

January 25, 2005

YOU CAN'T HAVE IT BOTH WAYS!

"Hey, hey, y'all, this brotha has lost his damn mind. It's amazing what money and praise from a white man will make some of us do. Singleton has a new game coming out called "Fear and Respect", done in collaboration with Midway and created for the PS2 and XBOX platform. I never thought I would see the day when some sellout negro would make a game based on the genocide of Black people -- speaking of LA gang violence. This really demonstrates the lack of worth placed on Black life when a game is made based on the impoverished conditions, violence, Black on Black crime and overall suffering of Black People glorified by some clueless negro. I just urge everyone to not support anything this man does. Oh yeah, he has of course, commissioned ignorant Snoop Dog to be the main character of the game, another person who will do anything for a dollar. I guess for people like Singleton, being denegated on the silver screen is not enough. Lastly, all this from an idiot who claims to have some understanding of white Supremecy and the Cress Theory of Color Confrontation -- of course 5 minutes of seeing baby boy with blow that myth -- the man does not understand sh_t. Oh yeah, don't buy a damn thing made by the Midway company either or we might as well be thanking hollywood for "step and fetch it."

Give me some response out there intelligent Black folks. Lets adhere to the motto "Images are important so tell a good story."

Posted by Act4reel on 12/21/04

That highly inflammatory quote above is from a growing misguided urban/hip-hop hater movement in the black community. Since the summer of 2004 there was a slow and steady drumbeat of naysayers and urban activists who have suddenly realized that too many video games portray negative images of minorities. This whole "save our images on vide games" campaign started in an August 12, 2004 New York Times article called "The Color of Mayhem, in a Wave of 'Urban' Games". The feature story written by Michael Marriott basically regurgitates the same concerns that civil rights leaders, like the NAACP, have argued in the past regarding negative media images of minorities. The Times article's next logical leap is to then show how mega-popular and mega-profitable video games like Rockstar's Grand Theft Auto, GTA: Miami Vice or GTA: San Andreas, Activision's True Crimes: Streets of LA, Midway's NBA Big Ballers, Ubisoft's Notorious: Die to Drive and EA's Def Jam Vendetta and their newest hip-hop game Def Jam Fight For New York are the cause of black-on-black crime, minorities dropping out of school and any other important social ill in the hood.

This NY Times article has spurred similar op-ed stories in other national papers. There are African-American Web sites like Black Planet with forums on this subject. And there will be undoubtedly scattered news stories on the usual talking head opinion shows on CNN, Fox and MSNBC. Nothing about this community outrage is going to make a real dent in the consciousness of the multi-billion gaming industry. That is because hip-hop, which thrives on negative black images, is a multi-billion dollar business that appeals to trillions in global consumer capital from white adolescents, minorities and tweeners.

It only makes sense that every major video game publisher or developer is going to have their own urban/hip-hop video game franchise. That being said the horde of civil right leaders, academics and minority politicians cannot expect the video business to censor itself and start creating positive minority characters when the film, TV and Music industries are doing the exact opposite.

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That portion of a highly inflammatory blurb was posted on Yahoo on December 12, 2004 on [Black-Filmmakers] Digest Number 1116. The guy dubbing himself Ac4reel was giving John Singleton hell for working with Midway on to create an urban video game. Let's put aside the fact that the brotha did even know how to use spell check on his message for big words like “genocide”, “ignorant” and “. “denigrated”. If you are too stupid not to know how to spell “ignorant” then don't use it in a sentence to clown someone. I should say for the record that I went to USC Film School with John and he was once my vice-president in my USC African-American Film Association. So, I know John well, but I am not by any means in his inner circle or talk to him frequently.

Anyway, the self-proclaimed online morality critic said John was selling out and turning his back on his black folks by perpetuating stereotypical images of thuggish brothas robbing, shooting and killing each other. But the one basic problem with this type of thinking is that John should have actually been making urban/hip-hop video games ten years ago when he was hailed “King Urban/Hip-Hop Cinema” when he made *Boyz n the Hood* and *Poetic Justice*. It was John that launched the film careers of Ice Cube who is now a mega-star and Tupac who would also undoubtedly be a big star if he had not been murdered. But the point is John has been highly influential in greatly help expand the culture of “thuganomics”. My biased theory of “thuganomics” is that the more thuggish someone is or acts the more real or street they are perceived. And gamers want to play urban/hip-hop games that are as realistic as possible. Which means you need the most thugged out thugs doing all your illegal hood crimes and activities.

I can remember being at a private premiere screening of John Singleton's *Baby Boy* at the 2001 Acapulco Black Film Festival. John got up and thanked everyone for coming and how he was proud that this was the third film in his hood trilogies. And then said something I have and will always remember. He said that not only was *Baby Boy* for us—meaning for us black folks—but that he had made the “Ultimate Nigga Film”. Yes you heard me right. John said he was extremely proud that he had made the “Ultimate Nigga Film.”

The few studio white folks who were at the screening probably had nothing to say, but I can tell you that all the rest of the audience was black. After John said that “Ultimate Nigga Film” line he got a lot of applause and screams of “Go On Brotha” and “Way To Go John”. And no one had a problem with what John he said because they knew John was serious about what he had said. He probably had thought he made the “Ultimate Nigga Film”. There was an obvious “Ultimate Nigga Film” void that if not filled by John, then by some other urban/hip-hop director sooner or later.

Now we shift to this year’s 2005 Sundance Film Festival when John Singleton’s latest urban/hip-hop film *Hustle & Flow* got the highest recorded film deal. Paramount’s MTV Films gave John \$16.5 Million for a film about a pimp with a mid-life crisis that wants to be a rapper. John was just the producer of *Hustle & Flow*, but it shows that urban/hip-hop culture can beat out all other dramatic films at a major film festival like Sundance. You can’t seriously doubt the power of “thugonomics” when a pimp/rapper movie gets the largest film deal at the worlds’—if not Hollywood’s--most prestigious and influential film festivals.

And if you want more highly acclaimed negative black characters on the TV side you have HBO’s *The Wire* about Baltimore drug dealers. *The Wire* has been hailed by many TV critics as a great drama. I love watching *The Wire*. In fact my favorite character is an urban hitman/thief/hustler named Omar. Michael K. Williams always gives a haunting and outstanding performance as the baddest mofo in the hood. Nobody on *The Wire* challenges Omar and survives.

Or one can flip channels to FX Network’s *The Shield* for its extremely well written and well acted violent, thugged out and gripping gangbangers, serial rapists, hookers, child molesters and drug dealers. One of my most favorite and memorable scenes in *The Shield* is where Detective Vic Mackey, played by Emmy winning Michael Chiklis, needs a drug dealer to leave a rival drug dealer alone that Vic protects. The dealer wouldn’t cooperate, so Vic had to mash dealer’s face onto a hot electric stove. Seeing the hot red grill marks on the dealer’s bloody face and the extra bits of nuances like his flesh falling off just made my night. I love watching *The Shield*. Nothing on TV except *The Sopranos* comes close to touching *The Wire* and *The Shield* for straight up hood reality and excellent authentic hood writing. Watching these type of gritty cable shows is like watching a life-size GTA or True Crimes video game that came to life.

And there really is nothing to say about the state of the music industry. The top R&B and hip-hop acts take the most superficial and negative images and turn them into the coolest things to be or done on the planet. Being a gangsta like 50 Cents and The Game. Being a Mack or Pimp like Snoop and Nelly. Or being a wild party animal or a “blinged out” baller like Lil’ Jon, Trick Daddy or Master P. Right or wrong Gangsta, Pimpin’ and Bling Bling are the mainstays of hip-hop and urban culture now. And all those super successful and popular Gangsta, Pimpin’, Bling Bling songs are played in every top urban/hip-hop video game.

Even the most harmless “Teen” rated driving games like Crash N’ Burn on X-Box and PS2 have up-to-date and hip-hop songs in them. I recently watched a group of multi-racial and suburban raised kids at a friend’s New Years Eve party play Crash N’ Burn. And they could easily load up a wide variety of music that was not chosen to be educational or inspiring. The music in the game was chosen to be exactly the bumping and thumping

The bottom line is that video games, like the GTA series, are created by mainly white designers trying to keep up or live-up to well documented and exploited hood imagery of minorities. The video game industry cannot perfect what has already being perfected in films, TV and music in regards to creating “so-called” stereotypical images. We need civic or responsible leaders to spend as much time trying to come up with a positive video game that would be as successful as the ones that think are negative.

In conclusion if the game is not fun to play, does not have cool graphics, does not have challenging levels or obstacles, does not have interesting and engaging characters and does not have great music, then this game is not going to influence anyone—no matter if it has tons of positive minority characters--because no gamers—black or white--will have bought it. The video game industry is not going clean up its act until its Industry cousins in film, *Hustle & Flow*; TV, *The Wire* and *The Shield* and music, *50 Cents* and *The Game*--do so as well. So far all you misguided urban/hip-hop video game haters—

You Can’t Have It Both Ways!

By

David L. Watts a.k.a. Money Train