses, "One in a Million" (1988)

Few bands attracted negative press as often as Guns N' Roses did in their early days. But even their staunchest defenders can't deny that the band brought this one on themselves. A retelling of Axl Rose's impressions upon his arrival in Los Angeles from his native Indiana, "One in a Million" takes shots at immigrants, African Americans and homosexuals -- the last two of which he used slurs to describe. Guns N' Roses fully expected the controversy and put a preemptive apology on the cover of *Lies*.

One In A Million
GN'R
LIES
Guns N' Roses Picture Exclusive
EXCLUSIVE
THE SEX, THE DRUGS, THE VIOLENCE
THE SHOCKING TRUTH
Elephant gives birth to midget
YOU'RE CRAZY
One In A MILLION
"SEX, SEX, SEX"
PATIENCE
MAN SUES EX-WIFE, "She took my sperm without permission"
EXCLUSIVE
LIES ★ LIES ★ LIES

Steely Dan, "Cousin Dupree" (2000)

Two Against Nature was Steely Dan's first studio record in nearly 20 years, and their first single showed that they hadn't lost their twisted edge. "Cousin Dupree" portrays a loser who had been reduced to crashing on his aunt's couch and lusting after her daughter, who had grown up considerably since he last saw her. He even goes so far as to make a move on her but, thankfully, she puts him in his place.

Cousin Dupree
STEELY DAN
two against nature