

Peace, Be Still - Thoughts for and About Michael



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lost a fortune. And, maintained a spirit of innocence and a soul of service. Wow!

Certainly Jackson's family drama, often publicly disclosed, led to some of his angst. How much more of the drama was fueled by the context of our nation's racism? Why did he feel compelled to get lighter, lighter, lighter? To get his nose thinner, thinner, thinner? Where did that compulsion come from? It could not have been completely internal, something he simply decided on. To what extent did the signals that all of us, black folk (I'm not going African American right now - just black folk), get take hold of his brain and drive some of his decisions?

Did Michael Jackson feel that he needed to buffer his success by looking like what he thought success ought to be - whiter, thinner nose, all that? I'm not trying to get into his head, just raise a question for a group of people who are being asked to reject themselves, even with the cries of "get over it" on slavery, with the call for race neutrality. There is no such thing as being race neutral. You are who you are. Nothing wrong with it. Just embrace it. At this moment, embrace it in the name of Michael Jackson.

Every Fourth of July I read Frederick Douglas' "The Meaning of July

Fourth for the Negro" just to remind myself of who I am and where I come from. Rarely will I engage myself in the festivities of the day, the patriotic flag-waving, the consumption of grilled meats, the gatherings. I generally read to anyone who will listen - "your freedom is not my freedom, your justice is not my justice, you may rejoice, I must mourn." I read this to others to the point of irritation. Indeed, I have friends and colleagues who will not return my calls on July 4, understanding that they are about to be read to.

I wonder if I will engage in the ritual this year - I haven't decided. It somehow seems petulant to hold to this tradition with an African American President in the White House. Part of me actually longs to put my hand over my heart (it won't happen) and sing about "the land of the free and the home of the brave". My lyric has been "the land of the thief and the home of the slave". Is it time to let it go? To embrace that which is good in our country? To shrug off the shackles of oppression in order to embrace the possibilities of a new and exciting America?

If only a shrug of the shoulders could accomplish so much. I bet that Michael Jackson would have, if he could have, shrugged off the images of success that pushed him into transforming his appearance so drastically. I bet he would have, if he could have, shrugged off all his demons so that he could simply, freely, moonwalk his way across a stage and across his life. I bet he would have chosen peace instead of the turmoil we all witnessed.

The concert tour that Jackson was about to embark on was seen by most as a way for him to earn some money and pay some bills. Might it also have been a cry for peace, for rapprochement, a harkening for a simpler time when Michael Jackson was a performer, an pop icon, not a lightning rod for controversy? I would like to think that Michael Jackson found peace on stage and that his concert tour was a step toward peace. His death suggests that he has moonwalked to peace in another way. Let me add my voice to the many asking for moments of silence and commemoration. Peace, be still, for Michael Jackson, and for all of us.

As I think about Michael Jackson, I am listening to John Legend sing "Green Light", and thinking about black men, music and movement. It seems redundant to add my thought to the many that have chimed in about the death of the icon of pop music, and at the same time, it seems so very necessary to offer the public wish that Michael Jackson has finally found peace. Without knowing the man (in the mirror) at all, my observation is that peace eluded Michael Jackson. He changed his appearance, lightened his skin, engaged in public drama, and apparently earned and



"FOR TOO LONG OUR CULTURE HAS SAID, 'IF IT FEELS GOOD, DO IT.' NOW, WE WANT TO BE A NATION THAT SERVES GOALS LARGER THAN SELF. WE'VE BEEN OFFERED A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY, AND WE MUST NOT LET THIS MOMENT PASS. MY CALL IS FOR EVERY AMERICAN TO COMMIT TO THE SERVICE OF YOUR NEIGHBORS AND YOUR NATION. BY DOING THIS, WE SUSTAIN AND EXTEND THE BEST THAT HAS EMERGED IN AMERICA."

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