

Zach Watson

Professor Morgan

AMS 231

Oct 4, 2022

1504 words

Michael Jackson

Even though Michael Jackson was a world-famous musician, many people had a lot to say about his choices as well as his music. The late singer had numerous hits during his career spanning from a very young age to his death in 2009. Throughout the decades, people had their opinions on not only his music but his personal choices as well. Through research and reflection, it's been found that these opinions vary over time. I've found that all opinions, good and bad, change throughout time.

In my research, I read "I'm White", an article written by Greg Tate in 1987. This article talked about Michael Jackson's life in many ways. This includes statements from young Michael Jackson being a part of the Jackson 5, a band Michael and his brothers had made up, to when Michael decided to part from the band and start making music on his own. He also talked about Jackson's solo career up until the article was written. Tate made it clear in this article on how he felt about Michael Jackson, and it was not too good. Tate opens the article with remarks about the way Jackson looked. He implied that the reason Jackson bleached his skin was to get away from his blackness. One thing Tate mentioned in this article was how when Michael Jackson was a part of the Jackson 5, it resembled the black culture in music with their dance moves and its R&B style of music. When talking about Jackson at ten years of age, he wrote, "part of the tyke's appeal was being able to simulate being lost in the hot sauce way before he was supposed

to know what the hot sauce even smelt like.” But, as Jackson grew older and created his individual sound and style, Tate became much harsher.

Tate goes on to talk more about Jackson and his decision to take his own route in the music industry. The first thing Tate discussed about Michael when he decided to take the solo route, was his face and skin transformations. He compares his transformation to Berry Gordy’s, in the article Tate says, “The difference between Gordy’s crossover dream world and Jackson’s is that Gordy’s didn’t preclude the notion that black is beautiful.” Tate’s negative opinions weren’t only shown towards Michael’s change in appearance, but his music as well. He talks about the difference between the song “Thriller” by Michael Jackson and the album “Bad” also made by Michael Jackson. He talks about how “Thriller” was a song loved by almost every black person when it had first come out. Tate says, “Three years ago black people cherished Thriller’s breakthrough as if it were their own battering ram apartheid.” Tate then goes on to discuss his opinion about the song “Bad”, he made it very clear that his opinion about this song was not the best. He says, “Bad sounds like home demos Michael cut over the long weekend. There’s not one song here that any urban contemporary couldn’t have laid out in a week, let alone two years.” Aside from Tate’s dislike of the album “Bad” he had extremely negative things to say about his appearance. He writes, “Only in the twisted aspects does Bad, mostly via the “Bad” video outdo Thriller. After becoming an artificial white man, now he wants to trade on his ethnicity.” This 1987 article about Michael Jackson did not hold back any criticism. Greg Tate among many others were disappointed with Jackson’s personal choices and image (“I’m White!”).

“Michael” by Hilton Als is an article written in 2009. For context, this is a few short months after Michael Jackson’s death. In comparison to the previous article, this one gives more

of a story of Jackson's career. Als describes Jackson's first solo hit "Ben" at just 14 years old. This song was frequently played in gay clubs like Starlite. In Als' opinion Jackson's career was thriving in his twenties. He implies that Jackson is a professional at using metaphors within his songs. He writes, "Michael Jackson was most himself when he was someone other than himself." As his physical transformations began it started to overshadow his music in Als's opinion. This article touches on the gay community's connection and opinions of Jackson. Als describes how his changes may have made black gay men feel even more alienated. Als states that Jackson was trying to recreate any success he had with "Thriller". He compares Jackson to Prince, one of his main competitors. He talks about Prince's "interest in bending racial boundaries without resculpting his face." Als talks about Jackson's lack of artistry towards the end of his life and career. He said as far back as the 90s, Jackson lost meaning in his lyrics. He implies that Jackson lost his touch long ago. He says, "Michael Jackson died a long time ago, and it's taken years for anyone to notice." Overall, Als felt like Jackson was only a good artist for a very short amount of time. He felt that Jackson's choices negatively affected himself, the gay community, and the black community ("Michael").

To add to my own opinion of Michael Jackson, I watched his music video "Smooth Criminal". This song was released in 1987. I felt like some of the things talked about in both articles I read weren't really all that accurate. One of the most talked about things in each article was the fact that Michael Jackson had "lost it" after his transformation. As I watched the music video to "Smooth Criminal", a video published shortly after Jackson had begun his transformation, I felt as if Jackson never lost anything. In this music video Jackson is seen dancing just as good after his transformation, as he did before it. Jackson's great ability to dance is what makes Jackson stand out from every other music artist, even in today's industry. Also, I

feel as if Jackson still had the strong unique voice he had always had from the beginning. One thing I strongly disagree with is in the article “I’m White!” by Greg Tate published in 1987, Tate really talks about how Jackson’s “Thriller” was his only hit album he had published. Tate really talks down about Jackson’s “Bad” album and says that “the only thing Bad has going for it is that it was made by the same artist who made Thriller.” I strongly disagree with that statement for many reasons, I feel like “Bad” was a very well-known and successful album. Many of the songs from that album have received a tremendous number of views and streams. Another reason I strongly disagree with Tate’s opinion is that Jackson’s album “Bad” has been a diamond certified album and went from a 10 times platinum album to a 11 times platinum album. Also, songs from that album are still being listened to today and can be found in a lot of movies today. In the article “Michael” by Hilton Als, published in 2009, he talks a lot about Michaels’s career went downhill after he made his transformation. I also strongly disagree with this article as well. Jackson was nominated for the “Artist of The Decade” award at the Soul Train Awards in 1989, which is why people started calling him the “King of Pop.” I also disagree with Hilton’s article because Jacksons music stayed at the top of the music charts for decades and is still very popular among today’s society. In my opinion, I feel like these articles were more caught up in how Jackson looked after his transformation than his music. Jackson had a major impact on the pop music industry and will always be remembered as one of the greatest artists to ever pick up a microphone.

No doubt Michael Jackson was wildly successful, and people had good and bad opinions about him. In 1987, Greg Tate felt like Jackson was running away from his blackness. While this might be true, this opinion created a bias against Jackson’s music. Tate was unable to find any positive words to say about Jackson. In 2009, Hilton Als had similar opinions about the way that

Jackson looked. He claimed that he lost his artistry because he was not happy with himself.

However, I am able to look at Jackson's music on its own. I've found that he was able to produce great music even later in his career. I look back on Michael Jackson as one of the best of all time, and I know that many others today would agree with me. The things that Jackson chose to do personally don't make a difference in his music, the talent speaks for itself. Greg Tate and Hilton Als allowed their judgements to influence the way they felt about his music. Overall, I think the biggest difference between today and years ago is being able to see past the way someone looks and just appreciate the art they put out in the world.