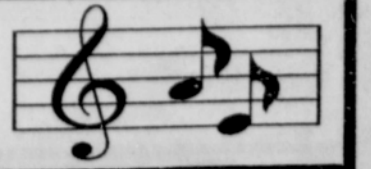




ENTERTAINMENT



BOYZ N THE HOOD

Art In Realism license to controversy



The Cost of Success

by Sharon Camarda

The real star of *Boyz N The Hood* is writer/director John Singleton—just for managing to get his film made and negotiating a three-year deal with Columbia Pictures. Of the 400 plus films released each year, only 19 by black directors were slated for release this year. Singleton is now riding the wave of young African American filmmakers cashing in on Hollywood purses. But at what cost?

Set in South Central Los Angeles, *Boyz* chronicles the lives of three boys beginning in 1984 and then moves to the present, when the realities of neighborhood violence hit the teenagers. It is not a "gang" film, although gang violence permeates the culture depicted by Singleton. *Boyz* is also not a "music video" film; there is no extraordinary cinematography and the soundtrack doesn't overshadow the film's substance. It is also not an "action" film although there are chases, police choppers flying overhead, wailing sirens, fights and killings. The film is about learning to make rational choices in a social pressure cooker. But can young, impressionable viewers separate artistic license from surface sensationalism? Singleton is presumptuous if he expects them to.

Singleton grew up in South Central and translates the gritty, unnerving reality well, but his inexperience as a filmmaker shows particularly in the never-ending barrage of moralizing messages and symbolism pushed into scene after scene. The blatant truth that gang involvement leads to death, selling drugs is bad business, moth-

ers addicted to crack risk their children's lives, unprotected sex brings babies, etc. is not new to a viewing audience. The real lessons in *Boyz* come during rare moments of subtlety—a football is taken by teenage street punks; one of them sees enough of himself as a youngster in a good little boy to give the football back, a father puts his son's well-being before his own social life, tears are shed and are not a sign of weakness between those who love each other.

Singleton doesn't give his audience much subtext from his characters, though he attempts to show relationships wrought with conflict and emotion. We know that Tre's (Cuba Gooding, Jr.) parents are divorced, but we don't know why. We know that Furious (Larry Fishburne) says the army is no place for a black man (he served in Vietnam), but we don't know why. A black policeman confronts the main characters on several occasions and is brutal and racist, but we don't know why.

What we do know is that *Boyz N The Hood* is bold and timely, and a formidable first effort by 23-year-old Singleton. It is obvious he wanted this portrait of urban survival, and hope for a better life, to do so much. Sadly, recent violence in several cities where the film was shown (and the hungry media coverage) may impede artistic progress by a growing community of black filmmakers. The very stereotypes Singleton wanted *Boyz N The Hood* to deny are being associated with the film. That irony, like *Boyz*, is a tragedy.

John Singleton, 23-year-old writer/director of *Boyz N The Hood*, grew up in the neighborhoods depicted in the drama and said the acts of violence were "indicative of the degeneration of American society, not a reflection of my film, which is about family, love and friendship."

Teach for Today's Truth

By Tony Washington

If one has the opportunity to view *Boyz N The Hood* he or she will see the definite impact Brothers and Sisters of the community should be aware of. Be aware of the fact that approximately 40% of the homes in the community have a single parent foundation, and this needs to be addressed. When someone doesn't have guidelines or a stable home to live in, it's almost a promise that all good will not come from the situation.

Boyz N The Hood is a great picture! It illustrated the need for unity among blacks, families and the need for worldwide peace. It's a shame that every time you hear about a film that's gang-related it gets bad reviews because it promotes violence. People need to be aware of the content and meaning of these films and have a better education of the "real deal." Wake up, America. It's just dirt and it's just bad that the familiar don't give their kids education and guidance.

Boyz N The Hood is about a father who wants the best education for his son and just happens to live in south central LA where "gang" is a popular word. And why not? There are gun shops and liquor stores on every other block; that's one reason why crime is so heavy. And also answers why these kids don't have a chance to survive.

Tre's father was great in raising him; responsible, firm and loving, and is an example of what needs to be done in your own Hood! Think about it.

Reality or Sensationalism

by Billy Don Moore

The irony of the motion picture *Boyz N The Hood* is that it will not be remembered for the positive messages the film deploys.

Although this is not a gang film per se, it does reinforce gang violence and gang activity in African American communities around the country. In my opinion writer/director Singleton is trying to present a positive message in some very troubled times. What Singleton is trying to get across to young Afro-Americans is that we need to change learned behavior. The fact that one out of every 21 Afro-American males can expect to be shot in his lifetime by another black male shows a gross disrespect that Afro-Americans have for their race.

In *Boyz*, Tre Styles (played by Cuba Gooding, Jr.) goes to live with his fa-

ther so his mom can work on getting a degree from graduate school in order to live a bourgeois lifestyle. The style of life with his dad became a form of boot camp. Tre and Ricky (Morris Chestnut) want to go to college but the "hood" influence is so strong and deadly that Ricky ends up dead and his verbally abused half-brother, Doughboy (Ice Cube), seeks revenge.

Again, death brings about more death. When does the killing stop and the reality that although this is a motion picture—kids cannot handle the messages or mixed signals a movie of this nature sends out?

I feel the movie was a work of art from an acting standpoint and director's viewpoint. What I would like to do is get the gangs out of the neighborhood so the boys, our young children can reclaim it.

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It's one of the year's best films."
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