

## Fathers Needed: An Ideological Approach to *Boys-N-the Hood*

*Boys-N-the Hood* on the surface was a hip-hop drama that tells the chilling story of three black males and their goals to survive the mean, gang-filled streets of Compton, California. The film debuted in the early 1990's highlighting issues plaguing black communities over the past three decades. In order to properly conduct a media literacy analysis on *Boys-N-the Hood* one must critically apply an ideological approach to the film by placing the presentation in a cultural and historical context to better discuss the implicit values within the film. The illumination of problems like teenage pregnancy, drugs, gangs and fatherlessness reinforce and contribute to the values (or lack of) that are familiar to most blacks. Inspired by historical and cultural events set in motion by absent fathers, *Boys-N-the Hood* highlighted prevalent yet unique challenges known to black communities by broadening the public's exposure to such social problems.

John Singleton's film included an all black cast of well-known actors, actresses, and music artists set to tell the stories familiar to many blacks in America. Appealing to young blacks, Singleton presented a reflection of black communities suffering with the reality of the missing father. From the lens of each member of a nuclear family, the mother, father, son and daughter, Singleton presented obstacles in dire need of addressing and conquering in order to create a more successful generation than the last. The social problems are identified and illuminated in each character except the ones with a father present in the home. Two of the three main characters in the film are the ones seemingly most susceptible to problems like gang violence, and drug use and a host of other problems because their father was absent. The third of the three, who resided with his

father, lived amid the problems only he made more responsible decisions than the other two.

Black families, historically were strong, two parent families deeply rooted in religion and education. Over the past few decades black families are headed predominantly by mothers who work several jobs, therefore leaving education and religion secondary if not tertiary to the maintenance and stability of a feasible livelihood. Fathers play a minor role, if any, in the lives of many black youth leaving females to carry the full load of raising the children and paying all the bills. In one scene, young Tre sat as his father, Furious, informed him of rules and chores around the house. Furious stated, "I know you think I'm being hard on you but this is for your own good, I'm trying to teach you something, some of these kids around here don't have that and you're gonna see how they turn out." According to Singleton's film, this ideological shift in the makeup of black families is accepted and often expected in black communities. *Boys-N-the Hood* challenged the representation of black families by influencing the audience to think about choices made in adolescence to urge a more conscious and responsible adulthood. Highlighting problems familiar to black communities was only half of the film's goal. The other half remained in the solution to issues like children seeking gangs, mothers taking on the responsibility of fathers and adolescents dropping out of high school. The solution was the father's role, interest and responsibility to his creations: his children.

Following the cultural norms of the crack era, hip-hop's disrespectful representation of women, and single parent families, Singleton's film widely broadcasted, acknowledged and addressed obstacles that plagued black communities. Connecting tragic events like the Rodney King beating with instances of police harassment resonates

in the minds of Singleton's audience. This familiarity of police misconduct and other issues overlooked by the dominant culture were profoundly addressed in educational yet realistic fashion. One of the final statements of the movie, “Either they don’t know, don’t show, or don’t care about what’s goin’ on in the hood” expressed the lack of concern by the larger society regarding the cornucopia of issues facing black Americans. Singleton urged his audiences to recognize and conquer problems seemingly restricted to black communities for the better health of all communities. *Boys-N-the Hood* maintains that children born to a single parent household are lacking the proper guidance to obtain a healthy adulthood. The best way to defeat a problem is to find out what exactly is the problem.