Linda Williams’ \textit{Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the “Frenzy of the Visible”} is an intriguing history of moving image pornography. Williams charts the development of filmic pornography from its late-nineteenth-century antecedents to the present day. The most prominent of these antecedents was, according to the author, the British photographer Eadwearde Muybridge. Muybridge, as camera buffs will know, achieved fame for his sequential photographs of horses and, later, of women. In 1877 Muybridge, commissioned by a wealthy friend, captured that previously invisible moment on film, when for an instant a galloping horse left the ground in brief, sequential, rhythmic, flight. Williams would have us believe that hard core pornography similarly captures that other moment of flight, when human, rather than equine bodies, experience a temporary, seemingly “invisible” and “frenzied” flight – during orgasm.

\textit{Hard Core} is a useful text providing historians of sexuality with a well-written chronology of the development of heterosexual, moving image pornography in the western world. An examination and explication of key terms and moments in this history are offered with as little prurience as possible given the subject matter. Terms from the parlance of the pornographer are graphically explained and the reader quickly understands the meaning of expressions such as “money shot” (visible penile ejaculation), “split beaver” (the opened female genitals), the “meat shot” (a further genital descriptor) and so forth. The terms, hard and soft-core pornography, are, curiously, made less explicit. Both, admits Williams, are contested terms, with soft-core often conflated with erotic romance, while hard-core usually being determined by the visible presence of the erect phallus and, by the 1970s, the clear portrayal of penetrative heterosexual sex. Soft-core pornography, on the other hand, plays a child-like game of “peek-a-boo with the body”. Hard-core pornography, its apparently much worthier and more intellectual counterpart, exists, according to Williams, as evidence and confessional of the voyeuristic record of “involuntary paroxysm…of the thing itself.”

The impact of changing technologies on the development of the moving pornographic image is entertainingly charted in this text. Evolving audio-visual technologies, have, necessarily, transformed the genre. Muybridge’s early proto-cinematic stills of naked running women, which were animated in larger than life motion using his own hand cranked machine, the zoopraxiscope, influenced the rise of the stag film. Stag, initially filmed on Edison’s Kinetoscope, was characterised by a raw primitivism, devoid of narrative, and it inevitably involved maximum visibility of the genitals. Williams’ neat turn of
phrase led her to describe stag as a “prolonged oscillation between genital show and genital event.” The development of movie length pornographic films, notably *Deep Throat*, (which Williams unconvincingly positions as a feminist film) is seen as a watershed in pornographic history, for in *Deep Throat* a narrative (spurious as it is) becomes, for the first time, a significant element of the erotic film.

Williams has also examined a relatively new and popular development in pornography, the emergence of “couples films.” These have, according to the author, largely destabilised the role and rule of the phallus in pornography, and have led to the development of more sophisticated sexual scenarios in which women’s desires, pleasures and sexual orgasm are the *raison d’etre* of the event.

Interestingly, women’s involvement in both the production and viewing of pornography has been credited with this erotic coup. In fact, Williams attributes a decrease in violent hard-core pornography to a kind of feminist “intervention” by female pornographers, claiming that hard-core films of the 1990s are much less misogynous and violent than films produced in the 1970s. This may be the case, and Williams is, to her credit, justly critical of pornography that obviously objectifies, debases or brutalises women. However, her admiration of “couples films” is not an assumption based on any significant analysis of heterosexual power relations, or the real politic of heterosexual sexual practice. It is a judgement based more on the aesthetic merits of “couples films” that are increasingly characterised by high production details which, reports Williams, include literate scripts, relatively good acting, handsome female and male performers and “abundant female fantasy.” These fantasies (and what fantasies they are) revolve around what Williams perceives as a new male anxiety, wherein male spectators can no longer “view (pornographic films) without worrying much about her pleasure.”

Films produced by Candida Royalle (herself a one time porn star, turned company director of Femme Productions) fall into this category. Williams argues that films directed by Royalle, which do not involve vaginal penetration of the vagina by an erect penis, seriously undermine the violent phallus of traditional hard core pornography. Radical feminists would disagree. Anti-pornographers Andrea Dworkin, Catherine Mackinnon, Dorchen Leidholt and Sheila Jeffreys, would maintain that the camera itself is a violent, penetrative phallus, as invasive and reckless of female integrity as its fleshy counterpart.

Despite Williams pro-pornography bias, made explicit in the introduction of *Hard Core*, where the author erroneously claims that feminists “closed the lid” on emergent sexuality debates of the 1970s, the text is a valuable contribution to the vexed and perplexing issues and debates which surround pornography. It is, in fact, an incisive, scholarly and at times witty text. Chapter Five, titled “Generic Pleasures: Number and Narrative” is an original and
entertaining comparison of feature length pornographic films with Hollywood musicals. Hard Core is worth reading for this amusing chapter alone.

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Black Man Emerging: Facing the Past and Seizing a Future in America  

“Please, it’s not about excluding the sisters. It’s about trying to gain your respect, and trying to keep it.”

So argues Gary, the police officer in Spike Lee’s Get on the Bus (1996), in response to an African-American woman’s declaration that the 1995 Million Man March could not possibly achieve “unity” without working alongside the sisters in “solidarity.” Jamilia is cut off before she is given a chance to respond to this, but chances are (by the look on her face), it would run something like her earlier retort to Gary’s argument for a men-only march:

   Gary: The thing is that there are certain questions which are specific to manhood, ah, such as, how can we be better husbands, and sons, and fathers, and [SMIRKS] lovers.
   Jamilia: Well you can start by not trying to put us womenfolk in our place. [SARCASTICALLY] Leave the sisters at home while the brothers work it out. Puh-lease.

Black Man Emerging, according to the blurb on the back cover, deals with the “fate and state of America’s Black men.” The book itself emerges from a long African-American tradition of self-help, while at the same time, it recognises the racist and systemically discriminatory nature of contemporary American society. In carving a path between these positions, White and Cones advocate individual improvement in a collective context of black culture, alongside a “candid Black/White dialogue about the role of race in society” (291). In the final section they outline a number of successful programs aimed at young black men and boys which are centred primarily around schools and other institutions.

In determining the “fate” of America’s black men, White and Cones take as the point of departure the Nation of Islam-organized Million Man March. The strength of such activities, they argue, lies in their ability to repair a rupture in the development of black masculinity. In chapter two, “Beginnings,” the authors attempt to establish the history of black masculinity, starting with Africa and ending with the urban ghettos of North America. The explicit and repeated suggestion that African-American men need to reclaim “the African-