

MJ: The Man in the Mirror Analyzed



Welcome to our special issue on Michael Joseph Jackson (1958-2009). Michael Jackson is one of the most widely beloved entertainers and profoundly influential artists of all-time; he leaves an indelible imprint on popular music and culture.

Five of Jackson's solo albums - "Off the Wall," "Thriller," "Bad," "Dangerous" and "HIStory," all with Epic Records - are among the top-sellers of all time and "Thriller" holds the distinction as the largest selling album worldwide in the history of the recording industry with more than 70 million units sold. Additionally, singles released from the "Thriller" album sold more than 100 million copies worldwide, another all time record.

During his extraordinary career, Michael Jackson sold an estimated 750 million records worldwide, released 13 No.1 singles and became one of a handful of artists to be inducted twice into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. *The Guinness Book of World Records* recognized Jackson as the Most Successful Entertainer of All Time and "Thriller" as the Biggest Selling Album of All Time. Jackson won 13 Grammy Awards and received the American Music Award's Artist of the Century Award. Michael Jackson started in the music business at the age of 11 with his brothers as a member of the Jackson 5. In the early 1980s, he defined the art form of music video with such ground-breaking videos as "Billie Jean," "Beat It" and the epic "Thriller." Jackson's sound, style and dance moves inspired subsequent generations of pop, soul, R&B and hip-hop artists (www.michaeljackson.com: accessed November 7, 2009).

The aim of this edition is to demonstrate that the life and work of Michael Jackson (MJ) is worthy of serious scholarly discussion, and that in addition to the work in this issue, more research need to be conducted on the particulars of his special contributions to humanity.

To begin, we have Michael Jackson's first public lecture presented in March 2001 at Oxford University (Oxford, U.K.) which I've titled "Love: The Human Family's Most Precious Legacy" whereupon he says "Human knowledge consists not only of libraries of parchment and ink - it is also comprised of the volumes of knowledge that are written on the human heart, chiseled on the human soul, and engraved on the human psyche", among other profound insights, to declare his concern for the planet and all living things.

Second, Susan Hidalgo and Robert G. Weiner of Texas Tech University (Lubbock, Texas) introduce a bibliographic guide to MJ in scholarly literature with content on the breadth of Jackson's influence. Thus, they provide scholars with a place to start exploring the world of the "King of Pop" in academic literature.

Julian Vigo of the Université de Montréal critiques Margo Jefferson's study (*On Michael Jackson*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2006) of Michael Jackson and suggests that in reading Jackson's body, it goes far beyond dance and approached the realm of somatic change which included a blurring of the lines between male and female, between black and white and between human and animal. This MJ was sexless as he interpreted the roles of both man and women; his sexuality was represented as either non-existent or hyper-active, between the media sensationalism of his not possessing sexuality whatsoever.

Firpo W. Carr informs us that MJ was tapped in an endless stream of consciousness with love as the main stream; Michael Jackson was apolitical, MJ called himself a theocratic who was an advocate of God's kingdom, Michael Jackson was also a proud Black man and if one were to visit the homes of family members one would be immediately struck with the African theme therein, thus this appreciation for African culture—from which MJ originated—was woven into the very fabric of his soul. And also important, Jackson had a personal library containing over one million volumes, and as he toured the world, he would visit old book stores and nearly deplete their stock of rare or out-of-print books.

Next, independent researcher and part-time instructor Konrad Sidney Bayer looks at the popular music conventions that MJ drew from to appeal to diverse groups to express a variety of musical tastes.

Matthew Delmont of Scripps College (Claremont, California) examines the first phase of Michael Jackson's television career by looking at the Jackson Five's television debut in 1969 at the Miss Black America pageant and their first nationally broadcast performances on Hollywood Palace and The Ed Sullivan Show.

Likewise, Richard M. Breaux of Colorado State University (Fort Collins) explores Motown Productions and Rankin/Bass Productions Incorporated collaboration to bring the *Jackson 5ive* cartoon to the American Broadcasting Company's Saturday morning line-up, and the place of the *Jackson 5ive* cartoon in the history of Black characters in animated television and film.

Darryl Scriven of Tuskegee University argues that while race in the American context functions largely as a fictive political narrative, which has psychological and sociological implications that surfaced in Michael Jackson's pathology of appearance and America's bipolar obsession with his racially ambiguous expression.

And finally, Professor Gershom Williams suggests that Michael Jackson's compassionate and loving spirit fell victim to the ever present and dangerous, subliminal forces of White racial superiority, although he had an abundance of positive role models and pro-Black examples of success and greatness.

I sincerely thank the above authors for making their contribution to a scholarly discussion of the life and work of Michael Jackson, when even in death, the full story of the "King of Pop" is not known. I also thank the Jackson family for entering themselves via the entertainment industry into a public sphere of influence. And especially, Jermaine Jackson as he worked with the African Diaspora Foundation (www.theadf.com) as a peace ambassador, wherein he visited the United Nations (New York, NY) and the Federal Republic of Nigeria with the African Diaspora Foundation in December 2003 (I serve as the first vice president of the African Diaspora Foundation).

Thank you for reading *JPAS*, we have reached the five digit mark in terms of visitors, and I am sure we will advance to greater numbers with your support.

Peace and blessings,

Itibari M. Zulu
Senior Editor