

Student Podcast Transcript

Los Angeles: On Film and On Record digital exhibit

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### **Podcast Transcription: Realities of L.A.: Police Corruption in Training Day and Characters Symbolism**

**EM:** Hey everyone! Today is Tuesday December 8, 2020. My name is Erika Morato, and I am at the home of our podcast guest, Steve DeArcos in San Fernando, California. Steve, can you tell me when and where you were born, and maybe a little bit about yourself?

**SD:** Sure, sure I can Erika. First of all, I want to say welcome to my home. I was born in San Fernando, California on June twenty fourth, nineteen ninety-seven, so I'm a nineteen nineties baby. I grew up in a low-income community and was considered an at-risk youth, so I had my fair share of run ins with the law.

**EM:** And that's with San Fernando PD, correct?

**SD:** That's correct. Since San Fernando is an independent city, their police force reports only to themselves, so you can see how that is somewhat of a problem in and of itself.

**EM:** Yeah, I can understand how that would be an issue. I think this sort of implied issue is reflective of a lot of what goes on in Antoine Fuqua's *Training Day*. I also know that this is one of your favorite movies that you've had me watch as well.

**SD:** That's correct. I'm really into movies that have a hidden meaning and *Training Day* just does the job with so much to unwrap and think about.

**EM:** Understandably so. When I watched this after your recommendation some time ago, I liked it just because of the storyline and action. Now that I've spent an entire semester focusing on archival sources and the role they play in shaping attitudes towards Los Angeles and its history, my eyes were opened to the "hidden" history in low-income communities specifically, and how it speaks to events, like police corruption, being normalized.

**SD:** I-I agree that people fantasize about Los Angeles having it be a great city that has no issues but in reality, it has a lot of issues, specifically with the law. I've had firsthand experience how officers maneuver and bend rules just because they're in a position of power.

**EM:** Right, and that's obviously not something explicitly stated when people talk about L.A., or at least it's not an agenda pushed the way Los Angeles being the land of opportunities is.

**SD:** Yes, definitely.

**EM:** Well without further ado, lets jump into the events in the movie.

[MUSIC]

**EM:** When the protagonist, Jake Hoyt, is first introduced, he reveals that he wants to make it in the narcotics unit as a means for a promotion. When he meets with the division head, Alonzo, Hoyt gives a generic reasoning behind his interest in the position, saying "I want to serve my community by ridding it of dangerous drugs". This is obviously a sarcastic and ingenuine response—what do you think of this in regard to the mission of officers as a whole? Do you think this is usually the general consensus?

**SD:** It's upsetting, Erika. We think that police officers are here to protect and serve us but a lot of the times, we live in fear of coming in contact with officers. I think Hoyt does mean well, but he quickly realizes not everyone feels the same.

**EM:** Yeah. Let's talk about Hoyt for a little bit. Warning, movie spoilers ahead.

[LAUGHTER]

**EM:** What did you think of Hoyt, as a character in a movie blatantly depicting police corruption, and what did he represent?

**SD:** Hoyt was a good guy, but he was clueless to the corruption surrounding him. For example, Lonzo forced Hoyt to smoke PCP and Hoyt thought that he was joking initially. He also rode along with Lonzo to the Sandman's house thinking that they were going to arrest a drug distributor and objected to serving a fake warrant, but the whole time Lonzo planned to steal money from the home and used his police status as a means for justification.

**EM:** Right. He definitely was clueless, which to me was representative of this glamorized version of Los Angeles we often see, is he not? He lacks total understanding of the ins and outs of his unit, much like people lack knowledge in L.A., its history, and the way society works. I don't necessarily think Hoyt is the poster child for what a respectable officer should look or act like, because he

doesn't really care for his community, or at least he doesn't express this. He does follow law though, would you agree?

**SD:** I do agree. There are subtle hints towards the beginning of him being this way, like wanting to present himself during roll call, asking where the police office is at, and where the narcotics division reports to.

**EM:** Right, and when protocol is not being followed, do you notice the camera work and how he's in disbelief over what he's witnessed with Lonzo? Lonzo is constantly assaulting or terrorizing people, and the camera will switch over to a close-up of Hoyt. He's stunned by the misconduct.

**SD:** We first see this sort of close up in the alley, right?

**EM:** Absolutely. Hoyt, protecting and serving, jumps out of Lonzo's Monte Carlo and he sees a young girl being assaulted. He gets into an altercation with two homeless men but he does save her.

**SD:** But Lonzo just kind of laughs at him.

**EM:** Yeah, he terrorizes one of the homeless men, after being disrespectful, with a knife, two guns, and a knee to the groin.

**SD:** Hoyt seems to be shocked by Lonzo's actions already which is emphasized through the close-up, but even more so when Lonzo lets everyone go with no written statement or arrests.

**EM:** You're absolutely right. I think it is fair to say that for Hoyt, as Marc Mancini states in "Lost Hollywood", "the illusion of Hollywood and the reality of L.A. cross-breed so freely", because there's a fine line between perceived versus reality.

**SD:** --As we see through Hoyt and his realizations. The "illusion" could be symbolic of him trying to save the girl being assaulted and then Lonzo basically tells him that it's a complete waste of time.

**EM:** Mhm. The "illusion" of Los Angeles is especially broken at Roger's house—would you say the same? And if so, why?

**SD:** When offered money from Rogers stash, Hoyt laughs, again thinking Lonzo is joking. He states that he only cashes checks from the LAPD and carries on. Later, when Lonzo tells Hoyt to shoot Roger, Hoyt again laughs, points the shotgun at Roger, and pretends to shoot him jokingly. It is once Alonzo actually murders Roger and all the officers make up a story that Hoyt again realizes things are not as they seem and far from what he has learned in the academy.

**EM:** You're right. Hoyt states that "what happened was murder...we have badges so it's different?" This being said, recounting on your past experiences and your statement of police corruption, can you think on a time where there was obvious wrongdoing by an officer, and why you think they felt empowered to do so?

**SD:** There was one occasion when I was pulled over by SFPD. It was a routine traffic stop, but the officer approached me with his hand gun drawn at me and asked me to exit the car. While I sat on the sidewalk, the officer searched my vehicle without my consent—I had known that this wasn't legal, so I myself was shocked.

**EM:** That's terrible, and I think your experience resonates with Hoyt's. You were a bystander to an unjust act, just as Hoyt was at Rogers' home. After the fact, the film uses videography, a long shot specifically, to show Hoyt standing outside. He looks longingly out to the city because the hidden L.A. history has been revealed to him. He was clueless, as most people are about Los Angeles' true nature and violent history, but through Lonzo, he learns the truth.

**SD:** Yeah, I kind of just sat on the sidewalk for a while trying to proc-process it as well. It's a shame that officers who are sworn to protect lawfully don't follow established rules.

**EM:** And how do you think, if you do think, that Lonzo is reflective of L.A.'s true violent nature in that sense?

**SD:** In some cases, officers do join the force to protect and serve, but because corruption has been normalized, they quickly forget why they joined in the first place and join in on the corruption.

**EM:** Yeah, Lonzo mentions this when Roger compares him to Hoyt. He says that he wanted to be a hero as well, but that only lasted a week. An example of Lonzo's wrongdoings include terrorizing a group of kids in a buggy, stealing their paraphernalia and threatening to have the young woman in the vehicle sexually assaulted.

**SD:** Yeah, that scene was very upsetting to me and emphasized that he must feel empowered to make these threats because he knows that he will not be punished.

**EM:** Yup, you're right. It's also here that we're exposed to Lonzo and his tactics as an officer. He takes the drugs from the young adults to force Hoyt to take them, something he planned a full week in advance, to have dirt on Hoyt. Why do you think he needed or wanted to have something to hold against him?

**SD:** Well, Lonzo knew that he was going to have a new ride along. Seeing as corruption is a part of policing, it's obvious that Hoyt would witness wrongdoings, and so I

think he needed a way to keep Hoyt quiet if he refused to partake in the corruption.

**EM:** Which he did. That's interesting. There's also a clear sense of partnership when discussing corruption, because Lonzo assures Hoyt that "the Lieutenant's got [their] back" and that they have plenty of time to figure out a solution to pass a drug test they wouldn't have otherwise passed. I think this speaks to the power imbalance in Los Angeles too, and it's ironic seeing as the officers, who are meant to capture users and sellers of drugs, need x amount of time of notice to pass a drug test because they are users themselves. It's hypocritical to say the least.

**SD:** I agree.

**EM:** This isn't the first sign of corruption either is it? Can you recall another time Lonzo bent the rules that he had sworn to follow as an officer?

**SD:** I'm not sure if this coincides well, but Lonzo getting a resident of one of the cities he's sworn to protect, pregnant just doesn't sit right with me.

**EM:** Yeah, I agree, I think it's an abuse of power, especially since it's revealed that everyone in "the Jungle" fears him and the repercussions of standing up to him. That seems to be the only reason they allow him to safely come in and out of the neighborhood.

**SD:** Yeah, he tells Hoyt that "judges have handed out fifteen-thousand-man years of incarceration time based on [his] investigations", so I can't imagine how many of those required bribery or fabrication of evidence.

**EM:** And he clearly has the means and support to do so. He's well connected to the state judges whom he pays to sign off on warrants, like the one signed to enter Roger's house, steal his money, and kill him. This plot coincides with a very real story from the late 1900's, written about in the New York Time's "Claims of Police Corruption in Los Angeles Fuel Criticism" in which an LAPD officer and his partner "shot an unarmed gang member, Javier Francisco Ovando, and planted a gun on him [to steal] eight pounds of cocaine".

**SD:** I wonder how many other stories there are like Ovando's out there. If corruption dates back that far, I doubt that there's only been one case in twenty plus years. Plus, it's ironic that police shoot "gang" members, when they seem to be the biggest gang themselves. Who is the real villains here?

**EM:** Well, Lonzo does say "I'm the police. I run shit here", which goes back to this instilled power that comes with his badge. Other members on the force, like Paul, Tim, and Mark, lie for Lonzo, and he knows they have loyalty towards him because he calls them his "troops". Corruption has been normalized and

therefore seen as a means of survival in low-income communities like Echo Park and MacArthur Park, both locations visited in *Training Day*. As Lonzo says, “we’re the police, we can do,” and excuse my language, “the fuck we want”. Why? Because corruption is just “the nature of the business”.

**SD:** San Fernando is similar. I knew a young kid who wasn’t aware of his rights, so SFPD kept him in an interrogation room without notifying his parents and interrogated him until they coerced him to make a statement. I don’t know what kind of justice is served there. It seems like the amount of cases closed is more important than holding the right people accountable.

**EM:** This kind of goes against Lonzo’s notion that corruption is necessary in order to survive the streets of say, MacArthur Park I think, because he’s not really doing anyone any favors and he’s not really in any danger. Lonzo does reveal that Roger sold drugs, but his impact on a community wasn’t any worse than Lonzo’s, in the same sense that Lonzo’s partners’ actions are just as bad in so far that they allow for the continuity of corruption. Going back to the scene in Roger’s home, the cohesiveness from different parties is shocking. The corruption of not only legally entering the home, but coming up with a story, shooting each other to make it fit, and then targeting Hoyt when he refuses to comply is interesting.

**SD:** ...The fact that they only got there because the judges allowed for this to happen is shocking.

**EM:** Right. To go back to the New York Times article aforementioned, there, “the district attorney’s office refused to prosecute an officer for... [beating a man] until he vomited blood”. I think this resonates with being able to bribe judges in *Training Day* and emphasizes that departments operate to protect themselves and fellow officers. We see this to this day through the reluctance to press charges against officers that murder innocent beings, but that’s a whole other topic.

**SD:** In other words of Alonzo, “it’s not what you know, it’s what you can prove”. Officers and others in power know that they can get away with illegal activities because they are in power. They can control a narrative well, and that might be why the real issues in L.A. are not emphasized enough.

**EM:** I completely agree. Through all these actions is where we see the comparisons between the two, revealing the corrupt from someone who is law abiding. This is where I draw the comparison of Hoyt as the advertised version of L.A., far removed from wrongdoings, and Lonzo who reveals L.A. and its true nature. This revelation coincides with Marc Mancini’s work yet again, stating that “The disappearance of Hollywood’s genuine historical [significance] is distressing”. Can you see why, and do you have any opinions?

**SD:** I haven’t studied the material as in depth as you did this semester, but I can see how this line between reality and advertised is problematic.

**EM:** It's problematic in the sense that there doesn't seem to be an end to the corruption in the foreseeable future. Although Lonzo's justice is served at the end, being killed as a result of his actions in Las Vegas and Hoyt prevailing, Lonzo is still seen as a "highly decorated officer" and heroized at the end, all his misconduct being symbolically dead with him.

**SD:** This can go back to cops killing innocent people to this day but being put on paid administrative leave or simply transferred elsewhere. There is no real justice being served.

**EM:** Yeah, I agree. Alonzo got what he deserved, but again this doesn't really solve the issue at hand. Behind Alonzo are thousands of other corrupt officers who see no wrong in their actions because their chiefs, coworkers, or unit don't hold them accountable and try to brush things under the rug.

**SD:** I can see why this glamorized version of L.A. is carried on. I never realized that this image could be so toxic in the sense that it covers up really all of L.A.'s wrongdoings as a city.

**EM:** You're absolutely right. It doesn't really matter how many Hoyt's there are in the force or in a position of relative power. The problem has and remains to be that change cannot be made to a city that refutes corruption.

[MUSIC]

**EM:** Well, that about wraps it up. Antoine Fuqua's *Training Day* emphasizes L.A.'s hidden history through characters Jake Hoyt and Alonzo Harris. While Hoyt is reflective of the unknown, Lonzo's character sheds light on the realities within L.A., and the problematic nature of not disclosing such actions. I'd like to thank you, Steve, for having me over, and hope you enjoyed the discussion!

**SD:** Of course, I hope this podcast encourages listeners to pay close attention to the corruption surrounding them. Thanks to all the listeners!

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]