

Director John Singleton hustled after 'The Hood'

On Mike's menu By Mike Clark With today's DVD release of *Hustle & Flow*, written/directed by Craig Brewer, co-producer John Singleton is suddenly ubiquitous. *Hustle* and the Singleton-directed *Four Brothers* (also just out) gave the onetime overnight success a good 2005. His other notable works include:

Boyz N the Hood

1991, Sony, R, \$27

After its Cannes triumph and a remarkable box-office return on the dollar, Singleton's writing/directing debut got him dual Oscar nominations at 24. Juggling half a dozen characters with ease, this cautionary tale contrasts three friends through young adulthood in South-Central Los Angeles. Fifteen years ago, the cast wasn't well known: Cuba Gooding Jr., Angela Bassett, Morris Chestnut, Nia Long and Ice Cube in his debut. More familiar was Laurence Fishburne, who is memorable as a complex authority figure.



Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

Life in South Central: Laurence Fishburne plays Cuba Gooding Jr.'s father.

Shaft

2000, Paramount, R, \$10

Firmly against punk "attitude" but spewing plenty of the same, Samuel L. Jackson is the cop nephew of the 1971 screen original played by Richard Roundtree (seen in a cameo squiring two foxy ladies out of a restaurant for a night one can only imagine). This overly slick but speedy melodrama with a pre-Miranda Rights mind-set benefits from two memorable villains: Jeffrey Wright as a drug lord and Christian Bale (reprising some of his *American Psycho* smarminess) as a rich-boy racist who kills a black man, then flees the country.



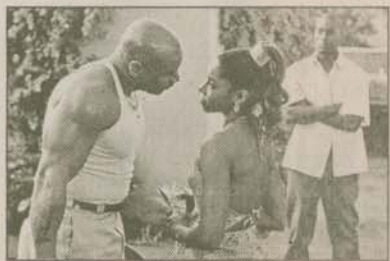
By Eli Reed, Paramount Pictures

Still the man: Samuel L. Jackson takes aim at a racist murder.

Baby Boy

2001, Sony, R, \$15

"Baby" Jody (Tyrese Gibson) is 20, father of two children by different women and living with Mom (A.J. Johnson) in South-Central Los Angeles. She's 36 and ready for love with burly live-in Ving Rhames, whose sinister demeanor hints at a tough-guy past. Messy but bracing and packed with surprising humor, this is a movie in which allegiances quickly switch. Jody isn't totally unsympathetic, but Singleton makes certain we always find him exasperating. Taraji P. Henson (from both *Hustle* and *Brothers*) plays his latest girlfriend.



By Eli Reed, Columbia Pictures

Coming of age: Ving Rhames, left, A.J. Johnson and Tyrese Gibson.

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