



# **"Baad Bitches" and Sassy Supermamas: Black Power Action Films (New Black Studies Series)**

*Stephane Dunn*

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This lively study unpacks the intersecting racial, sexual, and gender politics underlying the representations of racialized bodies, masculinities, and femininities in early 1970s black action films, with particular focus on the representation of black femininity. Stephane Dunn explores the typical, sexualized, subordinate positioning of women in low-budget blaxploitation action narratives as well as more seriously radical films like *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* and *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, in which black women are typically portrayed as trifling "bitches" compared to the supermacho black male heroes. The terms "baad bitches" and "sassy supermamas" signal the reversal of this positioning with the emergence of supermama heroines in the few black action films in the early 1970s that featured self-assured, empowered, and tough (or "baad") black women as protagonists: *Cleopatra Jones*, *Coffy*, and *Foxy Brown*.

Dunn offers close examination of a distinct moment in the history of African American representation in popular cinema, tracing its emergence out of a radical political era, influenced especially by the Black Power movement and feminism. *"Baad Bitches" and Sassy Supermamas* also engages blaxploitation's impact and lingering aura in contemporary hip-hop culture as suggested by its disturbing gender politics and the "baad bitch daughters" of Foxy Brown and Cleopatra Jones, rappers Lil' Kim and Foxy Brown.

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