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STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON



I thought I knew what to expect from this movie. I was wrong. The background story of the gangsta rap group N.W.A. (look it up) was filled with a perspective that I thought I knew. I didn't. Whether or not you are a fan of the group or its music, you cannot deny that their songs were, and still are, a reflection of the reality they experienced in their neighborhood.

Violence, drugs, gang wars, poverty, brutality, harassment and hostility remain the powerful forces that define so much of that experience. I could never pretend to know what it is like to be in the shoes of those who walk the streets of Compton. But N.W.A. reflected the harsh reality surrounding the people there. Sadly, I don't know whether much has changed there or not. But these boys from the hood became powerful leaders in the music industry. The controversy generated from their lyrics and their protest is as relevant now as it was then. People who do not know what life is like on those streets can choose to be offended or horrified by the truth of living it.

On the other side of this social coin, business is business and that world is just as full of danger as the tough neighborhoods. As an artistic expression, N.W.A. was struggling to find an audience in a society that needed to hear what was going on. When they began to find fans outside of their socio-economic experience, they became part of a different game where survival depends on knowing what is in the fine print and who has your money-making back.

You could make judgments on how the company was started, how it was financed and about whether or not the music was incendiary or not, but you can't deny that it stirred things up. Sometimes, when people don't have a voice, they need to be heard in a way that illustrates just how hard life can be. Of course, with anything commercial, the risk for exploitation is as ever present as anything lurking behind a dark corner of the block. Ultimately, in life on the streets and on the charts, it is all about survival. And to do that, sometimes you have to become a different person.

You can see the evolution of these artists over the years, how much they learned about living a life outside the limits of their beginnings. The streets will also take their toll. In that way, the education of the streets enabled them to be both stock and street smart. Their success is no accident. I thought I would see more graphic violence and offensive images, and while there are scenes that will serve as clear examples of how poorly women are treated and how callous that world can be, the fact remains that, for whatever reasons, that same world exists today.



Children without parents who love them or who are surrounded by violence are at a disadvantage in the poorer places. Girls who grow up used and abused wind up as

objects who are at the mercy of others, especially those addicted to drugs. And, yet, in those neighborhoods are people struggling to not be caught up in that lifestyle. People just want to make it home safely at the end of the day. I thought the movie gave a good depiction of the journey of the group and of the men in it. I can understand the socio-political underpinnings that came to create the group and why their message still strikes a chord today. The performances by the lead actors were great.

I give *Straight Outta Compton* four golden tickets.

