

They Don't Really Care About Us

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How the Bigger Picture is Relevant

On April 16, 1996, Michael Jackson released “They Don’t Care About Us”, a song that was a cry of protest but would soon become one of his most controversial records to date. It is true that the song speaks to the treatment of Micheal Jackson by law enforcement during the child abuse and sexual misconduct allegations he faced in 1993. Despite all of his fame and success, during this time he was subjected to the system that imprisons and oppresses immense numbers of minorities, specifically black people, and faced racism from police and the Santa Barbra district attorney, Thomas Sneddon, who was handling the case. Though it was written from his place of anger from going through such a tumultuous experience, “They Don’t Care About Us” talks whole about how the world and its many systemic injustices for those of color.

Relationship Between Sound, Color, and Text

Jackson’s song features two different music videos, the first being shot in a prison in Queens, New York, and the second in the slums of Rio De Janeiro, Brazil. Though both of these videos were shot by the same director and maintain strong imagery throughout they are very different. In the first music video shot in prison, it opens up with a PSA that this message is about all injustices faced in society because some of the lyrics were perceived as anti-semitic in nature. The opening shot is of a group of little black girls that can be heard chanting, “All I want to say is that they don’t really care about us. We know the truth. Enough is enough of this garbage.” These chants are followed by the violent images and videos of Rodney King getting brutalized by the police in 1991 and violent protests and riots that followed. No time was wasted in establishing the purpose of these lyrics. They, being the system, law enforcement, and generally, the government as a whole do not care about how the injustices, institutionalized and systemic racism they continue to perpetuate affect the citizens they were entrusted to care for.

Michael Jackson and all the other inmates are all dressed in blue for the entirety of the video. Biblically speaking blue represents the healing power of God. Those imprisoned and sometimes wrongfully imprisoned due to the color of their skin need healing in their lives especially when every right you once had has been taken away. At the end of the prison video, Jackson escapes to Brazil. Jackson is surrounded by the Olodum which is an internationally known Brazilian drum band. Jackson is seen dancing through the streets of Bahia while fans scream his name in the surrounding buildings. This video is more optimistic rather than realistic. It shows the hope that people have to someday have a better life. The unity of people who are all facing injustice that the hands of a governing oppressor but can relish in the fact that they aren't alone and with united action may one day see a better future.

Structure of The Media and Its Theme

The structure of this media is around institutionalized racism. Inherently institutionalized racism is systemic. The system that was created years ago did not want nor account for African American people or any people of color for that matter. As a result of this, all institutions in the U.S.A. and many other countries are built to oppress minority communities. In the song Jackson says, "I'm tired of being the victim of hate, you're raping me of my pride for God's sake." This is literal and figurative as during slavery black men were raped to humiliate and dehumanize them to take away any sort of dignity they may have had. Now instead of being sexually assaulted, they are physically assaulted and thrown in jail. Later on, Jackson sings, "Black man, blackmail, throw the brother in jail. Unfortunately, this is a common occurrence even in today's society. Black men are regarded as criminals and thugs and often have been wrongly accused and even framed for crimes they did not commit. Michael later sang, "tell me what has become of my rights, am I invisible because you ignore me?... You know I really do hate to say it, the

government doesn't want to see.” Jackson is speaking on something bigger than his own issues. Consistently in the U.S. rights that white citizens have do not always necessarily apply for those of color and the government refuses to acknowledge the problem that they have continued to let build for decades now. It an institutional problem, from the laws passed to the court system to those enforcing the law, every facet has to be changed. This is how institutionalized racism was structured around the song to build the theme.

Its Impact on Purpose

Ultimately, the purpose of these videos was to bring awareness to the immense problems that people of color face everywhere and to highlight the injustices and unjustness of the government. The problem is bigger than just having prejudice, it is unconscious bias and unjust laws and redlining and slavery and domestic hate groups, it is a myriad of problems that have created the society we live in today. “All we want to say is that they don’t really care about us.” and maybe if we continue to tell our truths and display the acts of injustices faced then someone will listen and take action.

Conclusion

They Don’t Care About Us was a cry for help. We cannot do this alone, people need to see that minorities face unimaginable circumstances of violence and hate. Michael Jackson was able to address this centuries-old problem of institutionalized racism without polarizing the people. The issues he brought to light are still relevant today and will continue to be until we as a society can destroy the institutions and ideals they were formed upon.

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