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Chapter 10 (First Half) Reading Response

The 1990s saw a boom of black cinema with many emerging black filmmakers and actors. The decade saw Hollywood start do embrace these black creatives which helped this renaissance grow. One of the main factors that led to this was how profitable these films were. Working as independent directors on shoestring budgets, if a film broke through to the mainstream, it was highly profitable. Such was the case for *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) which became one of the most successful films that year and the most successful black genre film at the time. There was also an increase in black audience members at the cinema (25% of movie-goers) that coincided with the rise of John Singleton, Spike Lee, Ernest Dickerson, and other black filmmakers.

Spike Lee’s success began with the release of *She’s Gotta Have It* (1986), an independently made film that broke into the mainstream. Modern-day audiences would have called Spike Lee an “indie-darling,” meaning a new filmmaker not backed by the Hollywood system that audiences love. In the years following, Spike Lee released *School Daze* (1988) and his magnum-opus *Do the Right Thing* (1989). Lee was poised to be one of the greatest living directors entering the 1990s and the future was bright. Yet, as Lee released more films, he began to face more criticism from critics and audiences. There is a ‘beloved indie-director to criticized studio-director’ pipeline that I seem to see quite often. The most recent example that comes to mind is New Zealand’s Taika Waititi. Waititi gained attention after releasing many beloved independent films, most notably *Boy* (2010) and *What We Do in the Shadows* (2014). Now, Waititi has directed two Marvel projects (*Thor: Ragnarök* and *Thor: Love and Thunder*) and is working on an untitled *Star Wars* project (although recent reports indicate the project might get cancelled). Recently, Taika Waititi has been under a ton of criticism as well for his most recent films. There are many differences between Waititi’s and Lee’s career, and this is not a very precise comparison, but it makes me wonder: why does success cause filmmakers to face more criticism? I have a working theory: they must now cater to a wider audience and cater to the studios financing their films.