

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	<b>Speaker:</b> <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:13	Jesse Thorn	Host	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> From <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and NPR, it's <i>Bullseye</i> .
00:00:17	Music	Transition	"Huddle Formation" from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:24	Jesse	Host	Chuck Klosterman writes about culture. Specifically, popular culture—rock bands and basketball teams and pornography and <i>Saved By the Bell</i> . He was a writer who wrote volumes of hot takes about popular culture before having hot takes about popular culture was just what was required to work as a writer. His 2003 essay collection, <i>Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs</i> , made so many top ten lists when it came out. And he's since positioned himself as a writer who doesn't just think about pop culture but has a knack for unearthing common threads in disparate things. Like, the Chicks, the former Dixie Chicks, and Van Halen, for example.
<p>And when he finds those threads, you—the reader—get a deeper understanding of all of his subjects. His newest book is called <i>The Nineties</i>. I know what you're probably thinking. When I say that there's a book called <i>The Nineties</i> and it's written by a writer like Chuck Klosterman, maybe it's a celebration of lesser-known Sting records or a—I don't know, 10,000 words on the problematic nature of <i>Home Improvement</i> and how it paved the way for nu metal or something like that. That is not what <i>The Nineties</i> is.</p> <p>In the book, Klosterman chronicles the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And he does so not as a culture critic, but as a historian or maybe a philosopher. It's not a book about nostalgia. It's a book about what happened in its contemporary context and the consequences, what mattered and what didn't. Look, you'll hear more about it soon enough. Let's get into it! My conversation with Chuck Klosterman.</p>			
00:02:11	Music	Transition	Buzzy synth with a steady beat.
00:02:16	Jesse	Host	Chuck, welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i> ! I'm happy to have you back on the show.
00:02:18	Chuck Klosterman	Guest	It's always great to be here, Jesse.
00:02:21	Jesse	Host	I couldn't quite tell if that was sarcastic. It sounded sort of in between.
00:02:24	Chuck	Guest	<i>[Chuckles.]</i> Well! That's kind of the world I live in.
00:02:30	Jesse	Host	<i>[They laugh.]</i> Well, let's start with this, Chuck. You are, of course, a celebrated scribe of generation X culture. Uh.
00:02:36	Chuck	Guest	Well, see, that sounds sarcastic to me.
00:02:38	Jesse	Host	Is that why—?
<i>[They laugh.]</i>			

00:02:48 Chuck Guest

I'm a millennial! I'm incapable of sarcasm. Is that why you decided to write a book about the 1990s, as a sellout move? *[Cackles.]* You know, it is interesting, because I wrote this book—you know, basically over the course of 2020, mostly, and some 2021. And you know, I was kind of—my mind was in the '90s all the time. So, like I was sort of reconnecting with these things that I used to think and feel during that period. So, now when I'm promoting this book, I feel like an idiot all the time, because I just hadn't thought about the—you know, the idea of selling out so omnipresently in a lot of years. So, it does seem strange doing this now. Uh, you asked me what was my reasoning for doing the book? Or—?

*[Jesse confirms.]*

Yeah? Well, *[sighs]*—you know, it's an obvious question to ask someone, especially when they're promoting the book. Like, "Why did you write it?" It's odd, because if I was totally being honest, I would say I don't know. I mean, I'm just compelled to do things. All of my books are that way. I never have like this clear idea of why I should be doing this. I just find myself doing it and a book ends up at the end. But that's a weird answer to give in a radio interview. So, the answer I give when I'm on a podcast or being—you know, talking to, you know, a journalist—it's kind of threefold.

One is that I find the '90s interesting because not only were they the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but in many ways I think it might be the last decade there's going to be under the old definition of what a decade is—the idea of like sort of framing a period of time in this ten-year increment and saying that there's certain textures and sort of a connecting fluid that sort of is in imbued during the whole time period. I think that probably is something that's not going to really happen in the way the world has shifted. Another part of it was the fact that I suspect that there's going to be a lot of writing about the '90s in the coming years. And most of it will be somewhat revisionist or very personal.

I sort of wanted to create the kind of foundation that those stories and books can disagree with, in a way—that my—that I kind of did this almost like a pitcher throwing fastballs right down the middle. It's a very kind of straightforward examination of the period. And I mean, and the third reason is I *[sighs]*—I just—I kind of think back on my other books and, you know, I wrote that book *Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, which was a lot about the '90s, but it was just a totally personal examination of it. It was sort of like my experience in the '90s. And I wanted to do it in a way that would be more objective and more detached and maybe something that I wouldn't feel weird about in the future, which I—which is how I feel about a lot of my other books. You know?

00:05:49 Jesse Host

*[Laughs.]* So, one of the choices that you made in writing this book was essentially to try and represent, in a relatively universal way but a very clear perspective, what it was like to be in the '90s. That is to say, this is not a retrospective book that is about analyzing the '90s in a new and fresh context. You know, you do some of that because it is now, now. But it really is trying to represent some of what it was like to be in that. Why did you choose to do it that way?

00:06:27	Chuck	Guest	<p>Well, because I think it is inaccurate to look at a period of time through the lens of modernity. I think that that's going to misshape it and change it and actually give a person who didn't have that experience an incorrect view of what the experience was like. I think most history is done this way, now—especially contemporary history, where a period is looked at and then whatever kind of the popular ideas or philosophies of the time are then sort of injected into that period. And it's—you know, that's a valid way to do something. I'm not even so much disagreeing with that sort of technique, except for the fact that what I wanted to do was sort of not look at this period and say, "Well, this is a new way to interpret it."</p> <p>I wanted to be like, "Well, this is how it seemed at the time." So, if you look back on this, with your reinterpretation, and wonder, "Well, why did they think this? Or why did people act like this?" I was trying to get back toward like the texture of the period itself. And you know, like if—so, let's say I had interviewed all of these '90s figures, now. Like, let's say I had talked to all of those people who were, you know, central figures in the '90s and talked to—had them talk now about what the period was like. What would inevitably happen is they would view that period the way they view it now. That's just—this is a common sort of human tendency to think of our—you know—former self as just... a version of our current self but, you know, we're thinner and maybe we had different hair or whatever. But somehow, the way we think has always been the way we think and that's not how it is.</p> <p>So, what I tried to do was instead go back and see what people were writing and saying at the time and use that as a way to sort of describe the experience of moving through that decade, as opposed to looking back and saying, "Well, we all thought this. Oh, but we were all wrong, of course." That's like—there's some of that in the book, but it's easier to think about things the way we think about them now than it is to try to jump back into the minds of people who are just, you know, no longer there.</p>
00:08:43	Jesse	Host	So much more to get into with Chuck Klosterman after the break. Stay with us. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and NPR.
00:08:51	Music	Transition	Chiming synth with a steady beat.
00:08:55	Jesse	Host	<p>Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i>. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Chuck Klosterman. He's the award-winning author of books like <i>Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs</i>, <i>I Wear the Black Hat</i>, and most recently, <i>The Nineties</i>. Let's get back into our conversation.</p> <p>What is something that you realized had changed in your mind in the last—you know, 25 years or whatever? What's something that, when you look back at the contemporary stuff, you were surprised to recognize something that you had felt at the time but had forgotten?</p>
00:09:31	Chuck	Guest	That's a difficult question! The—kind of the macro answer would be that we now sort of look at the '90s as sort of a low-stakes period in recent history, where—you know, the '80s had sort of the Cold War going on, the threat of nuclear annihilation, a long stretch of pretty kind of hard-right reactionary politics. We sort of look at the—you know, the post-911 world as, you know, kind of a country kind of in chaos trying to figure out if like will we still have irony? Will we still

have all of these ideas? Then we move into the periods that we've just had, which seem as if almost every moment is on the—you know—precipice of just a cataclysm or whatever.

So, we look back in the '90s and we're like, "Well, that was—this was a different kind of period where the stakes were a little lower. It was a little more comfortable." Now, of course, living through that, you didn't consciously say that or think that. Like, nobody was walking around in 1996 going like, "Well, at least what's happening in the world right now's not that important." You know, at least—you know? Like, nobody said that or thought that. And yet, when we look at, say, the 1996 presidential election, voter turnout was below 50%. It is probably the last election that will ever happen where the voting populace will not be continually told, "This is the most important election of your life." Like, that's gonna happen at every election moving forward, probably for a long time, now.

But that wasn't happening in 1996. You weren't being sort of inundated with this idea that, you know. The world of course seemed chaotic and confusing and complex, because that's how it always is. I mean, the present tense is always sort of a mystifying period for anyone. They're trying to figure out how they feel and what things mean and what's really happening. But then when you look back on it, it seems like this perfectly crafted novel where everything had to line up perfectly and interweave exactly in order to kind of move us into the world we are now. So, I'm looking back at this period and I'm reading about this period and trying to remember what I thought was happening and then comparing it to what other people seemed to be saying at the time to see if my memory was accurate.

And when you sort of reexamine a section of time that now is sort of remembered as being like—well, not so volatile, not so polarized. You know. We were—you know, we'd have arguments over the spotted owl in Alaska or like should Metallica be on Lollapalooza or something. These things that seem sort of not so significant now but were in the news then. And you think to yourself, well, it's interesting. We were still treating all those things like they were major. Like, we always treat whatever's happening as the end of history or the beginning of a new future or whatever. So, you go back, and you go like, well, we've now come to the conclusion that this wasn't the case. So, how did we convince ourself it was?

00:12:38    Jesse        Host

I mean, the '90s had a famously mixed relationship to the idea of apathy. [Chuckles.] Like, you're describing how everything felt like it had high stakes, but you know, it was also a time when people gave themselves permission to not care about things or to care about not caring about things.

00:13:03    Chuck        Guest

That's absolutely true. At the time, though, that was considered sort of a—you know, a problematic idea in some ways. It was just an acceptable problematic idea. Like, you know, I use *Reality Bites* as an example in this book, at one point. Because it's just like such a perfect encapsulation of sort of a mindset that could've only happened in 1994. But you know, there's a scene in that film where Ethan Hawke's character—kind of like the, you know, like the gen X slacker from central casting, but he's like—he's perfect in this role;

he's like—he is the epitome of what people sort of projected a hipster was like at this time.

And he says something along the lines of, you know, “I am under no obligation to make the world a better place.” And it’s kind of like ha-ha, he’s kind of a jerk for saying that but it’s also kind of charming. I think previous generations and future generations would hear that and see it as just profoundly troubling, like almost the explanation for what has happened in the world, now, was this kind of thinking where, at the time, while it was still used as a way to show a certain kind of amplified detachment from society, a degree of selfishness, all these things; it wasn’t an unacceptable thing to express. It was sort of seen as a time when you could think about your own life, your own kind of interiority. And it wasn’t—it wasn’t this thing where you were under this obligation to see what role in society you played and how you could sort of achieve anything. It wasn’t like that.

It was, really, *[sighs]*—at least in retrospect, a very individualistic time where being someone who sort of existed with this kind of autonomy was acceptable and had a degree of integrity, actually, built into it. Because it meant that you weren’t, you know, falsifying or sacrificing or compromising any of your authenticity to go along with whatever a larger social trend was. You could be this thing that was outside of it.

00:15:16    Jesse            Host

Yeah, I was like 11 or 12 or whatever when Nirvana became a national phenomenon, and I was aware of it because at the time, if you were in middle school, every year on your birthday, seven of your peers gave you a Nirvana CD. A couple gave you *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* by The Red Hot Chili Peppers, but mostly they just gave you Nirvana CDs. Like, I was familiar with it and all for it. But by the time I was making stuff—let’s say in college—that attitude maybe was fading a little bit, but it was still around—that like, “What is it to sell out?”

And the thing that I remember that upset me the most about it, at the time—when, you know, in 2000 or 2002—was feeling like what an extraordinary, unbelievable privilege it is to either have someone else be responsible for getting your art to people or to be in such an advantageous position that you can make art, have it not get to people, and still be okay. *[Chuckles.]* Like, I remember being like, “Yes! I’m putting up fliers for my sketch comedy group! I need people to come to the show if we want to do another show.”

00:16:50    Chuck            Guest

Well, no, that is—that is sort of the inherent sort of paradox of this. I mean, I—you know? You were in comedy, right? So, if you succeed at comedy, it means that people are going to laugh and enjoy it. And if people laugh and enjoy your comedy, they’re going to tell people and more and more people are going to attend these shows. And the more and more people who attend these shows, the more and more money you’re going to make. So, in a weird way, for you to be successful at being funny, you also had to get rich.

*[Jesse agrees.]*

You know? It’s like a weird thing! That wasn’t the goal, right? You didn’t go into it to make money. But if you actually succeed at the

thing you're trying to do, it's going to have this kind of domino effect where people are gonna wanna experience it and people are gonna pay money to experience it. And suddenly, the thing that had nothing to do with your origin is going to be part of who you are. And that's then going to affect how people coming to you for the first time are gonna see you.

I mean, one thing about the '90s—and this might—could be said about a lot of decades, but I think specifically this one—is that it's really kind of bifurcated. There's sort of two '90s. There's the first half of the decade, where a lot of the ideas when we talk about almost like the caricatures of the period are really formed there. Like, that's when—you know—grunge is happening, and independent film is really happening.

00:18:09 Jesse Host  
00:18:11 Chuck Guest

Rappers who dance. Vanilla Ice.

Yeah. Exactly. You know? Well, it's the beginning of Clinton's ascension and all of these things are happening. And then you have the second part of the '90s where things kind of shifted in practical terms away from that, but they still held onto the knowledge and the ideas that were there. But now, it was almost like something you had to work around. [Chuckles.] Like it was sort of like, "Well, okay. So, we want sort of the things that people traditionally wanted from success, but we have to make sure we do it in this way that still reflect what we still kind of assume to be the values of the period.

You sort of see this with the interest in the 1970s that happens in the '90s. Okay? So, every decade usually what happens is there's a kind of a rediscovery of 20 years ago. So, like in the '70s, people were really into the '50s. You know, they would watch *Happy Days*, watch *Laverne and Shirley*, watch *Grease* and, you know, *American Graffiti*, all of that. The idea sort of being that, well, the '50s were like a better time to be alive. More wholesome. And then you move into the '80s and there's this intense interest in the '60s, although it's a little different because it's—you know, you look at *The Big Chill* or like *Family Ties* or these things or like the music of REM or whatever.

It's looking back at the '60s and being like, "Well, that was like a revolutionary time, but the revolution failed. And now, we have to deal with the fact that we kind of moved on and became people that were actually closer to our parents than we thought we were going to be. How do we reconcile this?"

00:19:44 Jesse Host  
00:19:48 Chuck Guest

Like the dominant cultural obsession is yuppies.

Well, yes. Yeah. I mean, that's sort of the emerging figure, but that yuppie is interested in the '60s. [Chuckles.] Like, he's not—he's not—

00:19:55 Jesse Host

Right. 'Cause it's the person—it's the person—he's the person who betrayed the promise of the '60s or whatever. He's the baby boomer who turned his back and decided, "Well, I could just get rich."

00:20:05 Chuck Guest

Yeah. I mean, and a lot of the art from there, like using *The Big Chill* and *Family Ties* as the obvious examples, it's like those are the '60s that failed. The people who had these ideas and then they became adults and they realized that it was, you know, implausible. So, in the '90s, there's interest in the '70s, but it's very different. It's like in the first half of the '90s, it's somewhat sincere. It's like, you

know, the Led Zeppelin boxset is super popular. And some of the fashion trends that are happening sort of reflect, you know, the look of the '70s. And the idea of kind of the—because independent film is so big, it sort of demands that the person is an auteur who's making the movie. So, that's kind of like the '70s.

But then we move into that second half where you see things like *The Brady Bunch* movie or *That '70s Show*, where the idea is that we're interested in the '70s, but we don't really care. It's funny that we were—it's funny we were like that. You know? You watch an episode of *That '70s Show*, in some ways it's like the TV version of *Dazed and Confused*. But the movie *Dazed and Confused* was trying to really reconcile with what the '70s were like and what they meant and what it meant to be a person in that time. Whereas *That '70s Show*, which was well cast and entertaining and all these things, it was in many ways kind of outside of time. The kids were sitting in basements just the way they still did in the '90s. They were still driving around in their parent's car, just like people did in the '90s, but they dressed like they were at a '70s Halloween party and they're constantly making references to *Pong* and *Star Wars* and anything that was kind of going on.

It became this idea that the '70s were just about ephemera. And that ephemera was better than the ephemera of the late '90s, so it seemed more desirable. But it was a different kind of appreciation. It was almost like, you know, a curated museum appreciation of the past.

00:22:00	Jesse	Host	Remember when people used to say Bill Clinton was the first Black president?
00:22:05	Chuck	Guest	Yes, I referenced this in the book. Toni Morrison wrote that in <i>The New Yorker</i> .
00:22:09	Jesse	Host	God bless Toni Morrison, but what a <u>weird</u> idea that I think was based on him knowing some Black people and playing saxophone? That's my memory of it. I was, uh, 14 at the time. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:22:22	Chuck	Guest	Well, I mean, the reasons she gives for why Bill Clinton was the first Black president, if expressed by someone today, it would be—you would be, as they say, canceled for the reasons she gives. Part of the argument she makes in her piece is that, you know, Bill Clinton is the first Black president and maybe the only hope a Black person has of seeing someone like them be president. Now, granted, it wasn't that long before Obama became president, but that seemed very distant. This was why when you say like, "What a crazy, insane thing it is," of course it seems that way now. Like, of course it seems that way when you look back on it with sort of the knowledge that we have in present.

But at the time, that was not seen in any way as unreasonable. Like, it wasn't controversial that Toni Morrison wrote that in *The New Yorker*. There was no sort of uprising like, "How dare she say that?" It was like, "Hm. Interesting point, Toni Morrison. Like, this is good."

00:23:28	Jesse	Host	We'll finish up in just a minute with Chuck Klosterman. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and NPR.
00:23:35	Promo	Clip	<b>Music:</b> "Money Won't Pay," by bo en (feat. Augustus). Upbeat, cheerful music.

**Rachel McElroy:** Congratulations! You've won a ticket to attend an exclusive opportunity in a relaxing environment with two lovers.  
[Laughs.]

**Griffin McElroy:** Wow! Well, this sounds like a sort of... proposition of sorts, but really it's an ad for our podcast, *Wonderful!* It's a show we do here on Maximum Fun where we talk about things that we like and things that we're into.

**Rachel:** I'm Rachel McElroy and you just heard Griffin McElroy and we are excited for you to join us as we talk about movies and music and books!

**Griffin:** Things like sneezing. Or... the idea of rain.

[Both laugh.]

**Rachel:** Can you get news or information you can use?

[Simultaneously]

**Rachel:** I don't think so!

**Griffin:** Absolutely you cannot!

**Griffin:** Because we're here to talk to you about pumpernickel bread.

**Rachel:** You can find new episodes on Wednesdays.

**Griffin:** [Extreeme announcer voice] So catch th—catch the waaaave!

00:24:20	Music	Transition
00:24:24	Jesse	Host

Thumpy rock music.  
It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with writer Chuck Klosterman. His new book, *The Nineties*, is out now. Let's get back into our conversation.

I think that if you consider the '90s as the last gasp of the monoculture, the last cultural era before the internet split everything into pieces, you also kind of have to consider the idea that the '90s were also the last time that like White people got to decided everything about the discourse. [Chuckling.] Like, the rise of—the rise of Tupac and Biggie, I think, is most significant to me at least because it's like—that part of hip-hop culture is like the first time that something elbows its way into the mainstream like without the permission of—you know, the people—the White people who said it was okay to like *Public Enemy* in 1991. [Laughs.] You know? Well—although, I mean, you could also argue that the most popular television show of the 1980s was *The Bill Cosby Show*.

00:25:26	Chuck	Guest
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[Jesse agrees.]

So, now, was that—so, but now, of course, we would retcon that and be like, “Oh, it was because he made a show about the Black experience for White people.” That's what we would say now, if we were trying to look back on that, for a variety of reasons—one of which, the way Bill Cosby is sort of seen in our culture.

00:25:49    Jesse            Host            I think—I would say, about *The Cosby Show*—I wouldn't necessarily say that. I think one of the really extraordinary achievements of *The Cosby Show*—stipulating that Bill Cosby is a credibly accused rapist who I believe to be a rapist—but one of the extraordinary achievements of *The Cosby Show* is that it really did—I mean, if you talk to Black folks who watched at the time, it felt authentically and earnedly African American and from an African American perspective.

[Chuck agrees.]

00:26:34    Chuck            Guest            But it definitely—you know, like Cosby—trafficked in a respectability politics that made it comfortable for White people.  
Well, I mean, would you say the same about *The Arsenio Hall Show*?

00:26:38    Jesse            Host            No, I think Arsenio Hall's an—I think Arsenio Hall's a really interesting example.

00:26:43    Chuck            Guest            I think that's another example of what you're talking about. What is intriguing about the Biggie, Tupac thing is you would like find an article from—I guess it's from *The Guardian*, so that might—may skew it a little bit, because it might be the—you know, the British perception of the United States. But when Tupac was killed, they wrote a story basically saying like, "This is as meaningful as Kurt Cobain's death. But you know, people aren't ever going to accept that. People in America are never going to accept that this matters as much, because—you know—he is a Black artist and Kurt Cobain was a White artist." So, even at the time, there was this idea that like, well, this might be more important, but like people will never accept it.

But almost by forwarding the whole idea, it does suggest a bit of acceptance. It sort of suggests that people were already talking about that idea seriously. But what our memory of the event is, is that well, the media cared about the death by suicide of this figure in the kind of eroding idiom of rock and they ignored these murders of these figures in the ascending world of hip-hop. But they were noticed, and people did care, and it did matter. It—you know, Andee Rooney talked about Kurt Cobain. He didn't talk about Tupac Shakur. So, you could say like in the most mainstream examples of White culture, that was true. That we viewed one situation as meaningful and we viewed the other situation as—you know, just something that's happened to people who I don't really have any understanding of that world, at all.

00:28:32    Jesse            Host            But it wasn't completely gone. You know? So, I mean, that's—I don't know if this supports your overall argument or undermines it, but—  
Well, I mean, I think today probably we would say that—you know—Biggie and Tupac's deaths are more significant and more reflected upon in American popular culture than Kurt Cobain's. I mean, I think Nirvana still does have some relevance, certainly. I mean, like there's a lot of, ironically, rappers who are—who are into those aesthetics right now that are like popular. But yeah, like—I mean, there's not a touring [chuckles]—there's not like a touring arena show where you get to see a hologram of Kurt Cobain read poetry or whatever.

00:29:18	Chuck	Guest	Well, yeah. I mean, that's—that's not really an acceptable extension of that kind of rock culture. I mean, you would—you have—you will see that of, you know, Ronnie James Dio or Frank Zappa or these artists who are like, well. Their significance, their artistic significance, is not so inherently tied to this kind of uncompromising aesthetic that grunge artists put forward. I mean, grunge is—
00:29:44	Jesse	Host	Chuck, I think your next book is just gonna be similarities between Frank Zappa and Ronnie James Dio. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:29:50	Chuck	Guest	Well, they both have holograms! I mean, it's like—you know? It's like— <i>[laughing]</i> I mean, it's like—
00:29:51	Jesse	Host	The classic Dio-Zappa axis of cultural aesthetics.
00:29:58	Chuck	Guest	I mean, one thing about—you know, Tupac and Biggie is that—you know, their deaths are still technically unsolved. And they're still sort of up for debate. I mean, Kurt Cobain, yes, there are people who believe Courtney Love killed him, but for the most part we accept that he killed himself and we generally accept the reasons why. You know. It is just sort of—remarkable's the wrong word. Tragic also seems to be too much, but you know, when you look at grunge now, it was like that was an idiom of pop art where an insane number of its practitioners are now dead. Like, it's just— <i>[stammering]</i> there's—I don't know if there's a corollary for something that was relatively recent, where there are probably—you know—more than ten figures from that world who either committed suicide, died of an overdose, or were killed in some other way.
			I mean, it was—it was a strange combination of the idea that they had seen the way rock music had sort of behaved, for lack of a better word, in the '80s. Like, the hair metal bands and the Sunset Strip and stuff like that, that did anything to make it. "I'll kill myself to be famous. I'll do whatever it takes." And they saw that as just, you know, pathetic and they didn't want any part of that. And there was also a huge amount of heroin and opioid use in that culture. And it was a heavy drinking culture. And when you take those two factors along with kind of the over umbrella of what youth thinking was like in the '90s—some of these characteristics that we now apply to gen Xers or whatever. You are kind of creating this cocktail of, you know, potential morbidity.
00:31:55	Jesse	Host	I think it's also significant, though, that those things were—you know, at all times the national conversation, so to speak, is shaped by hegemony. Right? It's shaped by power, but in a context where there are so many fewer vectors, you know, where there aren't a thousand message boards, much less a billion social media accounts that like that conversation and that idea of what that time is, is very much defined by hegemonic power, by—in that case, you know—middle and upper-middle class Whiteness. And straightness.
00:32:37	Chuck	Guest	Well, I mean—sure, but you're talking about what defines it, then. And you're saying that it's a problem that that is what defines it. You know what? That may be true. But like <i>[sighs]</i> , the failed definition still ends up being the default definition. And you know, it works both ways. Like, I remember I saw an interview one time with one of the members from Run DMC. He made a real interesting point to me, which I just had never, ever thought of until I heard him say this. Which was that he was arguing that in some ways, a Black musician had an advantage, especially in the '70s, in the sense that

they were listening to Black radio and Black music and then also experiencing White music even if they didn't want to. 'Cause they would go out in public spaces, and they would hear it, or they'd watch—turn on the television and *American Bandstand*, it was all these White artists.

Whereas White musicians were very often only experiencing White music. And they had—you know, so the Black artist was able to take these two things and create these kind of whole new ideas. Like, I just—I always think of like there's a song called "Super Stupid" by Funkadelic. Okay? And it's very clear that Funkadelic had been listening to the band Mountain, 'cause Mountain had just come out with like "Mississippi Queen", and the riff they're using is exactly—well, not exactly, but very similar to that of Leslie West. And I don't know if Leslie West was having the same experience with Black music. You know?

So, it was a strange thing that sometimes when you see things emerge from the culture and it's kind of an awkward thing to accept—it was like sort of this thing that was bad—did have this weird upside. You know?

[They chuckle.]

00:34:26	Jesse	Host	Yeah, I mean, that's very true of—you know, it's something you hear from all kinds of artists. Right? Like, the thing that—the thing that made them different made them have fresh eyes on everything else. Right? Whether it's—you know, whether it's an immigrant or just a quiet kid who sat in the corner. You know what I mean?
00:34:50	Chuck	Guest	Yeah, I mean the things you're forced to experience, because you're in a—you lack power. This, in some ways, can apply to any person, just—you know—when they're in 10 <sup>th</sup> grade. You know?

[Jesse affirms.]

And there's thing that they have to read in 10<sup>th</sup> grade English class that they would never read on their own. And then years later, if that person becomes a writer or something, their influence came from this thing that they wouldn't have done if it wasn't kind of jammed down their throat because they had no ability to say no.

00:35:19	Jesse	Host	Well, Chuck, I always enjoy getting to talk to you. And I really enjoyed the book.
00:35:24	Chuck	Guest	[Laughs.] Well, hey. Thanks for having me on. It's always fun.
00:35:28	Jesse	Host	Chuck Klosterman, everyone. His new book, <i>The Nineties</i> , is out now. I <u>really</u> enjoyed it. Really got a lot out of it. The last time he was on the show was for his book, <i>I Wear the Black Hat</i> , which I also really loved. It's thinking about villains and villainy. It was a great book, and I had a great conversation with him about that book! So, dip into the archives if you're interested.

00:35:50	Music	Transition	Thoughtful piano.
00:35:53	Jesse	Host	That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> , created from the homes me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Here at my house, we just got a new cactus. My son had one cactus whose name was George Washington. The new cactus is named Abraham Lincoln. He's into naming the cactuses!

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio, Valerie Moffat and Richard Robey. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is called "Huddle Formation", recorded by the group The Go! Team. Thanks to The Go! Team and thanks to their label, Memphis Industries. Thanks also to Digital One, in Portland, for recording Chuck Klosterman's interview with us.

*Bullseye* is on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. You can find us in those places, follow us. We share our interviews there. I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

00:36:57    Promo                      Promo

**Speaker:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

*[Music fades out.]*