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Social commentary is the Peas' 'Business'

By Elysa Gardner, USA TODAY

NEW YORK — The Black Eyed Peas have racked up a lot of frequent-flier miles through the years.



Something to say: Apl.d.ap, left, Fergie, Taboo, rear, and will.i.am don't shy away from politics in their music.

By Robert Deutsch, USA TODAY

But for rappers Will "will.i.am" Adams, Jaime "Taboo" Gomez and Allan "apl.de.ap" Pineda and singer Stacy "Fergie" Ferguson, whose new CD *Monkey Business* arrived Tuesday, the more glamorous aspects of world travel have not been the most creatively inspiring. (**Related story:** ['Blessed' Black Eyed Peas](#))

"You go to South Africa and get off the plane, and you see blocks and blocks of shanty homes, miles and miles of houses made out of cardboard boxes," Gomez says. "Then about another mile down, you see this pristine golf course with only two people on it. That kind of stuff makes you think, and it influences your writing."

The single that put the group on the map, for instance, was written in response to Sept. 11, 2001.

Although *Where Is the Love?*, the band's topical plea for love, peace and understanding — featuring the controversial lyric, "We still got terrorists livin' here in the USA/The big CIA/The Bloods and the Crips and the KKK" — did not begin rocketing up radio airplay charts until 2003, the song was conceived much earlier.

"We were scheduled to leave on a tour boat Sept. 12," Adams says. "We came home in November and wrote *Where Is the Love?* We were all just asking questions: Why would somebody do that? What did we do? It felt like that's what all America was thinking."

Adams was surprised that the CIA reference didn't generate more heat two years back with all the tension surrounding the initial invasion of Iraq and various artists' reactions to the conflict. "You heard stories about people being banned from radio. But people played our song (unedited)."

The Peas' frontman is intrigued, in contrast, that the band's new single, *Don't Phunk with My Heart*, though a top 10 hit on top 40 radio, is eliciting a more cautious response from certain stations.

About half those playing the tune, according to the band's publicist, are subbing the word "mess" for the

title's vaguely naughty-sounding verb. "I'm like, whoa — that's crazy," Adams laughs.

Sean Ross of Edison Media Research says, "There's a long tradition of R&B songs that use 'funk' as a double entendre," among them the Brothers Johnson's *Get the Funk out Ma Face*. "The Brothers Johnson song wasn't a problem for radio in 1976, so it says a lot about the new nervousness that this is even an issue now."

Not that the Peas have forsaken social commentary for bawdy fun. Will describes *Union*, a new track that samples Sting's *Englishman in New York*, as "in the same spirit" as *Love*: "It's about how if we all didn't wait for some big war or terrorist act or natural disaster, we wouldn't feel alienated when we went somewhere different."

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