

The Great Debate

James or Jordan? LeBron or Michael? LBJ or MJ? This topic has been debated to death on talk radio, on podcasts, and in print. Michael Jordan is considered by many to be the best basketball player of all time. LeBron is the one current player who some think could challenge MJ for G.O.A.T. status. I believe the debate itself is a bit short-sighted since it completely dismisses other all-time greats like Kareem, Bird, Magic, Russell, and Chamberlain. Each of the guys mentioned in the last sentence, as well as MJ and LeBron, could lay claim to best-ever status. They all have countless great moments and statistical accomplishments that would bolster their case. They also have minor flaws that we could point out if we wanted to get nitpicky.

The Time Is Right

This article is about LeBron and Jordan though, and I think now is the right time to compare them. They both completed 15 seasons in the NBA so LeBron is at the same place in his career as Jordan was at his third and final retirement. They have each had 15 chances to win a championship, be the MVP, be an all-star, lead the league in scoring, or do whatever else great players do during the course of their career.

Let's Keep It Real

I will do my best to lay out the case for each guy and point out any factors that I think are important in this discussion. I have been watching basketball since 1982 so I have been a witness to both of their careers in their entirety. I can't stand hot takes so you won't find any here. If you are looking for an article that takes an EXTREME position or ignores all facts that go against a predetermined narrative you are in the wrong place. There are plenty of "experts" on Facebook and Twitter (not to mention Fox Sports, ESPN, or sports talk radio) that can provide that for you. I will also attempt to

avoid any recency bias and getting swept up with what is happening now while forgetting about the past. That is never a good thing and too many are guilty of it. At the same time, I am not a “get off my lawn” type person. We tend to idealize the past and overlook its flaws. The sport of basketball did not magically peak in 1986 and then go downhill from there. So if you are looking for someone who will say that everything and everybody was better in the 1980s you need to keep looking.

With that out of the way, let the comparison begin.

Rings Matter, But They Don't Tell the Whole Story

The more simple-minded among us would say that Jordan won six titles and LeBron won three, therefore Jordan is better. Case closed. It should be obvious that this is a very incomplete way to judge greatness in a team sport. Bill Russell won 11 titles. He is clearly the greatest if all we are doing is counting championships. Some may argue that Russell played in a different era so it is not fair to include him in this discussion. Robert Horry (a contemporary of both James and Jordan) won seven titles. I guess that makes him the greatest player of the modern (post-merger) era. No, no it doesn't. Titles are important and are definitely part of the equation, but they should NEVER be the single overriding factor when determining individual greatness in a team sport. This is not golf or tennis so let's stop pretending that it is.

Others argue that the fact that MJ was 6-0 in his finals appearances while James was 3-6 should settle the argument. This group is even dumber than the “championship counters” discussed in the previous paragraph. On what planet is making the championship round of your sport and losing somehow a lesser accomplishment than not making it at all? Continuing this flawed line of thinking it is better to be swept in the

first round of the playoffs (in order to preserve a perfect finals record) than to lose in game 7 of the finals! This makes absolutely no sense and I reject it out of hand.

You Play To Win the Game!

Winning does matter though, and great individual players in a sport like basketball should contribute to their team's success. To that end and because so many people are confused by this issue I have developed a simple scoring system to help inform our thinking on these types of debates. I call it the **REO Winning Scale™**. Jordan and LeBron are the ideal candidates to compare because they were both undeniably great and because both played 15 seasons (to this point). They also played their entire careers with a four-round playoff format which was introduced in the 1983-1984 season. Here is how the system works:

A player is awarded points for how far his team advances in the playoffs each season. Missing the playoffs altogether is worth zero points. In the NBA where 53.3% (this % was higher when Jordan played because there were fewer teams) of teams make the playoffs it is not a great accomplishment simply to make the postseason, so for a great player to miss out altogether is something of a failure. Losing in the first round is worth 1 point. Losing in the second round is worth 2 points. Losing in the conference finals is worth 3 points. Losing in the finals is worth 4 points. Finally, winning the title is worth 6 points. Titles do matter so a bonus point is awarded for that accomplishment.

Let's see how each player did in his career. First up is Jordan:

REO Winning Scale: Michael Jordan:

1984-85 - Lost in first round - 1 Point

1985-86 - Lost in first round - 1 Point

1986-87 - Lost in first round - 1 Point

1987-88 - Lost in second round - 2 Points

1988-89 - Lost in conference finals - 3 points

1989-90 - Lost in conference finals - 3 Points

1990-91 - Won NBA Title - 6 Points

1991-92 - Won NBA Title - 6 Points

1992-93 - Won NBA Title - 6 Points

1993-94 - Playing Baseball

1994-95 - Lost in second round - 2 Points

1995-96 - Won NBA Title - 6 Points

1996-97 - Won NBA Title - 6 Points

1997-98 - Won NBA Title - 6 Points

1998-2001 - Retired for three seasons

2001-02 - Missed playoffs - 0 Points

2002-03 - Missed playoffs - 0 Points

Total Score - 49 Points

Let's look at James now:

REO Winning Scale: LeBron James:

2003-04 - Missed playoffs - 0 Points

2004-05 - Missed playoffs - 0 Points

2005-06 - Lost in second round - 2 Points

2006-07 - Lost in NBA finals - 4 Points

2007-08 - Lost in second round - 2 Points

2008-09 - Lost in conference finals - 3 Points

2009-10 - Lost in second round - 2 Points

2010-11 - Lost in NBA finals - 4 Points

2011-12 - Won NBA Title - 6 Points

2012-13 - Won NBA Title - 6 Points

2013-14 - Lost in NBA finals - 4 Points

2014-15 - Lost in NBA finals - 4 Points

2015-16 - Won NBA Title - 6 Points

2016-17 - Lost in NBA finals - 4 Points

2017-18 - Lost in NBA finals - 4 Points

Total Score - 51 Points

By this measure, LeBron has a slight edge in terms of his impact on his team winning over the years. His **REO Winning Scale™** point totals will only go up as his career continues since he appears to not be slowing down or conceding anything to age. We must also acknowledge that Jordan retired briefly during his absolute peak and retired again at the very end of his prime. Those lost seasons would have almost certainly produced more playoff success and possibly even more titles.

Comparing Eras

Another factor to consider is that each of these players

played in at least two different eras of basketball. Jordan entered the league when scoring was high and the pace of play was fast. His rookie year the *average* NBA team scored 110.8 points per game. That season (1984-85) every single team in the league averaged over 100 points per game. By the time he retired the game had slowed down considerably and become more physical. Scoring was way down across the league. During his final season with the Bulls league-wide scoring was at 95.6 points per game and his final season with the Wizards saw scoring drop to 95.1 per game. LeBron came into a very slow paced and physical league, but the pace of play has increased dramatically in the last decade and scoring has as well. Watching a game from LeBron's rookie year compared to a game now is almost like watching a different sport. LeBron's rooking year saw team scoring at a near-record low of 93.4 points per game (the second lowest total in 60 years!). There were only two teams in the entire league that averaged over 100 points per game and four teams averaged less than 90. This season scoring reached a nearly 30 year high of 106.3 points per game.

We should also note that when Jordan played hard fouls were not discouraged the way they are now so players were physically more beat up. On the other hand, Jordan never had to deal with constant switching on defense or with zone defenses which were illegal at the time. LeBron has faced legal zones and much more sophisticated analytic based defenses for his entire career. I say all that to point out that one guy did not "have it easy" while the other had to "work for everything he got." Those who say such things are either very biased or willfully ignorant.

Competition Is Fierce, Until It Isn't

This analysis would be incomplete if we didn't compare the level of competition. Jordan entered a very deep and stacked

league. With a 16 team playoff field in a 23 team league it was easier to make the playoffs then, but harder to advance. For this reason, MJ went 1-9 in his first 10 playoff games and lost three series before he ever won one. As his career went on and his teammates got better he started winning more. The arrival of Jordan's prime coincided with the decline of the Lakers, Celtics, and Pistons dynasties that dominated the early part of his career. As those teams and players got older the Bulls took advantage. The league also expanded very rapidly in the late 80s and early 90s going from 23 to 29 teams. The talent pool was spread out and the league was watered down. In addition, many young players were going off the rails as the absence of a salary cap for rookies killed the incentive to get better. The mid-90s through early 2000s when Jordan did much of his winning was not a good time for the NBA in terms of style or quality of play. Jordan's Bulls were the primary beneficiaries of these events.

LeBron never was able to take advantage of excessive expansion as only one new team has been added in the last 20 plus years. He also played during the massive influx of excellent international players that was just getting started when MJ played. These international players increased the depth and level of competition around the league. Perhaps the biggest thing working against LeBron is that he had the misfortune of playing the latter part of his prime during the Warriors dynasty. He was able to beat them once in the finals, but one team with four of the top 20 players in the league is unheard of and considerably more difficult than anything Jordan ever faced in the finals. One benefit for LeBron is that he has been aided by playing in the weaker conference for his entire career so making repeated trips to the finals has been easier for him that it was for MJ.

Another way of to look at this is that Jordan faced tougher competition on his way to the finals, while LeBron has faced tougher competition in the finals. This would help explain why

one guy has more finals appearances, but the other has more finals victories.

Numbers Never Lie, But Do They Settle Anything?

I haven't spent a lot of time on individual stats because I don't think we will find any answers there. Look at these regular season numbers and you will see what I mean:

*MJ – 30.1 ppg 6.2 rpg 5.3 apg 2.3 spg 0.8 bpg .497 FG% .327
3PT% .835 FT%*

*LBJ – 27.2 ppg 7.4 rpg 7.2 apg 1.7 spg 0.7 bpg .504 FG% .344
3PT% .739 FT%*

In most categories, both guys got better in the postseason, which is not always the case even for all-star players. Their improved playoff statistics are just another testament to their greatness. Here are those numbers:

*MJ- 33.4 ppg 6.4 rpg 5.7 apg 2.1 spg 0.9 bpg .487 FG% .332
3PT% .828 FT%*

*LBJ – 28.9 ppg 8.9 rph 7.1 apg 1.8 spg 1.0 bpg .491 FG% .332
3PT% .743 FT%*

Jordan was a better scorer. LeBron a better rebounder and passer. This is true both in the regular and postseason. As he ages, LeBron's per game numbers will almost certainly go down (assuming he is human) while his name will climb higher on the all-time record book. After 15 seasons each though, the statistics for both the regular season and playoffs are incredibly close.

Haters Gonna Hate

As we wrap up this article I should be forthcoming and admit that I never really rooted for either guy. I was never a Jordan fan during his career. While I did root for him to finally win a title when they played the Lakers in 1991 (a lot of that was due to how much I hated the Lakers), I did not enjoy seeing him win throughout the 90s. I have never rooted for LeBron in any of his 9 trips to the finals. I don't hate his teams nearly as much as I did Jordan's Bulls, but I have always pulled for whoever his opponent was. I do recognize that both are all-time great players, so hopefully, my lack of fandom for either player will make me unbiased in this analysis.

Are We There Yet?

So where does this leave us? Each guy had a similar impact on their team winning as evidenced by their **REO Winning Scale™** scores. Both guys dealt with and conquered whatever the league threw at them in terms of style of play, pace of play, defensive rules, and physicality. They were both beneficiaries of certain peculiarities that were happening in the NBA during their careers, but they also had some bad luck in running up against all-time great teams that prevented them from winning as much as they could have otherwise.

My take is that at his peak Jordan is still the slightly better player. His ability to seize the moment and his more consistent shooting touch gives him the edge. It also helps that he has no black marks on his resume like James has from the 2010 and 2011 playoffs. Even when Jordan lost in a playoff series he still played well.

LeBron doesn't seem to be slowing down one bit though. He is now 33 years old and has been playing a full NBA schedule since he jumped straight from high school 15 years ago. Somehow he seems to be getting better as he ages. If he can continue to put up comparable numbers to what he has done so far in his career and make a couple more title runs this debate will need to be revisited.

Ranting Ever On: The Five Edition

There are days when you just need to rant and rave about stuff. Moments when you need to get it off your chest. You know the drill. If there is something that is bothering you or getting under your skin, this is a safe space to vent. But keep a few things in mind. First, do your best to keep the object of your rant as illogical and pointless as possible. Nobody has time for a rant about something serious and important. Second, try to keep it short and sweet. Long rants wear out their welcome very quickly. Finally, be honest and transparent. Nothing is worse than a ranter ranting about something that doesn't really bother them that much. It's plain to everyone around that it is an empty rant, devoid of

purpose and passion. Mean it or keep it to yourself.

In our ongoing effort to be helpful and generous, we here at REO have decided to give you, dear reader, a short collection of rants to help guide you in your future ranting. A primer, if you will. Here are five mini-rants about five different things that are deserving of the best we have to offer. We hope you will enjoy this Ranting Ever On, Friday Five style. And please, feel free to add your own rant in the comment section below.

How Pluto has been Dismissed As Not an Actual Planet

Back in grade school, we learned the acronym My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nine Pizzas to remember the planets. The truly awesome thing about this acronym is that we were getting nine pizzas. Nine! But now...now our innocence is lost. No more carefree hours of staring at that pizza planet in the sky (I don't think we can actually see it, but we can imagine its there). Now It's just My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nine... And that's it. Nope, nothing, nada. But there is hope. In recent years there has been a movement afoot to include all of the dwarf planets with the regular planets. If this dream transpires it will be Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Cerus, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto, Haumea, Makemake, and Eris. I have seen a number of suggested acronyms if this does, in fact, become reality. Unfortunately, none of the suggestions I read have included pizza, which makes me think many people are missing the important point here. Let me suggest My Very Educated Mother Christine Just Served Us Nine Pizzas Having Mucho Everything. So I say its high time we take back our childhood. Let's take matters into our hands and put that pizza back in the acronym as it so justly deserves. (Ben Plunkett)

Wendy's "Fresh-Never-Frozen Beef"

Why does Wendy's now advertise that their beef is fresh and NEVER FROZEN? It is in every commercial they do now. Freezing beef is now up there with being a Nazi as one of the worst sins you can commit in 21st century America. People freeze meat all the time. They buy giant deep freezers just so they can buy a lot of meat and freeze it.

Now Wendy's has decided that it is horrible to freeze beef. WHAT IS NEXT, WHERE WILL THIS END!?!?!?! (Mike Lytle)

Why Does Carey Elwes Have to Be So Much Cooler Than Me?

Yeah, Carey, I get it. You got to be Westley in *The Princess Bride*, getting to kiss Robin Wright, hang out with Andre the Giant, have the greatest sword fight of modern times and make women all over the world fawn. And you got a turn as the Dread Pirate Roberts, as if being a pirate isn't a lifelong fantasy of mine. Yeah, you got to actually be on the set with, run lines with, and act in the same scenes with George Costanza and other characters from *Seinfeld* once. No big deal. Not like I wouldn't light myself on fire to have had that opportunity. You got to match wits with Shawn and Gus as the mesmerizing, out-of-the-park home run recurring villain Despereaux in *Psych*. You even got to prove that when your role is a lame character, like Jerry on *Liar, Liar*, that you still make it totally unforgettable and quotable! You have the perfect looks, the sublime accent and the filmography I would die for.

And yet all of that apparently isn't enough, as you have now signed on for Season 3 of *Stranger Things*. Why do you do this to me, Carey Elwes? Why do you take my perfectly content life and make me yearn for more? (Gowdy Cannon)

Clipping My Fingernails

I hate clipping my nails. It's boring. it's tedious, and it seems like I am having to do it more often these days. My nails just won't stop growing! Why do they have to grow so fast? I'll admit, I would hate NOT having nails because then my fingers would look like little fleshy protrusions growing out of my hands, but all this nail clipping is just a complete headache. Sadly, there is no good answer here. No nails and I'm a mutant. Long nails and I'm a creep. So I have to clip them. Fine nails! I'll clip you on a regular basis but don't expect me to be happy about it! (Phill Lytle)

Internet Lists

Do you know what we need a lot fewer of on the internet? Lists. Some lists are cool, such as this fine websites weekly list of musings from various contributors. I have benefited greatly from sitting down in the morning and creating a daily to-do list But I think the internet has really gotten out of hand and we need to stop. Every time I turn around someone is publishing some inane list of something and they are usually way more than just a few items. "Twenty-five reasons why the number two is cooler than the number eight" or "99 reasons that 1999 was the best year ever!" or "22 reasons that Barb from *Stranger Things* is the greatest character in the history of fiction". I haven't always felt this way. I remember when they celebrated 100 years of film with the top 100 movies of all time. I enjoyed watching that because it was compiled from years of cinema and it made me want to watch some movies that I had never before thought of watching. Now, however, we are just using lists willy-nilly as if they are some magic device that makes our opinion more valid. Why do we like making lists and looking at the lists of others? Is it because we like

ranking stuff and seeing if others agree with us even if the things we are ranking aren't that important and/or really don't require any sort of ranking? Are we not content to have a group of stuff that we like that isn't broken down somehow? Do we have to catalog every single aspect of our life and share it with other people and then find ourselves arguing over the ways their list is different than ours? Maybe it annoys me so much because I've caught myself ten points deep into a 35 point list that I saw on the internet and realized that my life will not be improved by knowing all of the times that Hurley from *Lost* proved himself to be the smartest person on the island. Lists are not bad. Lists are fine if used in moderation. But can we please show a little restraint on our usage of lists.

I hope you will revisit the site next week when I publish my list of 19 reasons why I believe that *The Walking Dead* is all happening inside Jack from *Lost's* head. (Jonathan Postlewaite)

The Forgotten History of Christian Rock: Part Four

Welcome to *The Forgotten History of Christian Rock*.

This is Part Four of a five part series exploring the history of Christian Rock and Roll Music.

To read Part One of the series focusing on the pioneers of the movement in the 1960s and 1970s click [here](#).

To read Part Two where we looked at the popular rock bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Three covering the visionary bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Five recapping the series and introducing readers to the new music being created today, click [here](#).

To read our intro where we explain some of the reasons we wanted to do this series click [here](#).

Thank you so much for reading please feel free to comment below.

Part Four:

***The Road Less Traveled* by Michael Lytle**

The late 90's to the early 2000's

The late 1990s and early 2000s were a pivotal time in Christian rock and roll music. While it may not have been obvious or even a conscious choice there was a battle going on for where Christian music would go in the future. On one hand, some of the more creative and critically acclaimed artists like *Jars of Clay*, *Sixpence None the Richer*, and *Switchfoot* were also the artists that were selling the most records. This was not necessarily true in the 1980s where critical acclaim and commercial success did not always seem to go hand in hand. The rise of independent record labels like Tooth and Nail/BEC and Five Minute Walk/Sarabellum propelled forward artists like *Dimestore Prophets*, *Dryve*, *Starflyer 59*, and *Plankeye* who were blazing their own trails and not simply following what was popular in secular music. These labels also were reaching a younger audience which the big names of the 80s were starting to struggle with.

At the same time, the rise of modern pop/worship music was starting to gain momentum. If *Petra* and their 1989 album *Petra*

Praise: The Rock Cries Out was the John Wycliffe of this new praise and worship music then *Delirious?* was its Martin Luther. (Under this analogy *Hillsong* would be Zwingli.) The boys from across the pond created the blueprint that is still being followed, for better or worse, to this day.

While we here at REO are certainly very much in favor of singing praises to and worshiping our creator, the focus from record labels and radio stations on “worship” music was not all positive. Lyrics that dealt with personal struggles, social issues, family dynamics, and life, in general, were quickly jettisoned in favor of songs that addressed God directly. Again, singing songs to God is not a bad thing, but we lost something along the way when other types of songs were discarded. Today we rarely, if ever, hear songs like *All Star United's* satirical *La La Land*, which took aim at the health, wealth, prosperity gospel movement. It is more difficult to find voices like Steve Hindalong of *The Choir* acknowledging the strain a cross-country move from Los Angeles to Nashville had put in his marriage in *Never More True*. We moved away from bands like *Plankeye* writing about their band breaking up and the uncertainty it created in *Goodbye*. Radio forgot artists like *The Waiting*, who drew inspiration from the opening paragraph of Melville's *Moby-Dick* to write about the Old Testament wanderings of God's chosen people in the song *Israel*.

If you go to a Christian bookstore or listen to Christian radio today it is easy to see who won the battle. Modern worship music dominates the landscape while the more creative artists are once again going underground and using alternative methods to get their message to the public. We will continue this discussion in part five of our series.

The goal of the following playlist is to highlight some of the artists that we feel raised the bar of creativity and originality for Christian rock and roll music during the late 1990s and early 2000s. We realize that many of these artists

would have cringed at being labeled a “Christian band”. They would have preferred to be called a rock band that happened to be made up of people who were Christians. It may be hard to believe now, but this distinction really was a big deal to some during the time period covered in this article and playlist. While it might make for an interesting article at some point in time this is not that article. We tried to primarily highlight artists who either never got their due even at that time or who may have been popular then, but have fallen off the radar since. All songs on this playlist were released between 1994 and 2005. As always, there are other songs we would have included if they were available on Spotify. We have now put together four playlists for this series of articles. We expected the playlists that featured more recent music would be easier to put together than those featuring music from several decades ago. This was not really the case. Many great artists from the 1990s and early 2000s are not on Spotify. Some of our favorites that are missing include *Dimestore Prophets*, *The Listening*, *Reflescent Tide*, and *Room Full of Walters*.

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Part Three:

***The Underground Groundbreakers* by Phill Lytle**

The early 80's through the early 90's

There were no platinum records. There were no arenas filled to capacity. And unless your local Christian station was unusually "out of the box", you rarely heard this music played on the radio. Yet to many, if you were to pinpoint an era of music that justifies the existence of Christian rock, this would be it. Throughout the 80's and into the early 90's, a group of singers, poets, storytellers, and artists reshaped how we experienced "Christian" music. They turned it on its head and opened up a new world to believers, music lovers, and spiritual seekers. It was the time of the underground groundbreakers.

In part two we examined the bands that had major success and popularity during the 80's and early 90's. Bands like *Petra*, *Whiteheart*, and *DeGarmo and Key*. While those bands were playing in front of arenas full of youth groups, churches, and

believers, there was another movement happening just outside of the Christian mainstream. Out there, bands like *The Call*, *Daniel Amos*, *The Prayer Chain*, and many others were singing about broken relationships, marriage problems, politics, and doubts. Out there, their songs were in turn angry and frustrated, joyous and hopeful, pointed and prophetic. The music was enigmatic – less definable. It was passionate, messy, and full-to-bursting with life. They avoided the pop rock sounds of their more accepted contemporaries, choosing instead to blaze their trails with styles and sounds all their own.

This era of music produced some of the most critically acclaimed music in the history of Christian rock. Many of the albums that released during this time frame are still considered some of the best Christian releases of all time. *Circle Slide* by *The Choir*. *Sticks and Stones* by *the 77's*. *Reconciled* by *The Call*. These and more pushed boundaries and expanded what was believed possible for “Christian” music at that time.

Their music was never easy. Whether it was Steve Taylor singing satirically about a deranged ice-cream delivery man blowing up an abortion clinic to preserve his livelihood, or *The Choir* wrestling with the grief of a miscarriage, these bands made their fans grapple with big ideas and complicated emotional reactions. In some ways, they courted controversy, not to get the spotlight as much as to shock their listeners out of their comfort and stagnation.

At every turn, it seemed like these bands could not catch their big break. In a perfect world, many of them would be household names – their music was that good. That is not to suggest that these bands did not have any influence on future generations of musicians and creators. Members of these bands went on to form successful record companies that gave Christian music one of its biggest bands in *Jars of Clay*. They went on to produce albums for much more successful bands like

Sixpence None the Richer and *The Newsboys*. They eventually wrote and created songs that are sung in worship services all over the world like *God of Wonders*. No doubt, their musical legacy inspired many bands that are being played on the radio today. While few of them ever achieved the kind of success and recognition they deserved at the time, our musical heritage would be much poorer without their contributions.

As stated before, the playlist below is merely a selection of some of the best music in this era. It is meant to capture the sound and the spirit of this pivotal time in Christian music. Please, take some time to listen and appreciate the music that laid the groundwork and played such a monumental role in our history.

The Forgotten History of Christian Rock: Part Two

Introduction by Michael Lytle

When scanning the FM radio dial in any U.S. city you come across a wide variety of stations. In my city, if I want to hear oldies from the 50s and 60s I have a couple options. I can also listen to classic rock from the 70s, modern rock, alternative/indie rock, top 40 pop and hip-hop, and of course a variety of country options. If I am feeling particularly adventurous, I can check out mix stations that play popular songs from the last four or five decades.

If I want to listen to Christian music I have several stations to choose from as well. Unfortunately, they all basically play the same songs over again and their entire catalog seems to be chosen from music released in the last six to twelve months. It's as if there is a deliberate attempt to pretend that Christian music did not exist before last year. There also seems to be a mandate to play a very limited number of artists who for the most part play the same generic style of pop worship music. These stations are very proud of the fact that their music is uplifting, upbeat, positive, encouraging, and safe for the whole family. Sadly, it might prove difficult to find music that is challenging, convicting, original, or thought-provoking because those qualities might alienate some of their more easily offended listeners.

Why do Christian radio stations seem to avoid anything challenging? Why do they often gravitate to easy and safe music? And more importantly, why do Christian radio stations and even Christian music listeners want to ignore their history? Regardless of whether you are a fan of the music that continues to be released in the Christian Rock or CCM genres, it is critical to recognize that there is plenty of great Christian music that has been made over the last several decades. Unfortunately, nearly all this music has been forgotten or ignored.

We want to do our part to shed some light on this overlooked music. We decided the best way to do that is a series of short articles spotlighting different time periods and styles of Christian rock music. In [Part One](#) we covered music from the 1960s and 1970s. This article will focus on popular Christian rock of the 1980s and early 1990s. We are including a Spotify playlist that features songs from 1982-1993. This playlist is by no means exhaustive. While Spotify has a vast library of albums and songs they don't have everything we would have wanted to include.

We hope you enjoy reading these as much as we enjoyed writing

them. We give you Part Two of *The Forgotten History of Christian Rock*.

Part Two:

***Youth Pastor Approved* by Phill Lytle**

The 1980s through the early 1990s

The hair was long and flowing. The clothes were bright and garish, with neon, pastels, and spandex making frequent appearances. The music was big and bold – loud drums, big vocals, epic guitars, and keyboard and synth liberally sprinkled in for good measure. The early days of trailblazing and rebellion were gone. The banner-bearers of creativity and boundary-pushing were operating under the radar. The music that captured and defined the zeitgeist of the Christian rock scene in the 80s was unapologetically religious and unambiguously mainstream. It was safe rock and roll yet with enough edge and bite that it retained an element of danger and the allure of non-conformity. For the cool youth pastor, it was a dream come true.

As seen in [Part One](#), the 60s and 70s had the passionate trailblazers Larry Norman and Keith Green. In Part Three, we will talk about the underground Christian music scene with counter-cultural geniuses like The Call, The Choir, and the 77s. While those bands and many others like them were carving their paths by different means, the focal point of Christian Rock was happening out in the open for all the world to see. Bands like Petra and Stryper routinely sold out arenas that had previously been considered out of reach. Bands were selling hundreds of thousands and in some cases, even millions of records, getting serious radio airplay on traditional Christian radio stations and were no longer looked at as

pariahs by the church as a whole.

And their music made clear that the union of rock and roll and Christian ministry was the formula that worked. Most of the popular bands of this generation were overtly religious, eschewing subtlety in favor of on-the-nose messaging. This is not a criticism per se, simply an observation about the fundamental truth of the bands that reached the highest popularity during this era. They proclaimed Jesus, the Bible, and the Christian faith with no fear, no hesitation, and no reservations. To some, it did not represent real life in all its ugliness and complications. But to many, this music was a lightning rod for their faith – a boisterous and encouraging reinforcement for their spiritual journey.

This era produced some of the longest-lived artists and bands in Christian music history. Degarmo and Key. Mylon and Broken Heart. White Heart. It was a time that saw Christian bands like Idle Cure and Allies continue down the path forged by the godfathers of the genre. These and many more were rock and roll enough for young people to flock to in droves, while still maintaining a sense of spiritual steadfastness that made them feel safer than anything the world had to offer.

To be clear, the bands that thrived in this era did not do so with complete acceptance by the church. There were still many that attacked and criticized the bands for their hair, their attire, and their music. They were lambasted from the pulpit by more than one nationally televised preacher.[1. Jimmy Swaggart even wrote a [book](#) about it. We are linking it for educational purposes only.] While their path was easier than the generation prior, they still did much to smooth the road for the following generations of Christian musicians. They took the slings and arrows of an unwieldy and unaccepting group of believers, and they kept on moving, creating, and performing. We do well to remember the contributions during this era. Our Church and musical heritage demand as much.

Enjoy this playlist that will serve as a quick snapshot of the sounds and the styles of the most popular Christian bands of this era. In particular, pay special attention to the musicianship and artistry at play in many of these songs – something that seems to be missing from much of the current Christian music scene. Finally, we hope you will allow one minor indulgence. We have included a couple of songs by Rich Mullins on this playlist even though we realize he does not exactly fit the profile of the bands and artists we covered in the article. We just strongly believe that his music deserves to be remembered and this playlist was the best fit.

This is Part Two of a five part series exploring the history of Christian Rock and Roll Music.

To read Part One of the series focusing on the pioneers of the movement in the 1960s and 1970s click [here](#).

To read Part Three covering the visionary bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Four covering the music of the late 1990s through the early 2000s, click [here](#).

To read Part Five recapping the series and introducing readers to the new music being created today, click [here](#).

Thank you so much for reading. Please feel free to comment below.

The Forgotten History of Christian Rock: Part One

Introduction by Michael Lytle

When scanning the FM radio dial in any U.S. city you come across a wide variety of stations. In my city, if I want to hear oldies from the 50s and 60s I have a couple options. I can also listen to classic rock from the 70s, modern rock, alternative/indie rock, top 40 pop and hip-hop, and of course a variety of country options. If I am feeling particularly adventurous, I can check out mix stations that play popular songs from the last four or five decades.

If I want to listen to Christian music I have several stations to choose from as well. Unfortunately, they all basically play the same songs over again and their entire catalog seems to be chosen from music released in the last six to twelve months. It's as if there is a deliberate attempt to pretend that Christian music did not exist before last year. There also seems to be a mandate to play a very limited number of artists who for the most part play the same generic style of pop worship music. These stations are very proud of the fact that their music is uplifting, upbeat, positive, encouraging, and safe for the whole family. Just don't look for anything challenging, convicting, original, or thought-provoking because those qualities might alienate some of their more easily offended listeners.

Why do Christian radio stations avoid anything challenging? Why do they gravitate to easy and safe music? And more importantly, why do Christian radio stations and even Christian music listeners want to ignore their history? Regardless of whether you are a fan of the music that continues to be released in the Christian Rock or CCM genres, it is critical to recognize that there is plenty of great

Christian music that has been made over the last several decades. Unfortunately, nearly all this music has been forgotten or ignored.

We want to do our part to shed some light on this overlooked music. We decided the best way to do that is a series of short articles spotlighting different time periods and styles of Christian rock music. We are including a Spotify playlist with each article featuring some of the music from each era. These playlists are by no means exhaustive. While Spotify has a vast library of albums and songs they don't have everything we would have wanted to include. We hope you enjoy reading these as much as we enjoyed writing them. Without further ado, we present part one of The Forgotten History of Christian Rock.

Part One:

***Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music?* by David Lytle**

The 1960s through late 1970s

Rock 'n' Roll was rebellion—rebellion from social conformity, rebellion from moral standards, rebellion from the church. Sure artists like Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Chuck Berry infused blues with the sounds of both black and southern gospel, but the outcome was far from the music of the sanctuary. It was the music of the night and the nightclub. As the rebels of the 1950s gave way to the hippies of the 1960s, this rebellion became increasingly clear.

Rock 'n' Roll was sinful. Both the church and the artist agreed. It was rhythmic, sexual, and broke every tradition. Teens gyrated and shouted, while fundamentalist preachers fumed. When John Lennon contrasted the popularity of the Beatles with that of Jesus he did more than make an observation—he drew battle lines. It's no surprise that this same man later found it so easy to imagine a world where there

is no heaven. It was a world Christians found unimaginable.

More importantly, Rock 'n' Roll was the soul of a generation. What a generation it was! Their parents had grown up during the Great Depression and sacrificed mental and physical health to defeat the war machines of Germany and Japan. They were coming of age in the suburbs that sprouted in the soil of this post-war economic boom. The older the baby boomers got the more it became clear that they were not their parents. Their music, more than anything, was what made them different.

In this context, a handful of young people experimented with the idea of Rock 'n' Roll that was about Jesus. This first generation of Christian rockers faced a serious dilemma—the dilemma of existence. How could rock music even be Christian? How could a Christian play rock? For most churches, it was easy to dismiss rock as sinful, but there was a minority who understood that Rock n' Roll was the heart language of the new generation. They understood that rebellion from some of their parents' values (namely materialism and racial segregation) could be virtuous. They understood that Jesus transcended cultural expression. They were the Jesus Movement.

Some have tried to locate the origin of the movement to one church, like Chuck Smith's Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, CA, or one artist, like Larry Norman. Yet, the origins of Jesus Rock, like the origins of Rock 'n' Roll, are much more difficult to pin down. All over the Country musicians were melding the message of Jesus with the music of the times. Although a minority, churches in various parts of the country encouraged Christians to redeem Rock 'n' Roll. Likewise, many artists would forsake a lifestyle of sexual promiscuity and drugs for a radical relationship with Jesus Christ. They were known as Jesus Freaks. Their movement: the Jesus Movement. Their music: Jesus Music. Elton John even sang about them. They were Christian Hippies. Their message was about salvation, but their music would still rock.

Well, it would sort of rock. The fact remains that much of the Christian Rock music of the 1960s was never recorded. Recording costs were prohibitive and quality was low. Low quality was especially a problem for the heavier music of the late 60s. No matter, folk music was where it was at anyway. This was the era of Bob Dylan, Neil Young, and David Crosby. Much of the memorable Christian Rock from this era reflects these influences. Love Song, Sweet Comfort Band, 2nd Chapter of Acts, Randy Stonehill, and Larry Norman are just a few examples.

Speaking of Larry Norman. Norman is to Christian Rock what Elvis Presley is to Rock n' Roll. He wasn't the first but it is impossible to tell the story without him. He, more than anyone, is associated with the origins of Christian rock. His "Why should the Devil Have All the Good Music?" attempted to reconcile the dilemma of Christianity and Rock. His "Sweet Song of Salvation" became the anthem of the Jesus Movement and his "Great American Novel" is a scathing challenge to American values in the age of the space race in the tradition of Bob Dylan.

By the mid-1970s folk-based Christian music was well established and even accepted in some circles. Rock n' Roll, however, had gotten edgier. It was time for Christian Rock to really rock. It was time for Petra and the Resurrection Band. These bands attempted to preach the gospel with the blues-rock of the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin. Both had remarkably long careers and while their styles changed with the times, they consistently made their music about the gospel of Jesus. Petra would go on to make their name synonymous with Christian Rock throughout the 80s and 90s. They would also continue to rock.

The first generation of Christian Rockers faced opposition from all angles. They were scorned by the mainstream because of their commitment to Jesus and their denunciation of drugs and illicit sex. They were rebuked by much of the Church for

even trying to redeem the music of the world. Still, they kept on message. They focused mostly on salvation and the change brought by Jesus. As can be seen in the playlist, there also seems to be a significant interest in eschatology, which was apparently brought about by the fear of the atomic bomb.

The desire to redeem Rock n' Roll made it necessary to create a musical subgenre in which the lyrics set Christian Rock apart from "secular." While this created a false dichotomy between the sacred and the secular that Christian artists still face today, their singular focus on Jesus made their movement a success. Thousands came to a saving faith through the Jesus Movement. Today the instruments and rhythms of Rock can be heard in the majority of churches across the country.

This is most certainly an epoch on the history of the Christian church worth noting. For those Christians who enjoy rock music, this is your story. We hope you enjoy this less-than-exhaustive playlist. Sadly, due to the age of these recordings, and other issues, many great songs and artists are not available on Spotify. We did the best we could with what we had available. Please, seek out these trailblazing artists and bands we highlighted above. We also hope you leave your comments and share this series of articles. Let's not forget our past.

This is Part One of a five part series exploring the history of Christian Rock and Roll Music.

To read Part Two where we looked at the popular rock bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Three covering the visionary bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Four covering the music of the late 1990s through the early 2000s, click [here](#).

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Wild Card Round Preview (The NFL on REO)

Tennessee at Kansas City

The Tennessee Titans are big underdogs in the Wild Card match up with the Kansas City Chiefs. This is not surprising. The Titans are without their starting running back, they have played poorly on offense for most of the season, and they are short on playoff experience. The Chiefs, on the other hand, have an explosive offense, a very successful head coach, and are playing at home. Even as a Titans fan I admit that it makes sense that the Chiefs are a 9 point favorite.

Maybe it is the homer in me, but I expect this game to be close. The Chiefs have not won a home playoff game since 1993. This will be their sixth try and my sources are telling me their fans are nervous. On the Titans side QB Marcus Mariota is looking healthier than he has most of this season. In their playoff clinching victory last week he ran the ball several times with a good amount of success. Something he has not done most of this season due to injury. The Titans defense has also played well, especially against the run, in the majority of games this season.

The Chiefs are a streaky team. They started off 5-0 and looked to be the best team in the NFL. They went into a 1-6 tailspin and appeared to be choking away their playoff spot. Then they rebounded and finished 4-0 to win their division and get a home game in the playoffs. Unfortunately for the Titans they Chiefs are on a hot streak right now and should win a tightly contested game. Final score prediction – KC over TN 24-20.

– Mike Lytle

Atlanta at Los Angeles (Rams)

Last year at this time we would have all been surprised to find that the LA Rams were even in the playoffs. The fact is, they are not only in the playoffs, but are expected to beat the reigning-NFC-champion Falcons by a touchdown. The new-in-town Rams have taken the NFL by storm and are trying to recreate the greatest show on turf. The Rams offense has been able to put up over 30 points in 8 games this year and over 25 points in 12 games. They average a league-high 29.9 points per game. They are a well-balanced offense that has only failed to execute a handful of time. Jared Golf has proven to be a quality quarterback and as long as Todd Gurley gets plenty of touches, the Rams should be able to put up points on Atlanta. Their defense, for the most part, has gotten the job done. With defensive genius Wade Phillips calling the shots, there is reason to have confidence that they can keep the Rams in the game.

Despite being the underdogs, I am picking the Falcons to win this game. The Falcons struggled early in the year, but they seemed to turn it around starting with week 10 against the cowboys. They have only lost two games since that time and both to strong teams. When push comes to shove, I have more confidence in Matt Ryan than Jared Golf. Ryan's experience in the playoffs will be invaluable in picking apart the Wade

Phillips' defense. Perhaps more importantly, I trust Julio Jones to make big catches for his team. Sure, he has struggled to find the end zone this season, but big players live for big games. Julio was made for this moment.

Regardless of who wins, I expect this one to be a shootout. Falcons over Rams 35-30.

– David Lytle

Buffalo at Jacksonville

The Buffalo Bills enter the playoffs as the darlings of the NFL. For this storied franchise, it has been a long time (1999 season) since they have played postseason football, and it took a number of seemingly miraculous things to happen for them to finally break through this season. It is a great story and while I am happy for the team and their fans, great stories do not equal great teams, and the Bills are not a great team. They were a bottom half of the league team in both offensive and defensive statistics. They don't do any one thing really well, and do most things just good enough to get by. And LeSean McCoy being less than 100% is a back breaker.

On the other side, the Jacksonville Jaguars have been objectively good this season. They are one of the top two defenses in the league by any measurements that matter. And not to be outdone, they are the number five scoring team in the league. Their weaknesses are inexperience and Blake Bortles. While Bortles has been mostly solid this season, is there anyone out there that has any real confidence that Bad Bortles won't rear its ugly head at a critical moment?

Bortles will Bortle, the Bills are average, but the unit with the most talent on the field, the Jags defense, will dominate. Jags 30 Bills 10.

Carolina at New Orleans

In my humble opinion this is the most crucial game of the weekend. Simply because a strong case can be made for the winner being the NFC favorite even if they will not have home field. Many people would look at Philly, Minnesota and the L.A. Rams and point to either struggles or playoff inexperience at QB as cause for concern. As is well documented on REO by now, not me. I have less faith in the Top 3 NFC seeds mainly because none of them have won a playoff game literally since George W. Bush lived at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

That is not the case for the Panthers and Saints. On the road side you have a team that just went to the Super Bowl two years ago and were steamrolled by one of the more impressive defensive efforts by Denver we have ever seen in a game that significant. Carolina isn't as good an offense as their Super Bowl year but they do have Christian McCaffrey now, and Cam Newton still plays with a swagger that belies his less-than-elite stats and it makes a difference.

On the home side, you have a team with a very unique weapon in former-SEC two-headed monster RB Mark Alvin Ingram Kamara (combined 1850 yards rushing, 139 receptions and 25 total TDs). And also for only the third time in Drew Brees' 12 years with the franchise, the defense finished in the Top 10 in fewest points given up. It's uncanny how Brees has played with a Top 13 defense by this criteria five times in New Orleans and has made the playoffs every time and has played with a 25th or worse defense by this criteria six times and missed the playoffs every time. The one exception to this trend was the year NO won the Super Bowl with the 20th ranked defense.

In addition to being at home, I give New Orleans the advantage because of Brees. He has exceptional playoff stats in his career (320 YPG, a 4:1 TD:Int ratio) and has lost numerous times because his D could not get a stop, most notoriously against San Fransisco in 2011 when he led them to 18 fourth quarter points and still lost (Let it be noted that Drew Brees has far and away the most 4th TD passes in NFL history to give his team the lead in a game his teams would lose, nearly twice as many as the #2 guy). Their D is nowhere close to Denver in 2015 or even Minnesota this year, but they will be good enough to help New Orleans win this game and probably at least two more. I'll say New Orleans 31, Carolina 20.

– Gowdy Cannon

The NFL and the Myth of Parity (The NFL on RE0)

The NFL and the Myth of Parity

by Mike Lytle

It is pretty much universally accepted that the NFL wants parity around the league. In 1992 the league introduced unrestricted free agency which gave every team access to the same pool of players. In 1994 a league wide salary cap was adopted which meant that every team had the exact same limit on what they could spend on players. No matter how deep the owner's pockets were or how much money the team generated from

their fans the playing field was, at least theoretically, level. I don't dispute these facts and I completely agree that the NFL wants every team to have a chance to compete for a Super Bowl. This is not like college football where teams like Alabama and Ohio State are simply more talented than just about every team they play and should compete for a title just about every year. While teams like Indiana and Vanderbilt will be lucky to post a winning record once every five years.

Anyone who follows the league knows that on average there are six new playoff teams each year (out of twelve) and that each fall just about every fan base feels like their team has a chance to do something special if things break right for them. It is one of the reasons that despite negative publicity and a recent drop in the ratings the NFL is still the highest rated sport in our country by a pretty wide margin.

If we left it at that I think we would all agree that there is parity in the NFL and most would agree that that is a good thing. Unfortunately many fans and even respected sports media members want to take it further. Just about every year, especially if a dominant team does not establish themselves early in the season, you will hear a chorus of complaints. They say things like "the NFL wants every team to finish 8-8" or "there are no good teams this year, everyone is somewhere between bad or mediocre".

I want to be clear that this is a ridiculous position that is not supported by any of the evidence we have at our disposal. Each and every year there are great teams. Each and every year there are terrible teams. The league will never have anything close to a bunch of middle of the pack teams. It just won't happen. Unlike the NBA or college football we might not know who the great or terrible teams will be before the season starts, but rest assured they will emerge every season.

Let's look at the numbers. I decided to go back to the year 2000 partially because it is a nice round number and partially

because the cries of “too much parity” started in the late 90s when the salary cap had crippled previous dynasties like the 49ers and the Cowboys. If the NFL is really a race to the middle like some say we would expect to see very few, if any, really great teams and very few, if any, really bad teams from year to year.

I (arbitrarily!) decided that the mark of a very good/great team should be 13 wins. A 13-3 record is an 81.25 winning percentage. If you are going up against highly paid professionals each week and can win over 80% of the time then you are doing something right. Since the year 2000 there has been at least one 13 win (or better) team each season except for two. In 2002 there were three 12 win teams, but nobody reached 13 or more. In 2014 there were four 12 win teams.

On the flip side, if you are winning three or fewer games in a season then you just aren't very good. Since 2000 there has been only one season when at least one team did not finish with 3-13 or worse. That season 4-12 was the worst record in the league.

What do these numbers tell us? The main lesson is that virtually every year there are great teams in the NFL that win over 80% of their games. Most of the time there are a few teams like this per season. There are also really terrible teams in the league virtually every season that win less than 20% of their games.

The second lesson is to ignore sports radio and TV personalities who need to fill several hours each week. They fall to the temptation of overstating things. Fans do this as well, but at least they are not getting paid for their terrible opinions. This season when the Patriots and Steelers started more slowly than expected and no dominant team was emerging early in the season I heard the cries. I knew they would be proven wrong and sure enough the Patriots and Steelers are both 9-2 and on pace to win 13 games each. The

Eagles are even better as they are on pace to go 14-2. On the other end of the spectrum the Browns are 0-11 and the 49ers are 1-10. So much for parity.

REO Top Ten: Pies

Thanksgiving may primarily be about a heart attitude, but is there any image we associate more with the day than food? And is there any food other than turkey that we think about more than dessert? And is there any dessert we love more at Thanksgiving than pie?

With that in mind, REO had another round of voting with abrasive arguments, snide comments and manhood questioning. All over pie. Here are the ten that came out on top, in reverse order:

10. Apple Pie



Gowdy and I had a hard fought battle over who would write a tribute to the goodly apple pie. In the end, I slew him with my gleaming scimitar and then ate some apple pie. Kidding. I didn't slay him and I haven't had apple pie in some time.

I have never made an apple pie, but I have had the honor and privilege of being on the receiving end of masters of the art of apple pie cookery. In my mind, there are few pies as American as apple pie. Maybe pumpkin, pecan, or cherry. For my money, though, apple pie beats out these worthy opponents as far as U.S. citizenship. The apple pie can be deserved in a variety of different and very delicious ways. I have personally had so many superb types and styles that it is difficult to say an apple pie absolutely has to be in such and such a way to be a work of art. Two things, however, I do consider crucial in all varieties of apple pie: 1) A good, substantial crust and 2) a side helping of vanilla ice cream. This second is an extremely important issue. There is no adequate substitute. Anything else is uncivilized and un-American. (Ben Plunkett)

9. Key Lime Pie



I will be the first to admit that Key Lime pie is not for everyone. Unfortunately, all great people and even great foods have their detractors. After all, many are called, but few are chosen. If you like a bit of sour with all that sweet then this is the dessert for you. That delicious graham cracker crust puts it over the top. If Key Lime pie is wrong then I don't want to be right. (Mike Lytle)

8. Cherry Pie



Maybe apple pie is more “all American” but cherry pie tastes so much better that it should be the pie that represents our great nation in all international pie competitions. Nothing says THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA better than a homemade cherry pie with lattice crust cooling on the window sill of a little house out in the country. Topped with vanilla ice cream or even whipped cream cherry pie never disappoints. The awful 80s rock band Warrant named a terrible song (and album) after this great dessert but even that travesty could not ruin it for me. My only regret is that I did not fight harder to move this higher up on our list. (Mike Lytle)

7. Snickers Pie



Snickers won our best candy bracket so the built-in taste of Snickers in anything is going to be gold. I didn't grow up with it in pie form so for the last few years I have had to make up for decades of no Snickers pie. I often look for Snickers flavored anything when going to a place that offers deserts and I am often rewarded. So putting the best candy with one of the best forms of a dessert is a can't miss. And it didn't miss, landing in our Top Ten. (Gowdy Cannon)

6. Cheesecake



Back in 2016 I did a March Madness bracket on best dessert and cheesecake won. By a landslide. It dominated the field like the '98 Yankees. The final score of the championship was 74-43. It was like watching Reagan vs. Mondale.

I heartily concurred with the result. Candy excluded, I don't know that there is anything I enjoy more for the old sweet tooth than a well-done cheesecake. Having Eli's and the Cheesecake Factory close to my Chicago address is sublime. Heck, I'll even take the \$8.99 version from Aldi. Cheesecake is that good.

True story: one of my friends that used to live in Chicago wept the first time she saw a cheesecake at Eli's. Literally cried. I mean real tears, streaming down the face as if watching the *Friends* episode where Ross and Rachel break up. What more can you say for this dessert? (Gowdy Cannon)

5. Peanut Butter Pie



I've always enjoyed Peanut Butter pie. I'm a big fan of pie and of peanut butter, so the combination of the two is right in my wheelhouse. That said, a few years ago, I was at my mother's house and she had baked a pie earlier that day from a new recipe. It was a peanut butter pie with around half the sugar as the typical peanut butter pie. My mom is a great cook but I doubted that a pie with half the sugar would be something I would enjoy. I also was pretty confident it was another of my mother's attempts to help me to do something about some of my baby fat that had proven dreadfully difficult to get rid of. [1. Side note: When baby fat hangs around for nearly 40 years, can we honestly still call it baby fat? I contend that's a bit of a gray area.] My love of pie overruled my suspicion of my mother's true motives and I ate the pie. After two pieces, I pushed away from the table with complete confidence that it was the best peanut butter pie I had ever tasted. (Phill Lytle)

4. Fudge



We were unable to find a volunteer to write the blurb for Fudge Pie, even though it finished in our top five. So, in place of another well-written, witty, and intelligent blurb, we are going to peel back the curtain and let you see how the sausage is made at RE0. Here is a sampling of our discussion about who should write the blurb:

Mike Lytle: *I like fudge pie alright but not enough to write a blurb for it. Who was pushing it during the bracket?*

Ben Plunkett: *Good question. I don't even remember ever eating it.*

Phill Lytle: *Fudge beat out:*

Banana Cream (1st round)

Strawberry (2nd round)

Peanut Butter (3rd round)

It lost to Pecan in the Final Four.

I'm pretty sure I voted for it in the first two rounds as I don't like those other pies. I know I voted for Peanut Butter over it. (I was the only one evidently as PB lost 1-5 against Fudge in the elite 8.)

Ben Plunkett: *What in the world was I thinking? Not only haven't I tried Fudge Pie, I love Peanut Butter Pie.*

after a few minutes of doing a bit more research on how the vote went down...

Phill Lytle: *I was wrong. I voted for Fudge. I know why. At that time, I hadn't tasted my mom's Peanut Butter pie – which is far superior to any Fudge pie I have ever had. Ben, you voted for PB over fudge. You were the lone PB supporter.*

Nathan Patton: *FWIW (I don't know if it's already been mentioned, but I'm too lazy to check) today is National Peanut Butter Fudge Day... also National Absurdity Day, though that's not as relevant... though maybe it is...*

And there's your blurb for Fudge Pie.

3. Chess Pie



Chess pie is above all the tired and mealy-mouthed protestations made by foodies, elitists, and health conscious. They decry its simplicity. They denounce its unashamed reliance on ingredients we have been told are no longer acceptable to a refined and mature palate. Chess pie hears their high-pitched, meddlesome squawking and rises above the fray. Chess pie hears the noise and responds with silence. Chess pie is itself the answer. Before its face questions die away. What other answer would suffice?

Check mate. (Phill Lytle)

2. Pumpkin Pie



This remains by far my favorite kind of pie. My love affair with this slice of lusciousness began with my mom's masterpieces. These have yet to be beat in mine eyes. However, (and this an incredibly strong "however.") there is something about any pumpkin pie when capably done that earns it this elite place on our list. That flawless blend of pumpkin and spices. That sweet, sweet ooze in the mouth. That harnessing in pie form of the fall and Thanksgiving spirit. Perfection. (Ben Plunkett)

1. Pecan Pie



A great pecan pie can be difficult to make. Actually, I don't know this to be true from first-hand experience. I've learned it's best to only be involved in the of eating of pies and not the process of making pies. Which is fortunate for me because I get to reap the delicious rewards from excellent bakers like my wife and mother. It's also fortunate for the world because they are not subjected to my pitiful culinary creations. Some of my baking attempts ended up as twisted monstrosities. I've yet to see masses brandishing pitchforks and torches gathered outside my house, though the sight wouldn't surprise me. But I digress! My taste buds tell me that not all pies are created equal. Some varieties are better than others. And even among a specific variety like pecan, some turn out superior to others. They also inform me that when a pecan pie has just the right balance of taste, consistency, and sweetness then it's the pie which all others look up to in envy! Like so many things in life balance is the key. "I am one with the Pie and the Pie is with me." "May the Pie be with you... always." (Mark Sass)

Rambling Ever On Presents: Overrated/Underrated

We're back with more infallible opinions on those things in our culture that are a little too respected and things that need more love.

Ben Plunkett

Overrated – Big Toe

Everyone thinks he's the cool guy on the foot campus because he's this big old Hoss fella and he's the only piggy that actually does any work by going to market. All that is well and good, but he is also the only piggy that gets hurt. You ever think about that? So you're getting up in the middle of the night. Nine times out of ten, you are going to stub a toe and every single one of those times it the big toe and his bulbous ways.

Underrated – Pinky Toe

This is the dude that went wee, wee, wee all the way home. Okay, that does seem pretty lame, but people aren't asking about the context. It's all because all the other toes are so mean and stuff. So really, it all comes down to his sorry family life: His miserable brothers. There's the hifalutin biggest brother, the second eldest who stays at home all day playing video games, the third oldest who always eats all the food, and the pretentious fourth brother who constantly preaches on the many excellences of veganism. All in all, the poor guy has sorry role models and therefore has good reason to wee, wee, wee all time. Bless his heart.

Mike Lytle

Overrated – [Funyuns](#). I am not a fan of these artificial, processed, disgusting things that are made to look like the letter “o”. They are a disgrace to the chip family as well as the onion ring family. It is really hard to bring shame to two different types of food, but Funyuns pull it off easily. The fact that the word “fun” is in their name when they are opposite of fun is the cherry on top of this failure sundae. When most of your main ingredients sound like the names of villains in Harry Potter[2. Ferrous Sulfate would be exhibit A] then you have a problem.

Underrated – **Pork Rinds**. NOW WE ARE TALKING! Sorry about yelling, but I get excited about frying pork skin. They are natural, they are low in carbs, they are a great source of protein, but most importantly they are delicious. Whether you prefer plain, bbq, or hot and spicy, there is a pork rind for you. They are great served fresh at a state or county fair, but they are also great in a bag from your local Walmart or gas station convenience store. Sure they are high in sodium and fat, but most of us need more sodium and fat in our diet anyway so that is not necessarily a negative[3. This is completely false as most of us do NOT need more fat or sodium in our diets.]. In Spanish, they are called chicharrones which makes them sound even more scrumptious.

Gowdy Cannon

Overrated: Deep Dish Pizza from anywhere

Underrated: Frozen \$2.29 Pizza from [Aldi](#)

Oh, do I get made fun of for this in my church in Chicago. But I must keep it ¹⁰⁰ since the movie *Creed* taught me to. For pizza, I prefer a balance of ingredients. Deep dish has far too much sauce, which I assume is the point. The tomato sauce

is a role player on a good pizza to me, not the Allen Iverson of tastes. Hogging the ball.

I can, and have, eaten the big frozen Aldi pizzas five times in a week. They are simple yet thoroughly satisfying. I still remember when they raised the price from \$1.99 to \$2.29 at my local store. I wept for days. Because 30 cents over thousands of pizzas really adds up.

Phill Lytle

Overrated: Candy Corn

In 2016, [USA Today](#) conducted a survey to determine the favorite candy for each state. The people of the great state of Tennessee, my state, picked Candy Corn as their favorite.

Candy Corn.

I don't want to speak ill of my state, but this might be the dumbest thing Tennessee has ever done. Candy Corn is vile. It is a disgrace to candy. It is a disgrace to corn. It is sickly-sweet with the consistency and texture of hardened ear wax.

Underrated: Corn

Corn is the most underrated of all vegetables[1. I realize there is a lot of debate on this point. Some consider corn a vegetable, a fruit, and a grain. Basically, it's the holy trinity of food.]. It is versatile: you can put corn in just about anything and it makes that dish better. Corn on the cob – particularly grilled corn on the cob – is about the tastiest thing in the world. Other great examples of corn usage: Corn Casserole. Cornbread. Corn tortillas. Corn chowder. Cornhole!!!

Corn is king.

Ben Plunkett

Overrated – White Coffee (Overcreamed coffee)

This is what I call cups of creamer/milk with a little bit of coffee added. A lot of people apparently consider this the greatest thing since the invention of goat yoga. I have no problem with milk. I love milk. Milk is good people. But when I drink milk, I drink milk. When I drink coffee, I drink coffee. A wise coffee drinker once told me that you should never trust coffee drinkers who corrupt their coffee. I think there might be something to that.

Underrated – Black Coffee

And that brings me to the underrated king of coffees. It ain't just me, folks. There are dozens of us! Dozens! I'm thinking about starting a Black Coffee Matters movement. I think such a group has potential to make a true difference in the Java world. Who's with me?!

Phill Lytle

Overrated: Sleeping in

Sleeping in was fun when I was 13. Sleeping in stopped being fun when I became a man. Sleeping in is painful now that I am nearly 40. If I sleep in (basically any time after 9:00 AM) I feel like death the rest of the day. Plus, I feel like I wasted a good portion of my day.

Underrated: Naps

Naps were awful when I was a kid. Naps were essential when I was in college. Naps are glorious retreats to the world of slumber now that I am nearly 40! As much as it drives my wife crazy, I am able to take a nap every day at work on my lunch break. As a teacher, she is unable to do that, and so she resents my happiness and sleep.[1. She doesn't resent it. That

was a joke. Or maybe she does resent it a little. I don't know. I'm too relaxed and rested to really notice or care...due to all the naps.]

Mike Lytle

Overrated – Day old sushi. I am going to get very personal with this one. I once ate day old sushi that I purchased at a grocery store. I ate half of it the day I bought it and it was fine. I ate the other half the next day and it was not fine. Or perhaps I should say I was not fine. I have a pretty impressive record of stomach issues during my lifetime. This was especially true when I was younger. The sushi I ate that day messed me up for over a month. Most every topic covered in this article is a matter of personal opinion, but this one is fact – DON'T EAT DAY OLD SUSHI!

Underrated – Day old chili. I love fresh chili. I have had the honor and privilege of being judge/scorekeeper for several chili cook-offs and have tasted hundreds of chili varieties that were entered for competition. I have savored every moment. That being said, there is just something about eating chili the day after (or even a couple days after) it was first prepared. The flavors have more time to coalesce. The spices and seasonings have much needed time to meld with all the other ingredients and produce something truly special. Take your time, don't rush...you will thank me later.

Gowdy Cannon

Overrated: Pronouncing 'gif' with a Hard G

Underrated: Pronouncing 'gif' with a Soft G

“Gift” is an exception to an English pronunciation rule. “Giraffe” is the rule. I’m not even going to argue this. As a Level 1 ESL teacher I already spend way too much time trying to explain why OU has six pronunciations, why “both” and “bother” have completely different O and TH sounds and why “February” and “Wednesday” have the most random, ridiculous silent Rs and Ds (and if you think about it, the second E in Wednesday is silent as well...you can’t make this stuff up). All words we add henceforth need to be consistent. Think of the children! (And the immigrants)