

# 2005 Hiphopbattle.com AFM Overview & Boss'n Up Review

By

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## Hiphobattle.com 2005 AFM Overview:

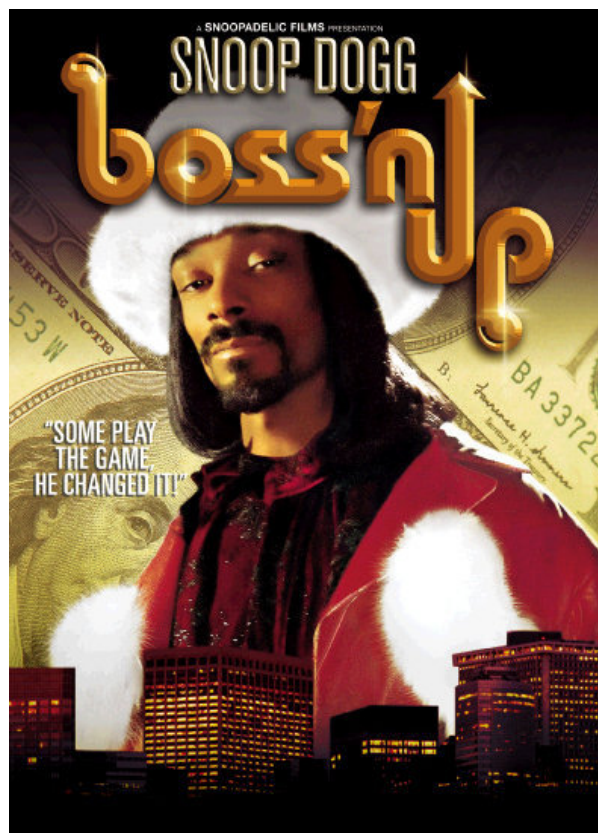
“ We put out Crash and Monster’s Ball to bring us [Lions Gate Films Releasing] respect and prestige. We don’t want to be the first place that people send their genre scripts or urban scripts”...Tom Ortenberg, President, Lions Gate Films Releasing.

That quote above was from this year’s 2005 AFM Film Conference at its usual spot at the Fairmont Miramar Hotel. Last year I started my 2004 AFM review with a similar and provocative quote from Michael Burns, Vice-Chairman, Lions Gate Entertainment, saying the state of black films performing overseas was lousy. I left the 2004 AFM Film Conference thinking that Michael was dead wrong and that black or urban Hollywood films had just as much chance to be successful as white Hollywood films. A year later and I sitting at this 2005 AFM Film France conference hearing Tom Ortenberg start out his comments by praising *Saw II* which had just opened the weekend before at #1 to stellar box office numbers. In fact, I believe the best opening of an October released film. After gushing over *Saw II*, Tom then proudly talked about the success of *Diary Of A Black Woman*.

Tom said neither he nor most of his Lions Gate execs knew who Tyler Perry was but he was told that he one day to make a decision whether to make *Diary*. Tom said he trusted one of his execs that were passionate about working with Tyler and the next day Lions Gate put up \$5 Million to make the deal happen. Everyone at the packed conference was sort of in awe at how effortlessly Tom made *Diary* happen overnight. What the vast majority of the folks in attendance did not know until during the Q&A session that followed was that Lions Gate only put up half of the \$5 Million for *Diary*. Tyler Perry had to invest \$2.5 of his own money. I subtly asked Tom didn’t Tyler do that and he admitted they only put up half. What I then tried to follow up with him, but got cut off from the moderator.

My follow up would have been if Tom believes hit urban films, like *Diary*, do not have a foreign box office potential why does Lions Gate still want the foreign rights to *Diary*. If the foreign is so bad why even take it or at least let the *Diary* producers or other urban film producers keep the so called worthless. I cover these film conferences every year and I’ll never understand why film investors keep believing any predominately black cast film or film with an urban/black theme is going to appeal less to moviegoers overseas. Lions Gate has no idea how much money they could have made off of *Diary* if they had simply treated like all its hit films. Perception is greater than reality is a quote I live by in Hollywood. If Lions Gate had played up in the European or foreign press Tyler Perry’s personal story of being homeless seven years ago and multi-millionaire now all on the profits of his black plays and film, then even Europeans would have wanted to check out *Diary* just to see what made him successful in the U.S. Urban films have a definite place overseas, but it will take more wits and guts than is currently being displayed by current studio heads to make that happen.

Also, while I was at the AFM I went to a Vision Films screening of *Boss'n Up*. I'll admit a lot of urban films like *Boss'n Up* are whack as hell. There are hundreds—if not thousands of minority filmmakers and producers that can make a *Boss'n Up*. But you could count the ones on your hand that could make an urban film as good as *Hustle & Flow*, *City of God* or *Collateral*. It's not an accident that watching masses of mediocre films will influence one to also make mediocre films. It's like night and day in terms of sheer cinematic quality; acting, directing, writing, camerawork, plotlines--the difference between a *Boss'n Up* and *Hustle & Flow*. You have to watch great films if you want to make great films. Every top filmmaker, Spielberg, Lucas, Singleton, etc', can trace their passion or love of film to classics. For Spielberg it would be from Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*. For Lucas it might be John Ford's *Stagecoach*. Or for John it might be Gordon Parks' *Shaft*. And for some poor sad soul in the 'hood it will be *Boss'n Up* that inspires them to be an urban filmmaker.



*Boss'n Up* is about a pimps and hos. Stuck as a dead-end grocery clerk, charismatic Cordé (Snoop Dogg) is down on his luck, broke and frustrated. He realizes his true calling when he meets a veteran of the pimp game who shows him the ropes. But with jealous hustlers watching his every move, a pimp can't have it both ways, he must choose between love and the game. *Boss'n Up* stars Snoop Dogg, Lil' Jon, Trina, Shillae Anderson, Hawthorn James (The Five Heartbeats). The film's director is Pook Brown and Snoop Dogg is the producer. But make no mistake *Boss'n Up* has the look and feel of its executive producer Jeff Clanagan.

One could totally dismiss Snoop's *Boss'n Up* if it was not for the mesmerizing performance of veteran actor Hawthorne James. I can say without reading one word of Iceberg Slim's true-life ghetto novels that Hawthorne accurately and greatly captured the essence of the ultimate Godfather pimp named Orange Juice. His gritty and smooth pimp portrayal is right up there with Morgan Freeman's career launching pimp role as Fast Black in *Street Smart*. I can easily say watching Hawthorne breakdown to Snoop Dogg what a man or pimp has to do to transform a woman into a whore is simply amazing. I know brothas and sistas hate to hear film or TV pimp praise, but sometimes you gotta give a pimp his due.

What Orange Juice says is dead wrong and has no real place in society—black or white. But it is the essence of undeniable 'hood logic that sways one to believe that is exactly how a man—or a pimp—gets a woman to become a hooker. We always see pimp films where the women are horny, abused and low-self esteem victims. But *Boss'n Up* turns that stereotypical film hooker depiction on its head as we watch Orange Juice methodically and calmly say what has to be done to “turn out” one's woman. The rest of the film is a joke within a joke, but Hawthorne makes one realize that the whole experience is not a waste. I just wish great actors like Hawthorne James had more opportunities to show their skills—an not just in low budget urban films that will make money no matter who is in them or what they are about. That is the irony of the AFM is that a Vision International seems to be the only legit distributor that can regularly release urban flicks like *Boss'n Up* overseas and make a huge profit. The market is there and if only the films in the urban/hip-hop genre can get better the easier it will be to see more of them getting deals like Clanagan got *Boss'n Up* from Vision Films at the 2005 AFM. We will have much more of our interviews of 2005 AFM attendees posted on Hiphopbattle.com. And one should read our 2005 AFI Film Festival Overview as well.

