The Battle of Images in Film: An Analysis of Movies by African American Directors Tyler Perry, John Singleton and Spike Lee
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This research addresses the internal battle African American film directors face while depicting images of the African American community. Today, Hollywood’s images of African Americans are no longer controlled by White movie makers. Over the past three decades, a number of Black film directors have been empowered to depict their own community instead of relying on outsiders. In the early twentieth century and before, many films by white directors depicted African American communities as violent urban life where people were loud, uneducated and behaved in a derogatory manner. However, what happens when African American film directors write the scenes? Is there a more accurate representation of the black community? If African American directors refuse to portray stereotypical negative images of the African American community are they applauded or heckled? Can African American film directors garner positive recognition from Hollywood critics without portraying negative images of the African American community? This qualitative research study seeks to identify the position African American film directors must take to appeal to critics in a predominately White Hollywood environment. The specific method that will be used to analyze the film directors approach will be based on the Entman and Rojecki film analysis framework. According to Cinema Score, African American film directors such as Spike Lee, John Singleton, and Tyler Perry have all individually grossed more than $50 million for their films. However, only Singleton’s films have received positive recognition from Hollywood. Unlike the others, Singleton’s film depictions are stereotypical of violent urban life, with even more negative portrayals of people of color. This research examines five films from 1988 to 2007, including Boyz N the Hood, Poetic Justice, Baby Boy, Why Did I Get Married, and Diary of Mad Black Woman. The research also investigates newspaper articles that feature critics comments and the directors comments about these films. The findings suggest regardless of the film directors race, the more stereotypical the image of the black community, the greater the success of the film. Hence, the internal battle facing African American directors.