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Kravitz on Black and White America

Tackles race with new album

(AP) — Lenny Kravitz, who was born to a black mother and white father, didn't recognize skin color in his own home as a child.

"I grew up in a house full of every color," he recalls.

Things changed when he went to elementary school.

"I didn't know anything about problems until I went to first grade and it was brought to my attention," the rock singer and guitarist said. "I knew my father looked different than my mother, but I didn't know that that meant anything. ... I had no idea that it was an issue."

On his latest album, "Black and White America," 47-year-old Kravitz tackles that "issue" as well as what his parents experienced as an interracial couple in 1960s New York. (Kravitz's mother starred as Helen Willis in the hit television show "The Jeffersons" in the 1970s and '80s.)

The Grammy winner's ninth album, which debuted at No. 17 on the Billboard 200 albums chart last month, was recorded over a two-year period in the Bahamas and Paris.

The Associated Press: What

stories do you remember hearing from your parents?

Kravitz: They would walk down the street (and) people would spit on them. My father would take my mother to a hotel on holiday and they would say, "No prostitutes

in the Bahamas?"

Kravitz: I live in an old airstream trailer on the beach and I live very simply there. I wanted to get away. I wanted to be away from everybody and everything — technology, I just wanted to be

in the nature. I wanted to hear what was inside of me, and I needed time to reflect and feel my spirit and it was a great time for me as a human being as well as an artist.

AP: Drake is featured on this album. How did that collaboration come about?

Kravitz: When I was doing "Sunflower" and it got to the middle section, I knew that it wasn't going to be a guitar solo or something, so I just listened and I heard (Drake's) voice. And same thing with Jay-Z on "Boongie Drop" — it's like I don't call somebody because I think, "Oh that would be the move to make." It's because the music is telling me and I hear the tones.

AP: "Boongie Drop" sounds like a monster hit.

Kravitz: Thank you. Say it louder. Tell everybody.

AP: So that song is about full-figured women, right?

Kravitz: You have all these full-figured, Bahamian women coming into the club dancing very provocatively and they're dressed very, very sexy, and their shorts are super short, their tops are very revealing and they're wearing all these bright colors. And what I took from that, what I really liked was the fact that they're not bothered by the stereotype of what society, what media says is beautiful. They know they're beautiful and they are beautiful, and they are not worried about fitting into that image, and I thought that was really beautiful to see because people here are killing themselves to look a certain way and aren't proud of how they were created.

AP: How do you think you've grown since your debut was released in 1989?

Kravitz: I've learned to calm down a little bit. I just think that happens the longer you do it, the more mature you get. Maybe I'm starting to mature a little bit. A little bit.



allowed at the hotel" — very disgusting things. My father lost his side of the family 'til I was born. It took them a minute to get it together. But in essence ... none of that bothered them. They were in love and they wanted to be together and that was that.

AP: Talk about the title track on this album.

Lenny: It's a very special song to me and it's obviously got a lot to do with who I am. It's my story. It's everything I knew growing up. It's my parents' story — being an interracial couple growing up in the time of the civil rights movement. And it's the story of today — what we're going through, dealing with race and the fact that we have an African-American president.

AP: How do you think Barack Obama is doing as our president?

Kravitz: It's a tough gig. I think he's done a lot of great things and I think that some things are challenging and difficult for him. But I don't know how it works. I know how I think it works, but we don't know how it really works. And so, you know, when I'm talking about him and I'm identifying with all this, it has a lot to do with sort of the social aspect of the whole thing, not just political.

AP: What was it like recording

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