

Letters on the death of Michael Jackson

30 June 2009

On "Michael Jackson's death"

The smutty backward media circus is back in full frenzy after driving Michael Jackson to an early death. Even after his death, just to hammer the message home, the fascists over at Fox were replaying every debasing allegation and eccentricity used to stigmatize Jackson whilst trying to disguise their gloating. According to this type, justice has now been permanently served, for they never forgave Jackson after a jury dismissed all the charges. A vital component of their media campaign back in 2003 going right through to 2005 was to ratchet up and exaggerate the charges against him, such as the "whacko Jacko" label, which added backup to their campaign for railroading him to jail. For instance, if you were whacko, anything outlandish was plausible and likely possible. But that label would have a pernicious undermining and cruel effect on Jackson after a smearing media campaign on a global scale.

I thought David Walsh's article in December 2003 ("Michael Jackson's tragedy") brought out some really pertinent points and has also been tragically confirmed. You wrote:

"Eccentricity in behavior, particularly sexual behavior, is viewed by a considerable portion of the US legal-police establishment as near-proof of criminal behavior. Even if Jackson were proven guilty of such crimes as to justify his being separated from the community, a humane society would view him with sadness and even sympathy, rather than scorn and hatred.... However Michael Jackson's court case turns out, one has the feeling that a sad, perhaps even tragic fate lies in store for the performer. Everything about American society and its entertainment industry in particular, of which he is both a celebrated figure and a victim, would seem to point in that direction."

John C
Australia
28 June 2009

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Hi Dave,

Your article on Michael Jackson is very good. This was indeed the final act in a tragedy that had been unfolding for a long time. I think you made the point very well about the entirely unhealthy and profit driven attitude of the

entertainment industry.

Just on that, I saw these comments yesterday from Mark Sutherland, global editor of *Billboard Magazine*, speaking about the money that will now be made on the back of Jackson's death. It really is repulsive.

He said: "Jackson is enjoying the best record sales he's had for a decade. The estate will get royalties from every purchase or download.

"They will also be raking huge revenues from air-play on radio, and video channels and on TV tributes. He has been played on rotation on every news channel on the planet for the past few days. And the estate has inherited a body of songs that will continue to earn millions for many years to come.

"He has one of the most valuable collections of songs ever recorded. You can't go to a party without hearing a Jackson song.

"If they develop Neverland as a tourist centre that will open up a whole other world of revenue. The licensing possibilities are enormous. You can sell merchandise and you can allow the songs to be used in musicals, adverts and so on."

Rob
29 June 2009

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David,

Thanks for a very compassionate, measured and eloquent appreciation of Jackson's life and career, as well as the frenzy of grief and exploitation surrounding his death.

Fred
27 June 2009

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Hi David.

Having grown weary and irritated quite quickly with the lazy and sickeningly hypocritical coverage of Michael Jackson's death, your coverage today was warm, compassionate, and accurate. As always.

Thanks for that.

Simone
Toronto, Canada
27 June 2009

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This is an excellent commentary on the tragic death of Michael Jackson, an extraordinarily gifted artist. As stated, Jackson's music was a definite product of an optimism that existed in working class areas like Gary, Indiana where the struggles against oppression produced an increase in living standards and real hope for masses of people. These talents and energies were exploited by the music industry, which only sees dollar signs and not how this human potential can be harnessed. This is what led to Jackson's destruction. It continues in a similar way today, be it in the sports or music industry.

Helen N
27 June 2009

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Very well written. Michael does have music that was socially conscious. The *History* album speaks about his never-ending enemies. I now pray that he finally has peace.

Greed is destroying the very fabric of American life and culture.

Sheila
Chicago, Illinois
27 June 2009

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David Walsh's obituary on Michael Jackson was the most insightful tribute I've encountered so far. He rightfully accused the popular media and the record companies of making a monster out of the celebrity that surrounded Jackson.

What I particularly like about Walsh's analysis is that he so thoroughly understands how deathly "celebrity worship" in America has become. It seems as if Americans are devouring talent and ingenuity, without worrying or caring about the consequences. These talented people just end up as another consumable on the capitalists' plates.

So many people in these publicity machines die early and untimely deaths. I wonder when Americans will start looking at the deadly human cost of their insatiable need for "heroes." And what's even scarier is that so many young people want to feed the machine by becoming celebrities themselves, because (as my niece has told me, and as I thought this way as a teen), "you must be famous to be someone."

It is a sad state of affairs when a culture's idea of "success" must include fame, fortune, and a willingness to be exploited.

Robin CJ
Texas, USA 27 June 2009

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The saddest part of the tributes to and obituaries of Michael Jackson is the omission of his "The Earth Song" and its profound video from 1996. Here is a celebrity

making a prolific statement on the global powers that are destroying the earth, its nature and its peoples. I am surprised and disappointed that WSWS overlooked this piece of genius that truly supports the very message that WSWS attempts to provide the world. Like the mass media outlets, you missed the mark in this obituary, and an opportunity to promote your message by honoring his.

Gary W
27 June 2009

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I had an interesting day at work today regarding Michael Jackson. I work in a call center for a small regional company near Cleveland, Ohio. There were about 30 of us and five supervisors there today. Ninety percent of my co-workers are black and in their 20s, mostly women but a few men.

The supervisors [white] and a few of their toadies [ditto] decided around noon to have a "moonwalk contest." This they proceeded to do at the top of their lungs right in the middle of our work area—a half-hour respite from harassing us for working too slowly.

After about half an hour I instant-messaged the young black guy seated next to me: "Is it just me, or is this bad taste really insulting?" He agreed, admitting he was a huge MJ fan.

We agreed it was a little *more* than insulting. No black coworkers joined in the snarky shenanigans. The majority of us, on break, enjoyed the all-day BET coverage of spontaneous celebrations around the world of Jackson's life and music, no matter what we thought of how the media made him seem like an unacceptable freak.

An excellent analysis of Jackson's surgical transformations appears in David J. Skal's brilliant history *The Horror Show*, and is well worth a few hours. A fine materialist analysis of culture and genres written in a very fun and non-jargon style.

Jay
Ohio, USA
27 June 2009

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<http://www.wsws.org>