

Boyz in the hood and black freedom fighters

[Philosophy](#), [Freedom](#)



Unite is a common word that comes to mind when debating the themes of *Boyz in the Hood* written by John Singleton and *Black Freedom Fighters in Steel* by Ruth Needleman. *Boyz in the Hood* is a film that follows the lives of a group of young African Americans living in South Central Los Angeles, California. Each main character faces some common struggle modern day children and teens face today. Their fate relies on what they decide to do about their common struggle. In *Black Freedom Fighters in Steel*, you glimpse into the lives of five men connected by one aspect of their lives.

They also must do something in order to survive as blue collar workers during the 20th century. Both these works have one common theme if not more, these boys and these men had to unite together in close friendship and within a union. *Boyz in the Hood* follows one particular group in South Central Los Angeles. Trey Styles along with his friends Ricky, Doughboy, and others all grew up in the same neighborhood living with various struggles, some in common. Trey moved to live with his dad at the age of 10, Ricky and Doughboy, half-brothers, lived across the street from him in a single parent household.

Ricky was raised on the hope and spirit of his mother to be a football star. His brother Doughboy was not given the same hope and dreams from his mother. Trey was raised differently than his friends because he was being raised by a respectable male, Furious Styles. Furious helped prepare Trey for what the future may have in store for him, especially when living in the so called, "ghetto." Although these characters were raised differently they still found strength in numbers, and stuck close together at a very young age.

One example is when they are walking down the tracks and Ricky gets his football hustled from him. Doughboy tries to stick up for his brother even though he fails. They all stood together during that scene when they could have easily been killed by these older guys. Darren, known as Doughboy, grows up deciding to become a part of a street gang, or group. Instead of avoiding the temptation of violence and the dangers of the lifestyle, he becomes sucked right into it. Although not a positive decision, in reality to some it feels like the only choice. The need for protection is essential to survive.

By joining groups, people in various neighborhoods across America, find often false sanctuary and more violence. Darren kept close ties with his friends. They united when it came to protecting themselves from other various groups. One incident would be when all the teens had their cars parked up and down the street and another group walks by and knocks Ricky. When Ricky begins confrontation with the other groups, they all join in. Another incident is when Ricky is shot; although they weren't all there when it happened, Darren and his friends all felt a need to avenge Ricky's death, collectively.

Trey was raised in a very strict and wise household. His mother was a well off business woman who took care of herself and her son until he reached a stage in his life where he was angry. Furious his father took Trey in and taught him specific values and self-discipline. With these values Trey made decisions opposite of a lot of his friends. He took a more optimistic route about living where he lived. He was aware of what goes on but he never

involved himself in it. Trey who was close to his friends didn't completely comply with them.

Ricky and Trey both had the most chances of leaving their town or living past age 25. While Darren and their other friends involved themselves in gang related activities, Trey and Ricky both avoided it. Still because they had all been friends for so long they still stuck together. When Ricky was shot and killed by another group, they all collectively went after that group. Specifically Trey joined them with this activity because he felt strongly about the issue at hand. He had lost his best friend and Darren had lost his brother.

Although Trey didn't fully commit to the retaliation, he stuck by Darren's side and comforted his friend. In Black Freedom Fighters in Steel five men are profiled explaining the struggles around working in Steel and within the union. In the beginning we hear about George Kimbley, who signed up for Steelworker's Organizing Committee as the first African-American. In order for African-Americans to face their struggles of poor working conditions, poor pay, and lack of job opportunities, they had to connect with the majority.

George Kimbley knew that in order to be in the union and make somewhat of a difference, you would have to get people to trust you. What Kimbley means is that white men within the union have to become use to you and learn that their misconceptions are wrong. Many African Americans felt they did not belong within the union because they would be harassed and discriminated against just like they would on the mill floor. Kimbley was one the many that went out and persuaded black steelworkers to join the union, SWOC.

He knew that in order to seek change they must become a part of something bigger. A separate committee for Blacks seemed unreasonable at the specific time. Kimbley felt that in order to meet the goals long term we must first integrate with others so they feel less threatened when requesting solutions. When struggling alongside people opposite than themselves, African-Americans felt a stronger need to cope with feelings that came along with integration and discrimination. Many residents within small African American communities in Gary, Indiana kept close ties.

They all went to the same church, their kids attended same schools, and they went to the same bars and kept in touch. They had a strong sense of community amongst themselves. Many men played cards together, such as George Kimbley and Jesse Reese. These men knew the importance of joining the union in order to receive if not equal better working conditions. They networked, one man would sign a friend up, and then his friend would sign up someone else. Networking, educating and discussing were various ways to get the community pro-union.

One specific example is how the amount of SWOC cards that came in signed by black workers stunned white SWOC participants. This proves that networking was working. Women also played a role in using their community to discuss issues such as organizing. Chain recruiting was widely used. This was used for example by an organizer. He and his wife would throw a dinner party and discuss various issues. By engaging in conversation they could relate on different complaints the other couples may have and convince them to join the union and inform others.

By passing on information about the union the African-American demographic within the steel companies and union were more likely to increase. More membership in the union would allow more chances of bargaining and promotions for minorities. Another example of uniting in Black Freedom Fighters in Steel is through the smaller committees that formed within the union. Many people such as, George Kimbley, felt that this would hinder the positive movement for African-American workers within the union. Others were tired of waiting for change.

They organized themselves within the union into committees such as the Eureka Club, established in 1952 by Curtis Strong, Arthur Adams, and Sylvester Palmer. (p 84) Curtis Strong worked in one of the dirtiest yet most important part of the mill. He explains that the coke plant was an essential step in steel production. If he and others shut down their department then they could shut down the whole mill. This was a very strategic plan in order to get the foreman and department heads to listen. One example is when Strong took a stand against a practice the company used when hiring new workers into the plant.

If the coke plant needed a maintenance worker or apprentice, they would use Virginia Street Hiring. The company would send "appropriate" workers, meaning white, for the specific jobs. Many current black employees were overlooked due to this practice. When Strong requested that coke plant workers be allowed to apply for apprenticeships and was denied, a wildcat strike broke out. Soon after Coke plant workers were able to bid on apprenticeships and better jobs. This was more than what the Steelworker's Organizing Committee had done for job bidding.

Instead of turning to the bigger union, they used their small collective to make a difference for specifically African-American steelworkers. Both these works demonstrate a theme that shows collectiveness. In order to be strong, certain people must band together, which has happened in history so often when it comes to people facing common struggles. Later on in *Black Freedom Fighters in Steel* they discuss how things have changed, beginning in the 1980's. Many people have become too satisfied and have stopped fighting for more. I believe this can play into the themes of both the book and *Boyz in the Hood*.

Briefly, today the world around us has everyone convinced that things can't get any better than this, but can they? When it comes to employment there is only so far we can go, but what about our communities? In the film you see a community that has been ignored. By being neglected from society, things may become worse. Young teens today struggle with constant violence and retaliation. Poverty is proven to cause an increase in violence. By ignoring cities and allowing children to suffer academically we are throwing them into violence. This is also discussed in the book.

Gary, Indiana which has been dismantled ever since the steel industry took a backseat. Many people living within the community lost their jobs, which affected the city's revenue. Schools are in poor condition which can be true for South Central Los Angeles also. Schools have a strong influence when it comes to discipline and respect. When we allow schools to deteriorate we lose those values within the curriculum. Few, but not all African-Americans have motivation to fight poverty. In time we may see this minority unionize again to better their communities in society.

Boyz in the Hood and Black Freedom Fighters in Steel seemed quite opposite to one another besides the involvement of African-American characters. After reading more into the book, the theme becomes apparent and can also be applied to the film. That theme being that in order to better life people must organize and come together, whether for good or bad. Boyz in the Hood has also had a place in my heart as a great film, but now I can respect it more after putting it in a new light. As for the book, I haven't been interested in Unions, but I did enjoy the stories the five characters brought to it.