

Lil Nas X: Marketing Genius, Queer Icon, or Both?

Added by Jean R Pateman on April 6, 2021.

Lil Nas X has universal reach. Ever since his song “Old Time Road” topped the charts for weeks in 2019, he has been idolized by all, even seeming the opposite of his target fanbase. Mr. X is a black gay man, and yet he had an overwhelmingly large conservative, racist, and homophobic fanbase.

They casually ridicule him with homophobic comments since he’s not “obviously gay.” Its an incredibly ironic statement, because he doesn’t conform to the heteronormative portrayal of a “good gay man.” His music is incredibly sexual and he dresses the way he likes. It’s often flamboyant, often gender non-conforming and always incredible. So he never has fit the motif for a “good” gay man, but he’s kept his conservative fanbase?

Why? I can’t say. At this point however it does not matter, because Lil Nas X doesn’t want his conservative fanbase, and he’s a marketing genius. On March 26, 2021, He released *Montero (Call Me By Your Name)*, a song that at surface level is very obviously a testament to Lil Nas X’s experience with religion being a gay man.

The music video begins in the Garden of Eden, where Lil Nas X kisses the snake (presumably the same one who convinced Eve to take the apple from the forbidden tree), he is then forced into a courtroom-like scene where the crowd throws stones at him and yells at him. The scene then transitions to him, still as an angel in the sky where he then begins pole dancing to Hell. The choice to go there seems to be willing, as if he had a choice of what he did. This presents the message that he is fine with going to Hell if it means he gets to be himself.

Three days after releasing the song, he released 666 pairs of shoes for 1018 dollars each, called “Satan Shoes.” This was brilliant. This brought forth a whole new wave of Christian anger and fear-mongering. In fact, Lil Nas X argued with multiple well-known Christian conservatives, such as Kaitlyn Bennett and the governor of South Dakota. He even urged them to continue being mad at him: “i spent my entire teenage years hating myself because of the sh*t y’all preached would happen to me because i was gay. so i hope u are mad, stay mad, feel the same anger you teach us to have towards ourselves.”

On Twitter, he writes to his 14-year-old self saying that even though he promised to never come out as gay or be that “person,” that he knows he is opening the doors for other queer people to just exist. He writes “but the truth is, i am. The agenda to make people stay the f*ck out of other people’s lives and stop dictating who they should be.”

Lil Nas X had to make a choice at some point, whether he was going to produce music that could be simplified and consumed by children and conservatives, or whether he would narrow his fanbase. And he made his choice in the most artful way. He doesn't want his concerts and streams to be full of people who insist that he diminishes himself and he made that clear, while also opening a lot of doors for the LGBTQ community and future queer youth in the music industry.

Featured Photo: Lil Nas X Official Twitter Account