

# Foxy brown and boyz n the hood: a comparison



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In Eldridge Cleaver's introduction to *The Genius of Huey P. Newton*, he states that when reading the essays of Newton, "one can picture Huey as he was when he wrote them: hard pressed by pigs who he knew were plotting to kill him. With pigs breathing down his neck, Huey was racing against time that had almost run out to get the information down on paper so that no matter what happened to him the roar of the Panther would still exist as a legacy to our people and our struggle." (Cleaver, ii) This mythological larger-than-life representation of Huey P. Newton is in sharp contrast to Newton's ignoble death from a violent drug deal in the 1980s. In many ways, Huey P. Newton can illustrate the major differences between the movies *Foxy Brown* and *Boys N' The Hood*. In the 1970s, Newton was a hero and a martyr as well as a representative of an African American masculinity that took pride in aggression. In the 1980s, Newton was a victim of a system of violence that came with urban blight as well as the neglected inner city. After the civil rights movement and the liberalism of the 1970s, the Reagan Revolution ushered in a period of conservatism that included free market economics and a concerted attack on affirmative action programs. For many African Americans living below the poverty line, gang activity with all the dangerous connotations became the best methods of securing income and safety.

In *Foxy Brown*, the racial connotations were in dialogue with a racist society that feared black sexuality and used the image of the hulking sexual black man as a way of pushing a racist agenda. Blaxploitation movies began with Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song in which sexuality was played up. "With the glamorization of the ghetto, however, came also the elevation of the Pimp/outlaw/rebel as folk hero. Van Peebles played up this new

sensibility, and his film was the first to glorify the pimp. It failed, however, to explain the social conditions that made the pimp such an important figure.”

(Bogle, 236) Overtly racist characters tend to be white villains. In Foxy Brown, the mobsters are the villains who refer to black characters as niggers and receive their comeuppance as their real life counterparts never did.

Drugs and prostitution are both referred to as forms of slavery. In Boys N' the Hood, the most racist character is a black police officer who has two very important scenes. In one scene, he tells Laurence Fishbourne's father character that it would have been better if he shot the burglar. In another scene, he holds a gun to Cuba Gooding jr.'s head assuming that he's a gang member and talks about how much he loves the power to kill him. Instead of racism being an external issue, it is internalized and the racist attitude informs the black-on-black crime that the movie highlights. When violence happens, it is tragic and unnecessary. Rap Culture

One of the ironies of Boyz N' The Hood is that it was sold on Ice Cube's reputation as a gangsta rapper who sold a hyper-masculine view of inner city life; however, almost every scene in the movie is a refutation of that heroic image. Ice Cube's character in the movie is a variation of the character that he would cultivate in his career as a rapper. In Boyz N'The Hood, the rapper myth is a self-destructive myth that leaves most people dead. The tragedy at the end of the movie involves young men trying to prove their masculinity first with a display of firearms and then with a series of revenge killings, the first one for “ talking shit.”

Even though Foxy Brown was made before rap, most of the movie enables the mythology of rap culture. Blaxploitation was a celebration of the hyper-

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masculine image of black men and Pam Grier's Foxy Brown plays by the masculine rules. Her power comes from her ability to imitate that masculinity. Status of Women

Even though Foxy Brown may seem like the more feminist movie, it was filmed in a genre that did not traditionally uphold women as useful members of society. It plays by the rules of action movies with Pam Grier as a woman who shoots criminals as her only outlet. She also castrates men and overpowers the old guard. Often she is hypersexualized with visions of her breasts throughout and posing as a prostitute. Even though the film stars a female character, it barely passes the Bechdel Test (2 women have a conversation about something other than a man) when Foxy Brown talks to a prostitute about financial problems.

By contrast, Boyz N The Hood is a movie about young men and it frequently portrays those men as calling women 'hos' and 'bitches.' Ice Cube has many of the "zinger" lines like the time when he is challenged for calling the character Shalika a ho and he apologizes while calling her a bitch. Yet, these are not ideal characters and the character of Furious played by Laurence Fishbourne provides a mature adult counterpoint to the young men's relationships with women. The few women characters are strong independent women who do their best in bad situations. They have less screen time, but they make their presence known, especially Angela Bassett who plays the mother of the protagonist who decides that he needs his father in order to stay away from the violence. Conclusion

While Foxy Brown endorses the violent hyper-masculine culture that would later be known as rap culture, Boyz N the Hood examines hip hop culture including its casual sexism for signs of a social order in turmoil. Even though both films are based upon the hyper-masculine standards of rap culture, Boyz N the Hood is a much more mature film as it allows for examination and reflection on exactly why these cultural norms come about and is not afraid to criticize them.

## **Works Cited**

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Cleaver, Eldridge " Introduction" Jan. 2, 1970 in The Genius of Huey P. Newton. New York: Awesome Records (June 1, 1993).