

# R.I.P. John Singleton



Film director John Singleton passed today at the age of 51 after suffering a stroke April 17th and going into a comatose state. His family removed him from life support after considering his condition and prospects for recovery. Singleton's innovative contributions to the film industry made him one of the most important directors of the 20th and 21st century. He unapologetically put his lens on Black life and brought seldom heard stories to the screen. His debut film, *Boyz n the Hood* made America look at violence in the neighborhoods from the perspective of humanity instead of exploitative stereotypes. He told [NPR](#),Â

*"If you see the films I make and if they are in an urban setting, I basically have an agenda to not only entertain but for you to feel something and to say something. Because this is where I'm from, you know what I mean? I'm making you feel something for this environment. I'm not exploiting it."*

Singleton and Spike Lee were the first major directors to use rappers in film roles with *Boyz n the Hood* and *Jungle Fever* being released a month apart in 1991. Ice Cube would get his acting start in Singleton's feature and Queen Latifah broke into the acting world in the role of a Black woman critical of interracial relationships.Â Singleton's story about gang violence was a national event that had people leaving the theater in droves with tears in their eyes.Â

*Boyz n the Hood* made him the youngest director and first African-America to be nominated for a Best Director Oscar. He would finish the '90s with the epic *Poetic Justice* that co-starred Tupac Shakur and Janet Jackson, *Higher Learning* and *Rosewood*. Michael Jackson utilized Singleton's talents for his famous 1991 video "Remember The Time." His movies were one of

the places where several Black Hollywood stars got their first film roles including Regina King, Morris Chestnut and Janet Jackson. His movies always dealt with racism such as the on-campus skinhead violence of *Higher Learning* or the destroyed Black communities of The Rosewood Massacre that took place in 1923.Â

In the 2000s, he paid tribute to Gordon Parks by remaking *Shaft* and directed *Baby Boy* which starred then-newcomers Taraji P. Henson and Tyrese as a dysfunctional mother and son in their first film. He later moved into a new lane with the action films *2 Fast 2 Furious* and *Four Brothers*. Singleton had plans to make a movie about his old friend and colleague Tupac Shakur but there were delays that stopped it from becoming a reality. In 2017, he co-created the FX series *Snowfall* about the rise of crack cocaine in Los Angeles during the '80s. The success that he experienced throughout his career did not stop him from being critical of Hollywood studios who he said did not want Black people directing films about Black people.Â

*I was discovered by a master filmmaker by the name of John Singleton. He not only made me a movie star but made me a filmmaker. There are no words to express how sad I am to lose my brother, friend & mentor. He loved bring the black experience to the world. ..Us at Cannes â€~90*  
[pic.twitter.com/CaRKjZtjgB](https://pic.twitter.com/CaRKjZtjgB)

– Ice Cube (@icecube) [April 29, 2019](#)

---

# Statement from AAFCA On the Passing of John Singleton



John Singleton at the 2017 AAFCA Awards in Hollywood, CA (credit: AAFCA)

“John Singleton” was, without question, one of the most important filmmakers of our generation. With his groundbreaking 1991 debut film, *Boyz n the Hood*, he brought a sensitivity to urban Black life that was unprecedented for the time. With that film – which he wrote and directed – he painted the challenges as well as joys of growing up Black in Los Angeles during one of its most tumultuous times. That film earned him a Best Director Oscar nomination, making him the youngest and first-ever Black nominee, as well as one for Best Screenplay.



John Singleton, Gil Robertson, Ava DuVernay, Robert “RZA” Diggs in 2015 in Hollywood, CA

John would continue to flex his versatility throughout his career, helming *2 Fast 2 Furious*, the second installment of the big-budget franchise and the biggest grossing film of his career in 2003. However, Singleton was most passionate about films about his community, particularly his native South Central Los Angeles. He immediately followed *Boyz n the Hood* with two other films set primarily in Los Angeles: *Poetic Justice* (1993), *Higher Learning* (1995) and *Baby Boy* (2001) gave a refreshing and personal lens to the identity of urban Black males that was multi-dimensional and spanned a wide variety of viewpoints.

John was a great friend to the Black press and to AAFCA in particular. To me, he was not only an advocate and treasured ally, but also a personal friend. I began covering his work with his second film, *Poetic Justice*, and feel privileged to have had a front row seat to his amazing journey. Just last year, AAFCA had the tremendous honor of celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that very film with him as part of our annual Summer Screening Series.

Over the years, John never shunned the Black press and personally made sure that African American journalists always got ample opportunity to cover his work. When we started the AAFCA Awards a decade ago, John was one of our first presenters. Filmmaking, they say, is very personal and communal and John embodied that. There are countless members of this community that he helped. He championed Craig Brewer in his debut film *Hustle & Flow* and introduced such actors as Morris Chestnut, Ice Cube, Cuba Gooding Jr., Tyrese, Taraji P. Henson and Angela Bassett to the big screen in leading roles.

Even though he ventured out to do the historic drama *Rosewood*, telling the hidden story of an all-Black town in Florida that was massacred in 1923, Los Angeles was forever his muse. His most recent co-creation *Snowfall*, the FX show chronicling the advent of crack to the city, will premiere its third season in July.



Ryan Coogler and John  
Singleton in 2016

I and AAFCA are not alone in saying that, while our dear friend will be missed, his legacy as a visionary filmmaker and unapologetically Black storyteller will live on forever. We send prayers and continued strength to his mother, his five children and the rest of his family, biological and cinematic, who loved and cherished him. Although we are heartbroken, we are beyond grateful for all that he has given us and the legacy with which he leaves us.

“Dear friend, we salute you and we love you.”

-Â Gil Robertson IV, President/CoFounder, African American Film Critics AssociationÂ Â

---

## Snowfall Premieres In Detroit



John Singleton's new TV series, *Snowfall* made its Detroit premiere last night. Singleton and the cast joined viewers after the screening of the first episode for questions and photographs. The director, who made history exactly 26 years ago today with the release of *Boyz In The Hood*, shared his motivation for the show about the rise of crack cocaine in Los Angeles. As a native of South Central Los Angeles, Singleton wanted to revisit the past and present the drug epidemic because of its long-term effects still visible today. He recalled how the drug destroyed relationships between young

people and the elders evidenced by the way the former once respected their older neighbors until they began to instill fear in them. The cast included Detroiters Angela Lewis who plays the role of Aunt Louie and veteran actress Michael Hyatt as Cissy Saint the single mother of Jerome and Franklin Saint. Damson Idris is one of the story's focal points as Hyatt's teenaged drug-dealing son. Idris spoke briefly to *Kick Mag* about drawing from his personal experience for the role and said that his hometown of Peckham, England is the "British equivalent of South Central." When asked about learning to speak American dialect for the role he stated his challenge:

*"Not making it comical. It was really important to me to sound like a real person. When I use to practice the American accent when I used to I was in London I use to look at people like Kat Williams and Eddie Murphy so I kind of had this template but when I started learning how to play Franklin I looked at more serious actors like Denzel Washington so it was definitely most difficult transitioning to an American accent and doing it just normal."*

Singleton emerged as one of the hottest young filmmakers when he debuted *Boyz In The Hood* which was also a return to his neighborhood but *Snowfall* has a different feeling even though there are similar timelines. *Snowfall* does not focus solely on family ties but a few different stories that intersect at the drug trade. Singleton created the show with Eric Amadio and Dave Andron and he expressed the importance of making a show that was not so downtrodden as to depress viewers but being careful not to glamorize the events. *Snowfall* is already doing well in the ratings game and is on its way to becoming one of the most memorable shows to debut this summer.

***Snowfall* airs on the FX channel Wednesday night at 10 ET.**

[youtube id="YJGwKlpoIF0"]

---

# Media Questions Of The Week

[vimeo id="124336782"]

How would the shooting of Walter Scott by ex South Carolina police officer Michael Slager have been handled if Feidin Santana had not recorded video of the incident?



Who will have the most memorable set at Coachella this year?



According to John Singleton, why is Morgan Creek studios suing Afeni Shakur for rights to the Tupac story?