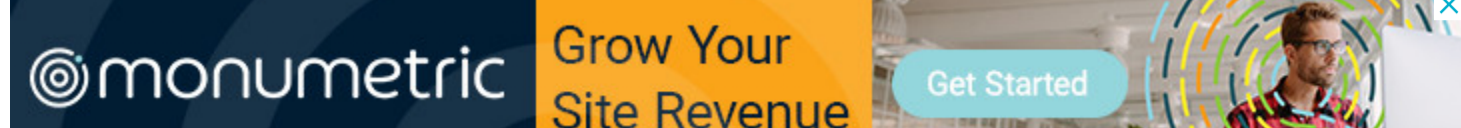


New York Times Documentary 'Malfunction' Shows How Janet Jackson Was Unfairly Left To Fend For Herself

Posted by Murjani Rawls | Nov 24, 2021 | HULU, Reviews, Streaming Reviews, Streaming TV | 0

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Here is the list of artists chosen to play the Super Bowl halftime show after 2004; Paul McCartney, The Rolling Stones, Prince and the Florida A&M marching band, Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers, Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band, and The Who. It wasn't until 2012 until a female solo artist (Madonna) was a headliner. A breast exposed 9/16ths of a second was long enough for an excessive fallout. The 'wardrobe malfunction' controversy had such profound ripple effect; organizers chose safe, legacy rock artists for years to follow. No, it didn't end Jackson's career. She has sold over 100 million records, recently headlined festivals such as Glastonbury, and was inducted into the Rock-and-roll Hall of Fame. However, the incident evinced an insidious double standard regarding the female body and who gets to cry foul and indecency.

Malfunction not only focuses on the day itself, but frames Jackson's career and the climate behind the almost puritan view of media that surrounded the Super Bowl show. In that essence, it does a good job at setting the stage for a battle that a lot of artistic media had been battling dating back to the 1985 Tipper Gore-led Parents Music Resource Center days. As Jackson's career progressed, she took the reins of her path, beginning with 1986's *Control*. But as discussed by journalists and news writers, she had a battle at every turn, speaking on subjects like female empowerment. Even at the beginning of her acting days on *Good Times*, Jackson was questioned about her weight. As journalist Jenna Wortham of the New York Times noted, it was a time when parents were extremely cautious about what music was conveying. Figures like shock-jock Howard Stern were also under extreme scrutiny for his style of radio broadcasts. There was a massive culture war that America was going through that continued into the early 2000s.

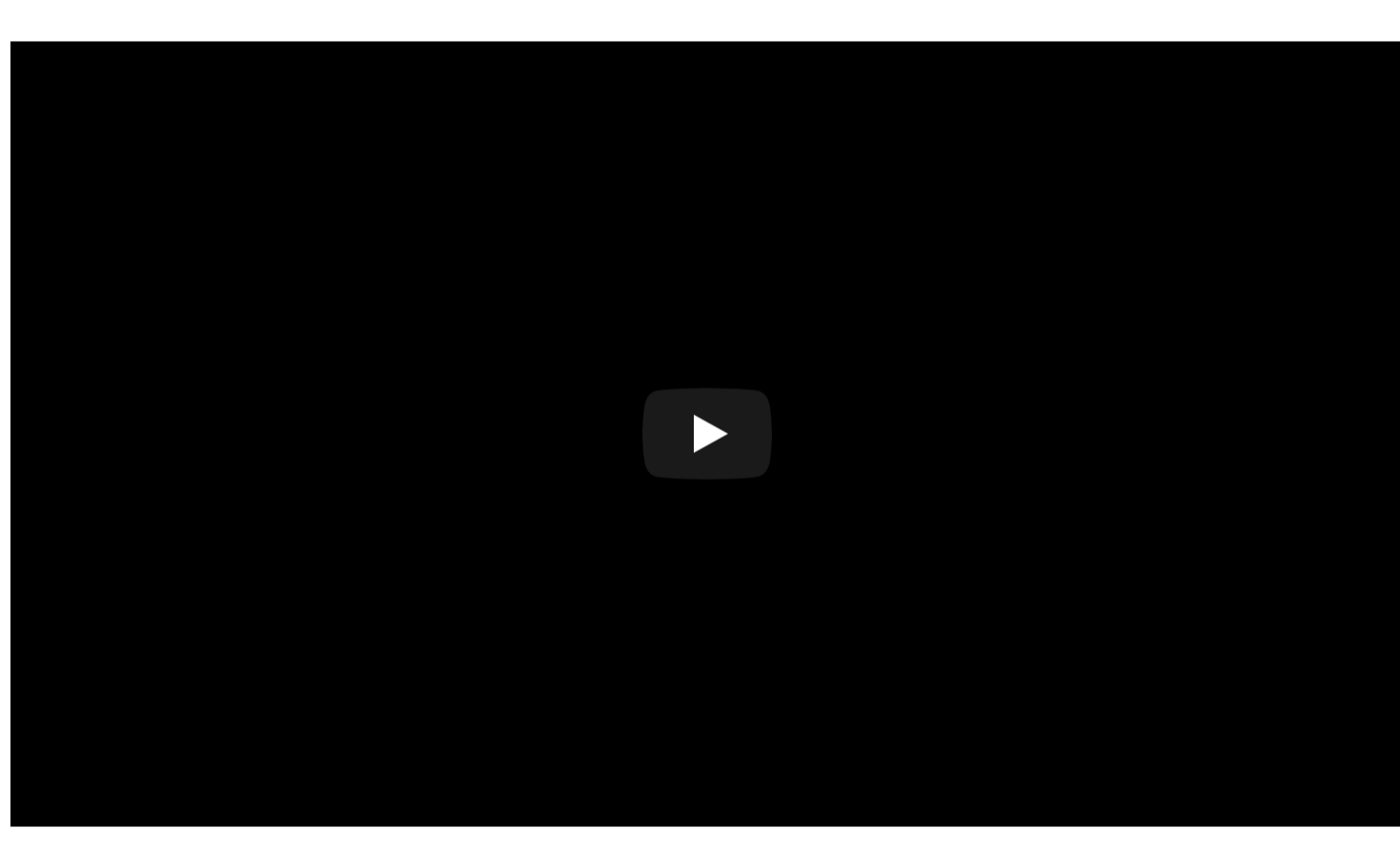
Starting with 1993's *Janet* and 1997's *The Velvet Rope*, Jackson explored her sexuality more, making a lot of the conservative public uneasy. Footage from talk shows such as Oprah and The View where Jackson is questioned about being comfortable in her skin at nauseum – almost like scolding from a teacher. Looking in modern contexts where artists such as Cardi B, Meg the Stallion, and Ariana Grande can celebrate their more intimate feelings, it's almost unfathomable to see where we were.

MTV TRL was hitting its apex as a bastion of pop culture, so it made sense for Viacom and the NFL to partner up. (Even if the NFL was uneasy about it). One of the most ironic parts of the documentary is that standards and practices were not worried about Jackson – more concerned about Nelly, Diddy, and Kid Rock. However, after the incident happened, she received most of the backlash. Two people received different treatment, and one is Justin Timberlake, who is briefly the subject of another New York Times documentary regarding Britney Spears. Timberlake got to make jokes after the incident and even win awards after a brief apology at the Grammys. Partly because he got the word out first, he could distance himself from it. Jackson would be subject to jokes and prodding from late-night hosts like David Letterman. Former CBS executive Les Moonves demanded she apologize to him in person, even more insidious given his recent history. The context in which a Black woman is being used as a scapegoat by various men is a horrible look.

If you don't know the background or context of this moment, "*Malfunction: The Dressing Down of Janet Jackson*" is geared towards a person who doesn't know the history before and after. There is no comment from Jackson or clarity on what was known right before the performance. Perhaps that's her story to tell on her terms. Although the documentary doesn't find explicit evidence Jackson was blacklisted, it geared some unfair animosity towards her direction. Timberlake has since made an apology, but let's not forget, in 2018, he was invited back to headline the Super Bowl halftime show. While things have thawed out over the years, there's a substantial failure on many people's hands that got clean just from taking the artificial moral ground.

Former editor-in-chief of Billboard Danyel Smith stated that Janet Jackson laid the groundwork for artists to be comfortable showing all facets of themselves. Yes, it's true. The documentary, in its entirety, is a warning of how irrational, knee-jerk responses can be detrimental.

Photo Credit: Kevin Mazur/Getty Images



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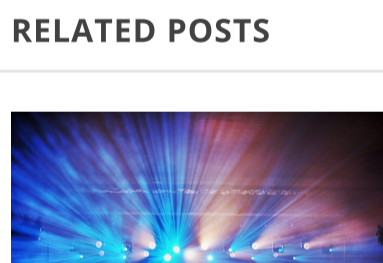


Murjani Rawls

Journalist, Self-published author of five books, podcast host of The War Report and The Deadscreen Podcast, and photographer since 2014, Murjani "MJ" Rawls has been stretching his capabilities of his creativity and passions, Rawls has as a portfolio spanning through many mediums including music, television, movies, and more. Operating out of the New York area, Rawls has photographed over 200+ artists spanning many genres, written over 700 articles ranging displaying his passionate aspirations to keep evolving as his years in media continue.

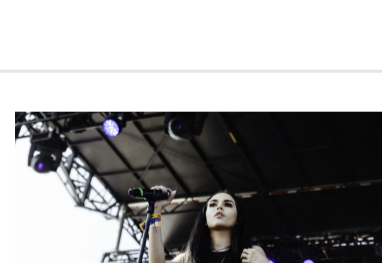
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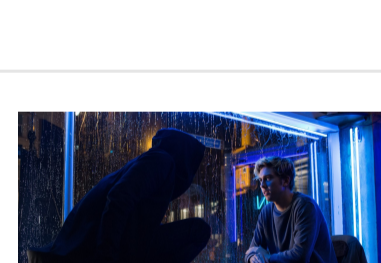
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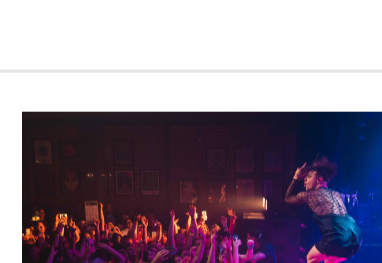
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