



Straight Outta Compton

By Ricardo Cortez Cruz

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Follows the lives of two friends, Rooster and Clive-nem, as they try to cope with drugs, gangs, and women, while growing up in an L.A. ghetto.

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Straight Outta Compton By Ricardo Cortez Cruz Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This first novel is a hipper than hip-hop send-up of the "boyz 'n the hood" stereotypes slammed together with references to everything from Leroi Jones and Madonna to Titus Andronicus. Essentially a series of free-form short stories interlocking as much by imagery and rhythmic devices as plot or character, the novel tells of the rise and demise of an assortment of black teens in the Los Angeles ghetto of Compton. Clive thinks he has gotten his girl pregnant; Rooster kills a hooker; Billy may or may not be in a Hollywood movie about his gang life. Little of this makes narrative sense, and Cortez Cruz isn't really interested in telling stories. His Compton is more a state of mind than an actual place. His style is equal parts Sandra Cisneros and Ishmael Reed, but without her compassion or his precision. Too often, as in the title chapter, the literary and pop culture references become so much name-dropping ornamentation. On the other hand, the author has a mordant sense of humor that shines through at unlikely moments. Generally, this is an exasperating debut, intermittently impressive, but too often choked on its own flash and filigree.

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From Library Journal

This "rap novel" combines the rhythm of the streets with the frenzy of cocaine jangle and the surrealism of despair and violence gone one step beyond ugly. Black men "livin large" in a Los Angeles ghetto, Rooster and Clive part company when the latter seeks a way out of Compton and the former immerses himself so totally that he brutally rapes and murders a woman in her "Little Shop of Whores" amidst a sticky, symbolic "slew of Sugar Babies." Bleeding from a knife wound dealt by yet another woman he's brutalized, Rooster ("Being Black his whole life's story") is hunted by Billy Bugle Boy, a character Cruz asks us to "imagine" in a movie starring the Crips and the Bloods, rival L.A. gangs. Meanwhile, Clive, fearing he's gotten a girl pregnant, witnesses the Rodney King beating (in the "movie") which, here, ends with the police dousing King with gasoline and setting him ablaze. Though it is often frustratingly incoherent, Cruz's prose has an irresistible hard-bop cadence to it. Recommended for minority and black studies collections.

- Ron Antonucci, *Hudson Lib. & Historical Soc.*, Ohio

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From Kirkus Reviews

A rap, jive, and video-inflected hallucination of the L.A. black ghetto, winner of the 1992 Nilon Award for minority fiction: a violent, slangy, tour-de-force debut. Unlike Jess Mowry's *Way Past Cool* (p. 288), which uses more traditional narrative form to explore youthful violence in a California ghetto, Cruz throws the reader into a fast-moving stream of insults, images, physical and emotional brutality. Even readers who understand all the vocabulary will be swept into disorientation--though never boredom--by the cutting and mixing in this druggy, surreal nightmare. "Alondra bled real black blood mixed with 10W-40 oil and hard water" opens a chapter in which an L.A. street is personified as a woman: Rodney King, being beaten by police, "kissed Alondra with his big lips...put his chest up against Alondra, the dark tarred pebbles feeling like hard nipples underneath his skin." A prostitute keeps spitting out babies during a conversation. Women are routinely feared, hated, abused, and demeaned. Boyhood friends become enemies, joining different gangs; one young man rapes and murders a friend's mother. Throughout, characters see themselves inside a blaxploitation film, make conversation derived from song lyrics and movies, and find themselves in crime stories in the newspaper, as if Cruz acknowledges that the living world portrayed here to such terrifying effect may owe as much to media-shaped images as to actual people living ghetto lives. Raging energy and cruel humor: so up-to-the-minute it's hard to judge its lasting power, but an explosive package for 1992. --

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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