

Media and Psych Analysis:

What messages do we receive from leadership about violence?

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In 2016, Director Janice Cooke release a biopic centered around the experiences of Michel'le Toussant, A Black female singer signed to Death Row Records in the 1990's (Cooke,2016). *Surviving Compton* opens with a scene of a young Michel'le working in a clothing store while she sings to herself (Cooke, 2016). Soon, she is noticed and approached by a young man in search of a female voice to accompany his musicianship (Cooke, 2016). Michel'le, assertive but seemingly unconfident in her abilities, accepts the man's invitation and attended a recording session where the young man and others were blown away by her performance (Cooke, 2016). Michel'le recorded vocals which, surprisingly, she would soon hear on the radio (Cooke, 2016).

The film follows the singer from the point in her life where she worked in a department store through her career where she toured with artists like MC Hammer (Cooke, 2016). Michel'le was first noticed by NWA artist Dr. Dre and was soon catapulted to stardom considering her breathtaking vocal abilities. (Cooke, 2016). *Surviving Compton* explores the world of the music industry in Compton from the perspective of Michel'le and provides a deepening of awareness around the experiences of Black female artists in the 90's (Cooke, 2016). Michel'le's story includes the beauty of motherhood, the stress of capitalistic relationships, and the horrors of self-medication and addiction (Cooke, 2016).

Most interestingly, *Surviving Compton* shines a light on the violence Michel'le experienced throughout a relationship with Dre and others (Cooke, 2016). While the violence inflicted onto her and millions of other Black femmes is devastating, the film explores that all-too-common narrative of Black female elders preparing their beloved children and grandchildren for the inevitability of domestic violence (Cooke,2016). Note that this preparation is not an intentional act of grooming for victimhood but a response to decades long realities for Black women.

Violence against Black women, both in and out of the home, is an intersectional oppression most commonly referred to as misogynoir (Manne, 2017). Misogynoir is a specific race infused patriarchal phenomenon in which Black femmes are victimized for their Blackness and their proximity to womanhood (Manne, 2017). Realities for Black femmes within the interlocking system of oppression include the risk of experiencing violence at the hands of others where there exists a power differential – that is that non-Black men and Black men are likely leverage their position within society to inflict harm disproportionately on Black femmes. Unlike the reality for non-Black women and femmes, the violence experiences by Black femmes is experienced through a compounded oppression (Manne, 2017).

Surviving Compton shows the reality of this experience from Michel'le's perspective where she is able to control the narrative and share her side of the events told – up until its release—from the perspective of the men involved (Cooke, 2016). Michel'le returns from rehabilitation where In a loving and heartfelt scene between Michel'le and her grandmother, the film shows the deep remorse that Michel'le's grandmother felt for not speaking against violence (Cooke, 2016). In the scene, Michel'le's grandmother looks her in the eye and expresses a profound apology that rings louder than other messaging in the film (Cooke, 2016). This scene symbolizes an ending to the generational perpetuation of harm against Black femmes and provides and foundation for a future where violence of any kind is unacceptable.

References

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