



Hip Hop's First Lady

Just another day
of Queen Latifah

Latifah is a nickname Dana got from her cousin. It means delicate and gentle in Arabic. Later Latifah added Queen and a new stage name entered the rap scene.

Queen Latifah is one of the most prominent women rappers. Like the best MCs, she has a uniquely defined style, which manages to be strong and soulful (= emotional). Her lyrics always fit the music perfectly so she pronounces everything clearly and directly. Unlike most other rappers, she combines singing with rap.

Breakthrough at 18

Queen Latifah, whose real name is Dana Elaine Owens, started out as a beatboxer for a girls' rap group at high school. When a local DJ made a demo recording of her rap and passed it on to the MTV rap program, a record deal (=a contract to make a record) followed soon after. She was only 18 years old. In 1995 Queen Latifah won a Grammy award for her single "UNITY", in which she demanded respect for women in society. She criticized

the offensive language to describe women in everyday life and rap lyrics.

Film screen

Queen Latifah has also succeeded in the world of film. She has appeared in the movie of the foremost African-American director, Spike Lee, *Jungle Fever* and a commercial hit, the *Bone Collector*, playing alongside Angelina Jolie. So far her biggest achievement has been an Oscar nomination for best supporting actress in the musical *Chicago*.

The song

The song "Just Another Day" is a good introduction to her music. In this piece she gives a realistic and unusually relaxed portrayal of her neighborhood.

*We gonna take this one over to 275 Paulstand
384 Steuyversant, we gon take it over to
155 Morgan
144 Harrison*

[Chorus:]

*Just Another Day, living in the hood
Just another day around the way
Feelin good today, feelin lovely-yay
Just another day, living in the hood*

*Just another day around the way
Feelin good today
I hear the (gunshot), but I'm here to stay*

*Well it's a beautiful day in the neighborhood
A beautiful day in the neighbor-hood
Can't go wrong, I feel strong and the flavor's good
I'm wit **whateva** comes my way, hip-hop hooray
Latifah's on vacation, Im just plain on day to day
I **strap out**, step out in every direction
Glock, techs, jimmy hats, in case I need
protection
So I land cruise, play I wanna be's
A kid in the increase gettin jack right in front
of me
So I pull the tech close, my finger's **on the trigger**
Don't **wanna get wet**, so they step
Cause mine's slightly bigger
But better yet, I'ma threat, so ya better walk
Or **get sketched out in chalk**,
cause I don't wanna talk
I stay **true blue**, I'm hopin it's you too
I got the fever for the **flava** of a **woo woo**
So it's back to the **block** time to play
It's just another day around the way, hey*

*Time to **chill**, hit the hill, uptown let's keep it sights
Shoot some pool, act a fool, cause it's own
tonight*



Downtown Brooklyn

*I'm doin the knowledge, it's not easy, easy
Watchin a cop cuff a kid for sellin a clip to a D.T.
But it's home, so I flex,
get pressure off my chest
Slip in a tape, now which hood should I hit next
Stomachache, had a steak, and take for a bean pie
Get a final call for the brother in a bow-tie
I'm from little kids, dream, and fiend for fun
Lots of laughter moms, no pops playin wit her son*

*I pass by a girl's wake, they say she died at seven
Hit by a stray, but I pray there's a hood in heaven
Fake brothers' claim
there's no shame in their game
You know my name,
show me a real nigga wit a brain
Too it's back to the block time to play
It's just another day around the way, hey
Ryan Scott (Australia)*

CULTURE POINT

The N-word in Rap

This line "nigga with real brain" is not an attack on all African American people. The use of the 'n' word is complicated and depends on who is saying it. In the context of Latifah's lyrics, she is criticizing the behaviour of certain people in her community who live up to a stereotype. As a whole, the song is an affirmation of the vibrancy and many dimensions of life in her neighborhood.



TASK

Read the lyrics of this song and try to answer the questions below.

- 1 What do you think "155 Morgan" refers to?
- 2 What word can describe the neighborhood the singer lives in?
- 3 What does the word "flavor" mean?
A) food B) personal style C) weather
- 4 What do you think Glock is a brand of? Clue: She uses it for protection.
- 5 What does she see in the second stanza?

Solution: 1 street in New York City, Brooklyn; 2 dangerous; she hears a gunshot; 3B; 4 a type of a gun; 5 policeman arrests a child, mothers without fathers, funeral ceremony of a young girl

GLOSSARY*

hood – a short for neighborhood, a common term in hip hop lyrics
wit – an alternative pronunciation of with, associated with the New York accent
whateva – whatever
to strap out – to fasten a gun
glock – a type of semi-automatic pistol
tech's – another type of semi-automatic pistol
jimmy hat – a condom
land cruise – "to cruise" is to move over or around the land; a "land cruiser" is a large SUV (a suburban utility vehicle)
to play wanna be's – to act as if you are sb famous
kid in the increase – a young man acting too tough

gettin jack – being smart
on the trigger – the "trigger" is the mechanism (esp. on a gun) which, when pulled, causes the gun to fire; to "have one's finger on the trigger" implies that somebody is ready to shoot
wanna get wet – to bleed
get sketched out in chalk – when people are murdered/shot the police draw the outline of the body on the pavement
true blue – faithful
flava – flavor
woo woo – an alcoholic cocktail
to chill – to relax
to shoot some pool – pool is the general name for games played on a billiards table; "to shoot some pool" is to play some billiards games

to cuff – "to cuff someone" is to put them in handcuffs (pouta)
clip – a cigarette of tobacco and marijuana
D.T. – a police officer
flex – to stretch one's muscles
to slip in – to put something easily into something else, e.g. to slip a cassette tape in a cassette player
brother – a term of affection between African-Americans for an African-American man.
bow-tie – a piece of men's formal clothing worn around the neck (motýlek)
bean pie – a sweet pie made of beans, sugar, butter, milk, and spices; bean pies are commonly associated with African American Muslim cuisine
fiend – a person or thing that causes annoyance

pops (slang) – dad
wake – a ceremony held at the body of a dead person before burial
hit by a stray – to be injured or killed by a bullet which has not hit its original target
fake brothers – a "fake brother" is an African-American who behaves in a way which is harmful to their community
game – behavior

BRE x AME

TV programme (BrE) x **TV program** (AmE)
neighbourhood (BrE) x **neighborhood** (AmE)
behaviour (BrE) x **behavior** (AmE)
favour (BrE) x **favor** (AmE)