

Defacing Michael Jackson

By
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SETTING

1984. The arid and abandoned land of Opa Locka, Florida.

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

The story is told with four actors.

FLORIDA TRACK A: 1. OBADIAH - light-skin teenage black boy
and
older adult man who narrates.

FLORIDA TRACK B: 1. FRENCHY- dark-skinned black teenager

FLORIDA TRACK C: 1. RED- mentally-challenged black twin
2. YELLOW - other black twin who stutters
3. CITY COMMISSIONER - black commissioner

FLORIDA TRACK D: 1. JACK - white teenage boy new to area.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

The stage is bare for almost the entire play. The objects in the play can be mimed, but it's the directors choice as to how many objects. The actors should be specific with objects mimed.

Obadiah narrates the story as an older man, but lives in the piece as a teenager. Light shifts reflect a change from present to past as well as a jump to a new locations. The scene changes are minimal and the entire play should flow together without stopping.

The MJ mural can be mimed as well. If it exists then it can be created through slides, video, or just fragments of photos. As long as there is a sense of regeneration and disintegration throughout the play.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

OBADIAH

Can you take yourself back? Before the rubble and ash of the Twin Towers, Oklahoma City and Waco. Before crack, Columbine, Atkins, and AIDS. Further back, before Clarence and Anita, Bush and Quayle, Jim and Tammy Faye, even further! Before televangelists, telemarketing and Teletubbies. And here we are. The year of the eternal future: 1984. Opa Locka, Florida: a flat city of gasoline stations, abandoned parking lots, and a drainage canal where every year a few drunks drown in the weed-choked black water that carry waste from Miami and into the Everglades. A place where something is always getting started and nothing is ever finished. This is the edge. Of black and white. Of innocence and corruption. Of naïve optimism and jaded cynicism. Of the fading cold war and the approaching hot peace. Metal jacks and Thundercats. GI Joes and Cabbage Patch. And rising above it all is one man who they come to see. I aesthetically structured the room so that all eyes could see. They filed in with rubber bands, cracker jack toys and sticky sweet and sour fingers. The lights are turned off 30 seconds before the beginning. To set the mood. And the crowd hushes in reverential silence. Can you go back? I can.

LIGHTS SHIFT. OBADIAH is a
teenager shouting at his
friends.

OBADIAH

All right! Hey, quiet! My parents are in the other room. No fighting, no talking, and definitely no eating candy or food. My mom would kill me. We've only got a sofa and a loveseat and it has to last. We got Lays and Ritz, and that's all you getz. If you've already seen him once this week, go to the back, greedy. Relax, you're in my home. My living room. My family. And if any of you have seen the retarded twins down the block, tell them to give me back my bike.

SCENE TWO

FRENCHY, a sassy, dark-skinned teenager settles down a group of kids. Red, a mean-snarky teen, stands beside her.

FRENCHY

A-ight, let's get started. I said let's get started y'all. Simmer down. BOY, YOU BETTA SIMMER DOWN! (over-official sounding) Welcome to 'The Opa Locka City and Miami-Dade County, Florida Michael Jackson Fan Club.' As you president, Yvonne "Frenchy" Carter I call this meeting to order. Now let's get down to business because I got great news and I ain't tryin' to mess around w'ich y'all today. The first thing you can do is thank me because I am the best president ever.

RED

You da only president ever.

FRENCHY

I'm the only one qualified to fill the shoes of being responsible enough to do this, Red.

RED

You da' HNIC. For now.

FRENCHY

Thanks for the fortune cookie, Niggadamus.

OBADIAH

-Frenchy! Get to the news.

FRENCHY

Well ANY-way. The city of Opa Locka is finally starting to come around to our love of Michael Jackson: the greatest musician and entertainer in the whole universe. I mean, did you see what he did on-

OBADIAH

-Frenchy.

FRENCHY

Ahem. As I was saying Opa Locka wants to honor Michael

Jackson and wants us teens -and even retarded kids like Red- to be

FRENCHY (cont'd)

involved. So they're gonna build a giant mural on the city hall building wall! And we're going to get to help make a monument to Michael. I'm telling you this is just the sort of thing that'll bring the Jacksons in to town. Get a mural, a few statues, maybe a theme park.

OBADIAH

We can just start with the mural first. This is kind of exciting. A mural. Wow.

BEAT

OBADIAH

What is a mural?

FRENCHY

It's a thing, okay. A very big thing. So stop bothering me about dumb details. A mural is a fancy work of art. And it's gonna have Michael Jackson on it.

RED

Better keep Frenchy's face away from it or she'll crack the whole damn picture.

FRENCHY

(fake laughing)
Ahahahaha...that's so funny Red. No wonder you and your brother came out retarded. Your momma probably saw your face and tried to shove you back in.

OBADIAH

How are we gonna do this mural thing?

FRENCHY

Well, I, as your trusted president have been put in charge of it. I'm gonna be picking out different fans to help put it together. Don't worry, Obie you're at the top of my list.

OBADIAH

You'd do that for me?

FRENCHY

Hold me.

OBADIAH

What?

FRENCHY

I mean...I'd do anything for my favorite Michael Jackson fan club treasurer. Any other news?

RED

(breaking their intimacy)
There's a new family that moved in down the street!

FRENCHY

You bug-eyed muthafucka-

OBADIAH

-Frenchy!

FRENCHY

(composing herself)
Ahem. Okay? So you think we should invite them into the club?

RED

No, we should see if they got any cool stuff we can sneak on.

FRENCHY

Meeting adjourned.

Lights shift.

OBADIAH

As it turns out the mural would be a pretty big deal. It would be a collection of Michael Jackson memorabilia from fans. We would all get a chance to have our voices heard.

SCENE THREE

YELLOW and FRENCHY play jacks. Yellow, the light-skinned twin of Red, is a boy with a speech impediment. After a toss, he swipes some of the jacks.

FRENCHY

Uh-uh! Gimme back my jacks.

YELLOW

I w-w-win.

FRENCHY

You cheatin'!

YELLOW

Fu-fu-fair as square.

FRENCHY

Youze a lying cheatin' retard.

YELLOW

...ah-ah-I nu-never lie.

FRENCHY

I'm finna go to Obie's house becuz I ain't playin' wit you no more. Gimme back my jacks, retard!

YELLOW

Nu-nuh-uh, ugly!

FRENCHY

Who you calling ugly, retard! You so stupid that when you count to ten, you get stuck at one.

YELLOW

Your...so ugly w-when you t-take a bath the water j-jumps out.

FRENCHY

Yeah, well you're so stupid that you took a blood test and failed.

YELLOW

Yuh-you so ugly you make onions cry.

FRENCHY

That ain't nuthin' because you so stupid that you tried to mail a letter with food stamps. You so stupid, you took a ruler to bed to see how long you slept! You is so stupid! That, that...they had to burn down the second grade to get your ass out of it. That's how stupid you are!

YELLOW

So? My momma said you uglier than s-s-sin on Sunday. Yuh-yuh-you so ugly... your doctor is a vet. Wuh-when you g-get up, th-the s-sun goes down. Yuh-you s-so ugly that if-f ugly wuh-were br-bricks you'd be the Guh-Great Wall of Ch-China. D-d-damn...youze ugly!

FRENCHY

Gimme back my jacks!

YELLOW

Muh-make me!

FRENCHY

Ima tell yo moma!

YELLOW

S-so? M-my momma don't like you. S-she said you t-too ugly.

FRENCHY

Then Imma tell my moma!

YELLOW drops the jacks and
FRENCHY scoops them up. She
begins to leave.

YELLOW

Wait!

FRENCHY

What? (imitating) 'Yuh-yuh-you g-g-got s-something t-to s-say?'

YELLOW

A secret.

FRENCHY
No you don't?

YELLOW
Uh-huh.

FRENCHY
Nobody else knows? (He shakes his head 'no'.) Why not?

YELLOW
S-s-savin it.

FRENCHY
'Chamon, Yellow. Tell me, fool!

YELLOW
(wags finger)
Fuh-fuh-first, the rest of the jacks.

FRENCHY
You are evil.

FRENCHY hands over the rest
of the jacks to Yellow.

FRENCHY
This better be worth it, dumbo. Now tell me. Come on, I
ain't got all day. Gonna take you long enough to say it.
What's the secret?

YELLOW
C-cr-crackers.

FRENCHY
Crackers?

YELLOW
Crackers...w-white people.

FRENCHY
What about them?

YELLOW
They coming.

SCENE FOUR

OBADIAH

In the hood when you got something everybody wants a piece. "Just lemme touch, man. Just lemme hold it for a while, man. I just wanna feel it, smell it, taste it, own it. Come on, man! Lemme borrow it fo' a second! I'll bring it right back!" Gimme, gimme, gimme is the ghetto anthem. My family was the first in our neighborhood. The first to have central air-conditioning. The first to have lawn sprinklers. The first to have an encyclopedia set. Oh yeah. Ghetto fabulous, that's us. We were nigger rich and cracker poor as my cousins would say. So when we were the first to get a VCR, people lined up. And when we learned how to record something on it, the time had arrived. Because this is 1984, and the kids on my block only cared about one man.

LIGHTS SHIFT. OBADIAH's neck starts twitching like a zombie and he's joined by FRENCHY and RED. They all do a quick series of dance steps like monsters. Frenchy and Red exit. OBADIAH continues to bob, grabs his crotch and unleashes a MJ-esque...

OBADIAH

HOOOOO!!! (LIGHT SHIFT BACK) But I'm getting ahead of myself. All the kids would come to see, "Thriller." That was the neighborhood activity, the daily event for us. Thriller at Obie's home. We never got tired of it. The tape played again and again. Rewinding to the beginning...

FRENCHY (O/S)

Obie-

OBADIAH

-fast forwarding to a part we liked-

FRENCHY

(entering)
-OBIE!

OBADIAH

Quiet, Frenchy. I'm reminiscing.

FRENCHY

But we got a problem.

OBADIAH

What?

FRENCHY

White people.

OBADIAH

Excuse me?

FRENCHY

They're coming for us. Moving in and taking over. I'm scared. Hold me! (she clutches him) That's better.

OBADIAH

Ahhh...Frenchy.

FRENCHY

Yes, Obie.

OBADIAH

Who told you that white people were moving in?

FRENCHY

Yellow did.

OBADIAH

But Yellow is, like... retarded. Brother is so stupid I told him we got a new color TV and he asked 'what color?' You can't believe what he tells you.

FRENCHY

He's never wrong. Kiss me.

OBADIAH

What?!? (removes her) Wait a minute. Where are these alleged White people?

FRENCHY

Down the street, near the canal. Where is you going?

OBADIAH

I'm going to go see for myself.

FRENCHY

But you might get hurt! Aren't you scared?

OBADIAH

Why would I be scared? I see White people all the time on TV.

SCENE FIVE

Stakeout. OBADIAH and Yellow lay on the ground. OBADIAH cups his hands into a pair of binoculars and scans the horizon back and forth. Yellow steals one of Obadiah's hands and looks through it, and they scan the horizon as Obadiah talks.

OBADIAH

We're scared of what we don't know, right? Space aliens, Big Foot, Hamburger Helper and white people. I mean this is Opa-Locka. A city of blacks built in the swamps of Seminole country. A community dreamed up by a demented real estate developer who had an obsession with "One Thousand and One Nights" and an Arab fetish. Opa Locka has the largest collection of Moorish architecture in the western hemisphere. Blacks, Seminoles, Arabs, Moors. We are a tattered village of outcast people, ideas and history. We relate to Michael Jackson. A poor boy from Gary, Indiana with a fat nose, goofy grin and high voice. We live his life and see this outsider become the ultimate insider. You live as an outcasts, a minority and then one day...

JACK enters.

OBADIAH

...the majority arrives at your door. They have everything and you have nothing, so what do they want with your small little community? But you shouldn't be rude or make them feel uncomfortable.

LIGHTS SHIFT.

OBADIAH

What are you doing here?

JACK

Hi, I'm new in the neighborhood.

OBADIAH

Why?

JACK

Why?

OBADIAH

Yes, why?

JACK

Because my parents moved here. Hi, I'm Wes.

OBADIAH

No, you're not.

JACK

I'm not?

OBADIAH

No, that's not your name.

JACK

Yes it is.

OBADIAH

The neighborhood's been talking and we've decided that your name is Jack. That's your new name, Jack.

JACK

But everyone calls me Wes.

OBADIAH

No, they don't. Everyone calls you Jack, Jack.

JACK

Why?

OBADIAH

No one told us your name, so someone just started calling you Jack and it stuck. (to audience) They actually called him Cracker Jack...don't look at me. I didn't come up with it. (to JACK) So now everyone calls you Jack, and it's going to be a pretty hard name to shake.

JACK

But I just got here.

OBADIAH

Your name arrived ahead of you. I'm Obie. This is Yellow.

JACK

Is that his real name?

OBADIAH

I don't know. Is that your real name? (Yellow shrugs) Well that's what we call him.

YELLOW

M-m-my b-brother is Red.

OBADIAH

Red and Yellow are twins.

JACK

(to OBADIAH)

Oh...he's a little...slow.

OBADIAH

Slow? No, he's very fast. He's just retarded. Him and his brother. Only difference is Yellow stutters.

JACK

That's so sad.

OBADIAH

Sad my ass. They're both thieves.

YELLOW

Nu-no, w-we ain't.

OBADIAH

Oh yeah, then where's my BMX?

YELLOW

Red's got it.

OBADIAH

And then I got to Red and he says Yellow's got it. This is what they do.

JACK

Then you should call the police.

OBADIAH

The police? Jack, what the hell is wrong with you? I said I wanted my bike back. I didn't say I wanted him killed.

JACK

No, the police don't kill people. My dad said they help people fix their problems.

YELLOW and OBADIAH look at each other and then to the audience.

OBADIAH

You see how strange Jack is? But I'll be nice. (to JACK)
Jack, your dad is a liar.

JACK

So now you're calling my Dad a liar?

OBADIAH

Well yeah.

Obadiah and Yellow laugh at him. Jack looks at them.

JACK

I guess I'm outnumbered.

OBADIAH

Get used to it.

JACK

(humming)
...'helpless like a baby.'

OBADIAH

What?

JACK

You know, the song...'looking in the mirror...helpless like a baby. I can't help it.'

OBADIAH

Michael Jackson.

JACK

Yeah. I love Michael Jackson.

OBADIAH

Are you serious?

JACK

I would give my pinkie finger for a signed album.

OBADIAH

No, you wouldn't. I'd give both my thumbs for all his signed albums.

JACK

Your thumbs? That's it?

OBADIAH

I would cut off my arm for a jacket.

JACK

I would cut off both arms for his jacket.

OBADIAH

Then how would you wear it?

JACK

I'd have the jacket stitched to my back.

OBADIAH

Wow...you've thought about this.

JACK

Michael Jackson is amazing. I'm, like, his biggest fan.

FRENCHY

(entering quickly)
Waitwaitwaitwaitwaitwaitwaitwaitwait...Okay...um Jack, sweetie.
You are not Michael Jackson's biggest fan. I am Michael
Jackson's biggest fan. I am president of THE Michael
Jackson fan club...I have all the albums. I write letters, I
cut out all his pictures from *Ebony* and *Jet* and hang them
on my wall.

JACK

Who are you?

OBADIAH

This is Frenchy.

JACK

Are all you all related?

OBADIAH

Ewww. No, we're just all united by our devotion to Michael Jackson. It's kind of scary.

FRENCHY

Yeah, I am MJ's biggest fan. And Obie is second because he is co-founder and treasurer of the club.

JACK

Okay, well I just really like Michael Jackson. As much as you guys.

FRENCHY

You can't like him as much as us.

JACK

Why not?

OBADIAH

Frenchy, let's not get into this. Jack-

FRENCHY

Because he is our's.

JACK

...wait...are you guys...related to Michael Jackson?!? Oh my God!! Oh my God, you do kind of look like him a little. I mean the hair, the skin-

FRENCHY

-he's ours because he's black.

JACK

So?

FRENCHY

So there is a difference. I can love...Obie, name something white...

OBADIAH

Hockey!

FRENCHY

Name something else.

OBADIAH

Ummm...serial killers! Sally Fields? Larry Bird.

FRENCHY

Perfect! So I can love Larry Bird. But I can't love him more than tall white dudes. It's different.

JACK

But when the Celtics beat the Lakers this year everyone on TV was celebrating.

FRENCHY

Nah, people were happy. But it was different. Blacks were like 'yah. Good game.' and white people were like 'FUCKING AMAZING, DUDE! Radical!' And Mexican didn't know what to do. They just looked confused. It was different. Bird was doing it for all them tall white dudes who can't dunk and wear ties to work.

JACK

Well I was rooting for the Lakers. I like Magic Johnson better any way. He's way cooler.

OBADIAH

See Frenchy! He likes Magic better than Bird.

FRENCHY

Yeah he's a regular Abraham Lincoln. 'Sho glad massa is so nice to us. I'se go tell the others.'

FRENCHY and Yellow laugh and exit.

JACK

Why did she talk like that?

OBADIAH

It's just 'fake slave' speech. All blacks are required to learn how to do it.

JACK

Oh, do you learn it to honor your people?

OBADIAH

No, it's usually to make fun of *your* people.

JACK

Everyone is so mean. I thought neighbors are supposed to welcome you when you're new in town.

OBADIAH

Look...we're just messing with you. Look, you can come over to my house tomorrow...if you like...

JACK

Umm...why?

OBADIAH

My parents have a VCR and we can watch...are you ready?
"Thriller!"

JACK

And then we can hang out?

OBADIAH

Yeah. We'll 'hang'

JACK

Awesome, I've made my first friend.

OBADIAH

Sure.

JACK

Maybe we'll best buddies.

OBADIAH

We'll see.

JACK

And you'll call me Wes?

OBADIAH

Not a chance, Jack.

JACK

(exiting)
...at least I tried.

OBADIAH

Keep trying. (to audience) After that first meeting, I told Frenchy to be nicer to Jack. Now what we did to him was unfair, manipulative and a little cruel. But all the black kids I knew acted this way toward white kids. We knew it didn't matter if we made them squirm, because this was our way -at least for a few years- of evening the score a

little. Besides, they would have the rest of their lives to take their revenge out on us. And they would.