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**Michael Joseph Jackson:
The BADDEST Entertainer Our Generation Ever Saw
Between The Lines**

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Our hearts have been heavy for about a week now since the news broke that pop star, Michael Jackson, died suddenly from a heart attack (of some sort). Everything, and when I say everything - I mean EVERYTHING, has been bumped from the news cycle. Not just the 24 hour news cycle, or even the 72 hour news cycle, I mean for seven days straight, it's been about the "King of Pop."

People used to joke about how large Michael Jackson was. They thought it was "hype," even some megalomania playing out. But you never know how much you love something or someone until it's gone. All week, television, cable networks, radio stations and night clubs - around the world have been paying tribute to Michael Jackson. Some people are bigger in death than they were in life as the martyr effect takes greater hold of our emotions and memories as time moves on. I don't know if that will be the case for Michael Jackson. Since the time we first laid eyes on him, Michael Jackson was the baddest entertainer we ever saw.

Maybe it's a generational effect that affects every generation - I doubt it. There are few that defined American culture, even fewer that defined world culture. Of those few, I totally missed Frank Sinatra's prime (though I'm not sure I really wanted to see it), caught Elvis while I was young but wasn't impressed. The Beatles were the big bang of rock culture so it affected me when John Lennon was killed in 1980. But Michael Jackson's music is the soundtrack of your life if you were born between 1955 and 1965. You could also include 1975 and 1985 if you really wanted to.

You know, every generation thinks their life was harder, their leaders were greater and their music was the best. If you doubt it, just put four generations in a room (like I can) and ask the question, who was (is) the greatest entertainer ever? My grandfather will tell you, Cab Calloway, my father would tell you Sammy Davis, Jr. and my son would tell you Usher (!!??). But for my generation, there was nobody better, coming or going, than Michael Jackson. Not taking anything from the others, but while they may have defined their generation's music - none of them defined their generation's culture. In terms of people of color, Michael Jackson was the Jackie Robinson of entertainment. He didn't just break the colorline, he obliterated it. He changed the music game.

From the time he was 12 years old, when I first saw him at the Forum in Los Angeles with his brothers (my mother must have spend a week's pay to send us), or saw him at Dodger Stadium during the Victory Tour or at the Sport Arena (and Madison Square Garden) during the Bad Tour, there was no one greater than Mike. I never even *thought* about buying a red leather jacket before I saw Mike's. Never quite bought into the glove, or the high water pants, but it didn't matter. In fact, the Madison Square Garden performance was the greatest single performance I ever witnessed.

It was the night after the Grammys, and after dominating the Grammys with the greatest selling album of all-time, *Thriller*, Jackson's follow-up album, *BAD*, didn't win a single grammy (even though it is the only album in history to have five (5) number one singles released from it). Of course, there was some "hateration" going on. Michael Jackson didn't say a word. He just came out the next night and gave the performance of his life. People after the concert just said, "G*dDAMN, that Michael Jackson is a bad muthaf----!!!" He spellbound the crowd, and from there, he went on to spellbound the world.

Michael Jackson's discography is huge. This week, they've played music I had forgotten about. It was like, "Dang, I remember that." We get so inundated with *Off The Wall*, *Thriller* and *Bad*, you tend to forget all the music that came before and after it. Michael Jackson, through his music, will live forever. His influence on the music industry, the video industry, the clothing industry and merchandising industry will never be forgotten. Mike was a brand before branding became popular. We got "Michael fatigue" not because we got tired of the music (we never got tired of the music), it was because we got tired of seeing him - he was so heavy in rotation.

Even when Michael Jackson changed himself, we never changed on him. Even when he put himself in "situations," we rooted for him. We might not have left our kids with him or liked the eccentric behavior very much, but we never stopped loving him or his music. And wherever he showed up, we stopped and watched. Why? Because Michael Jackson was the baddest thing we ever saw. Excitement personified. Our generation lost a part of itself last week. The person who sang the soundtrack of our generation left us to enjoy our memories in his memory. He was so bad, he asked you the question, because he knew that you knew the answer. *Who's BAD?*

We will miss him terribly, but we will treasure him always.

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