

Cultural analysis of boyz n the hood essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Boyz Next Door Up until the early 1990s, the decay of inner-city America largely went unnoticed by the general American public. However, the rise in popularity of gangster rap and the release of such films as *New Jack City* and *Menace II Society* drew the public's attention toward the largely ignored urban areas. Of all the films in the genre that came out, though, one in particular stood out. *Boyz N the Hood*, directed by John Singleton, became widely acknowledged as the definitive film for inner-city African Americans.

Regardless of age, race, or religion, the film's powerful and gritty imagery captivated audiences nationwide. Though many Americans had a general idea of the rough lifestyle endured by many inner-city dwellers, the situation wasn't fully exploited until a film, such as *Boyz N the Hood* provided truly realistic imagery to go along with the verbal descriptions many had heard in rap songs. As author John Berger stated in the article "Ways of Seeing," "It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it" (Berger 134). In a sense, *Boyz N the Hood* became the imagery necessary for many people to fully comprehend a lifestyle they had never been exposed to. Though many people had heard of the rough lifestyle experienced by many inner-city teens, the film became the visual the country need to truly recognize how rough it was to overcome the obstacles that stood in the way of many of these teens.

Unfortunately, it took a fictional film to bring to light, and raise awareness for, the many problems facing inner-city African Americans. *Boyz N the Hood* focuses on the lives of three young men growing up in South Central Los Angeles. Tre Styles is a very intelligent teenager, yet still needs the guidance

of his father, Furious, in order to resist to falling into many of the traps that commonly swallow the lives of young black men in the area. Doughboy represents the more stereotypical inner-city male. Throughout his life Doughboy has been in and out of institutions. Seemingly having accepted the fact the he is leading a doomed lifestyle; Doughboy spends his days on the front porch of his house drinking malt liquor.

Lastly, the story follows Ricky the younger brother of Doughboy. Athletically gifted, Ricky is receiving looks from all the powerhouse football programs, yet doesn't have the SAT scores to gain admittance into the schools.

Throughout the film, the trio is forced to overcome many obstacles, from the gang violence that runs rampant in the area to the racial struggles that still plague society, in order to rise above and hopefully someday leave the inner-city. When the film was released in 1991, the United States was in a state of turmoil.

The AIDS pandemic was fully heightened, with celebrities such as Magic Johnson and Freddie Mercury announcing they had contracted the disease. Urban areas rioted everywhere in response to an amateur cameraman captured the brutal beating of Rodney King by several Los Angeles police officers. From coast to coast, racial tensions were at their most prevalent since the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. Globally, the world was changing as well as the once powerful Soviet Union fell apart. Due to these very tense times, the themes displayed in Boyz N the Hood registered particularly hard with many Americans as they were experiencing many of the same problems at the time of the film's release. In some areas, the films message hit so hard that riots broke out at theaters.

As stated in the article, " Screening Race: Responses to Theater Violence at New Jack City and Boyz N the Hood", author Laura Baker states, " The press again widely reported on assaults and one homicide associated with the exhibition of Boyz N the Hood at approximately 20 of the 829 theaters screening the film. The worst of these occurred at the Halsted Twin Outdoor Theater in the south Chicago suburb of Riverdale, where a man was fatally shot in his car by another man as both were leaving the drive-in. Other incidents again ranged from nonfatal stabbings and shootings to fistfights" (Baker 4). The subject matter in the film was so controversial and strikingly realistic that audiences nationwide broke out in rage and rioted.

Culturally the world was experiencing a facelift as well. Popular music was shifting from the larger-than-life hair bands of the 1980s to the gritty gangster rap popularized by artists such as N. W. A. and the 2 Live Crew.

The hip-hop movement was also being felt in the fashion world where the popular styles tended to reflect what popular rappers were wearing in their music videos. As Susan Bordo stated in her article, " Beauty (Re)discovers the Male Body," the mainstream successes of hip-hop, along with the attractive rebellious images displayed by popular artists of the genre, lead to a widespread hip-hop inspired trend in fashion that was popular among all classes of people (Bordo 202). In film, 1991 was the year of the blockbuster. Films such as Terminator 2, Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves, and Beauty and the Beast helped rake in profits like never before seen. Also, the success of Boyz N the Hood set off a spree of films directed towards the black audience with releases such as Menace II Society and Dead Presidents.

Of all the various aspects of Boyz N the Hood that received critical acclaim, the realism of the film, above all, is what made the movie so powerful. Similarly to real life, the characters deal with racism, violence, drug abuse, and poverty on a daily basis. Whereas director John Singleton could have chosen to shy away from some of the issues, so as to reach a broader audience, he attacked them head on to provide a truly powerful film. Instead of copping out and watering down the characters, Singleton stayed true to the reality of the people and presented them in their truest forms, real people with real problems. Also, the characters language was filled with slang commonly used in urban areas. The movie also addressed the hopelessness and frustrations many feel when growing up in the hood.

In his article, "He is a "Bad Mother*S%@! ": Shaft and Contemporary Black Masculinity," author Matthew Henry states, "As a black within a racist social and political hierarchy, he has neither power nor privilege; yet, on the other hand, as a male within a still patriarchal power structure, he has both" (Henry 119). In other words, Henry is explaining how frustrating it is for African-American males to be full of so much pride, yet be so powerless in terms of the great spectrum of American society. Due to their sex, the African-American male feels as if he should be a dominant character as is common among males throughout many societies. However, due to the racial boundaries that much of our country falls victim to, the African-American male commonly has to overcome far more obstacles than a white male would in the same situation. These frustrations build up and lead to the violence and drug abuse that dominates inner-city societies.

Though the movie was purely fictional, the issues it portrayed helped exploit a huge problem in our country. The movie helped humanize a cultural group that many Americans failed to ever recognize. Though the inner-city may be filled with violence and drugs, the people within are still human and have emotions just like everyone else. Commonly one hears of the problems faced by inner-city African Americans, it took the powerful imagery of *Boyz N the Hood* to provide an image to match up with these words as most are never truly exposed to the inner-city areas. One of the truly haunting images from the movie is when the boys, as children, come across a dead body.

The children casually examine the body, to which Tre states, " Don't y'all know that this is a dead body? to which Ric Rock replies, " Yeah, motherfucker, we know that shit. He ain't bothering you, so don't fuck with him" (Singleton). For many people, it was hard to digest the fact that a group of children could so casually handle the sight of a dead body, yet for many in the hood the sight is simply an everyday occurrence. Despite the fact that many inner-city areas are still plagued with the problems explored in the film, *Boyz N the Hood* helped start a movement to eradicate these problems and provide equal opportunities for all, regardless of race or social class. Without the powerful imagery displayed in throughout this film, many Americans would still be in the dark as to how rough the living is in many inner-city areas.

Though many had read articles or heard stories about these areas, the realistic images gave a truly concrete meaning for the American mind to grasp. This film truly put to use the saying that a picture is worth 1000

words. Works Cited Baker, Laura. " Screening race: responses to theater violence at New Jack City and Boyz N the Hood.

" Velvet Light Trap. Fall 1999: 4-16 Berger, John. Ways of Seeing. " Ways of Reading.

Ed. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's 2005.

134-155. Bordo, Susan. " Beauty (Re)discovers the Male Body. " Ways of Reading. Ed.

David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's 2005. 168-213.

Boyz N the Hood. Dir. John Singleton. Perf. Laurence Fishburne, Cuba Gooding Jr. , Ice Cube, and Morris Chestnut.

Columbia, 1991. Henry, Matthew. " He is a " Bad Mother*S%@! #": Shaft and Contemporary Black Masculinity. " African American Review.

Vol. 38 (2004): 119-127