

# **WILLIAM GREAVES**

## **PSYCHODRAMA, INTERRUPTION, AND CIRCULATION'**



## A NOTE FROM THE ORGANIZERS

William Greaves is a key figure in American filmmaking. Despite his historical and contemporary significance, few of his films are restored and available. As artists, writers, and educators, we have both been deeply influenced in our own practices by Greaves' progressive artistic strategies, particularly his use of psycho-drama to reveal the nature of hidden power structures, and his use of Brechtian tools for analysis of labor conditions around the making of the work. We are also interested in the way his unique observational eye and virtuosic editing tell a specific and rich story of black empowerment during the '60s and '70s.

With this symposium, we want to share this important work with a new generation and give access to films that have rarely been screened. For this occasion, 1972's rarely seen *Nationtime*—Gary has been newly restored. During this day, there will be a keynote address and a panel discussion with contemporary artists and thinkers to more deeply probe the universe of William Greaves. There will also be an exhibition with works by Greaves and the artists Martine Syms and Sondra Perry, both of whom are working in the vein of his legacy.

— Fia Backström and Martine Syms

# CONVERSATION

## FIA BACKSTRÖM AND MARTINE SYMS

**Martine Syms:** First, I wanted to ask you: How did you learn about Greaves' work?

**Fia Backström:** A friend pointed me to *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* (1968) a few years ago and I was blown away by it. It is destabilizing in so many ways. One can never really be sure what is real-life and what is staged in the film. Greaves is visibly the director but he is also playing the "director." There is not much of a script, but for a continuous repetition of one scene. This rut triggers the whole scenario of the crew's upheaval, which climaxes in the final discussion in which Greaves reveals that the operative premise (or question) for the film is a critique of alienating labor conditions. What about you, how did you get to know about his work?

**MS:** I also came across the same film. I had seen part of it when it was released on Criterion Collection. When I was in college, a friend of mine was watching every single movie in the collection. *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* was playing in her dorm room while we were hanging out and I was trying to figure out what it was. But I didn't have the title and I didn't know the director. Years later, I was meeting with Erin Cristovale and Amir George for the Black Radical Imagination screening and they had just presented *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* in Boston and I was like "Oh, shit, that's that movie." I rewatched it and in that gap of almost 10 years, I'd become obsessed with *Black Journal* and knew who Greaves was through his public television work. My artwork and research were about alternative histories of television. I'm often thinking about the gap between representation and reality, how moving images can change your relationship to your lived experience, and how the labor of image-making shows up in the image itself. Most recently, I was teaching Greaves' work in a studio class about repetition. His films were the focus of our recursion unit, formally in the way they are edited and because his work contains several strange loops about performance and process.

**FB:** Me too, I used the film to teach a critical issues class. Like for you, new layers of meaning open up each time I see it. I am interested in his use of psychodrama as a method, which extends for me from pedagogy to art making. In 2009, I actually did a cover version of *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm*. I translated its parameters into exhibition format as a way to understand and explore psychodrama. I became the Indecisive Artist,

involving everyone in the institution from the museum directors to the interns. I asked the curatorial assistants to record the process. Like Greaves, I needed a short scene to provoke the dynamic within the institution. So I lifted a scene from the play *Les Enfants Terribles* by Jean Cocteau, because it was the name of the restaurant where the curator and I had met to talk about the work. I presented the scene in which the two siblings work out their rivalry in a tent-like structure in their moonlit living room to the museum staff as a foundation for what could exist in the space. In the end, a minor, unstaged upheaval from the installation crew actually took place.

**MS:** Yes, it's almost another recursion—an enactment of what he's doing. When I was teaching it, we had started working on this symposium and exhibition, so I was thinking about it in relation to *In the Company of Men* (1969), which I was obsessed with. It feels very contemporary in the way that power dynamics are being discussed. It brought up questions about how people are now understanding those relationships, and how psychodrama or reenactment can be used to play with them and create a different way of relating. I recently saw the director Céline Sciamma speaking after her film *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019). She was talking about how most of the time the way you're taught to write film is about a negotiation, a conflict, a struggle. She was really interested in trying to write scenes without a traditional hierarchy, and how that allowed for different possibilities, different relationships, created different conversations. You see it repeatedly as a technique used in *Black Journal*, too. It creates this opportunity, or interruption, for imagining other ways of interacting, other ways of living, and so forth.

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**FB:** I think the real-life enactment of something where you put your body on the line is part of the incredible power of the work. To work through representational space or semiotic systems, like his contemporary Jean-Luc Goddard, is a very different tactic than trying to imagine another outcome by working through a specific scenario in real life. It's like actual social reality is his material, for example in *Nationtime*—Gary (1972) he frames the Black Caucus with the narrator voice of actor Sidney Poitier, to turn it into a drama. It's almost like seeing a stage play. Greaves' use of pseudo-documentary to analyze reality is more urgent than ever because of the contemporary media situation that makes it hard to distinguish real-life events and persons from fictionalized ones.

**MS:** I feel maybe Greaves and a lot of people who worked on *Black Journal* were coming from theater and a live context, and within television was this new medium. They were still in that time of there being a lot of hope around what television could be and in the United States, commercial television hadn't totally foreclosed the option of what could be on TV. (In the last few years, I do feel that some of the



potential of showing in those spaces has been foreclosed by advertising.) Still, I do think there are a lot of similarities. The parallel with my own life would be the internet. I really grew up alongside that and I wanted to make film and video for that medium. I liked the way things could circulate and how that circulation, similar to a theatrical context, actually became a part of the work. And when you were just talking about putting your body on the line, I was thinking about embodiment. I think embodiment is also really key for me in this work because at the end of the day, that's kind of what race is about. That's the difference in lived experience. So, how do you make work around an embodied experience without having some stakes? I think it becomes really flat when it's just talking about representation. With my work "Lessons," for example, my initial goal was reflecting on what Sciamma was talking about, along with many other filmmakers, Greaves included, whom I'm influenced by. I wanted a project where I made everything the wrong way. I was kind of talking the way Frank Logan talks about "impropriety" but in relationship to blackness. I was going to put cuts where they shouldn't be. I was going to have the composition be fucked up. I was going to have the sound be fucked up. Most of the footage I was using was documentary footage, whether that was taken from my own archives—I kind of go back through my own archive, cannibalize my own images all the time—or footage from news and things like that. Plus, I was interested in having primarily black people featured in them so it's like a document of what black people are doing: How we are living, acting, breathing, thinking, and, in that way, it really does parallel. Like I was saying, I was watching *Black Journal* and I was just like, "This is so insane." It's really just incredibly made.

**FB:** That's incredible! But to understand that there really was no news or TV program for black people is so fucked up, so *Black Journal* becomes this incredibly important source of empowerment.

**MS:** Right, that it wasn't standard. *Black Journal* was first run by white executives, and not until the fifth episode is the leadership black. That's the first episode that William Greaves directed.

**FB:** Returning to embodiment, in *Still A Brother: Inside the Negro Middle Class* (1967), which consists of a series of interviews, mainly with black middle class men, there's another interruption technique. In the middle of the film, a staged satirical scene at a mansion suddenly appears. In a role-reversal, a group of African Americans dressed in fancy garb and tennis clothes are served cocktails by a submissive white maid. It gets me thinking of Derek Jarman's film *The Tempest and The Garden*, in which a musical number interrupts and radically alters the tone.

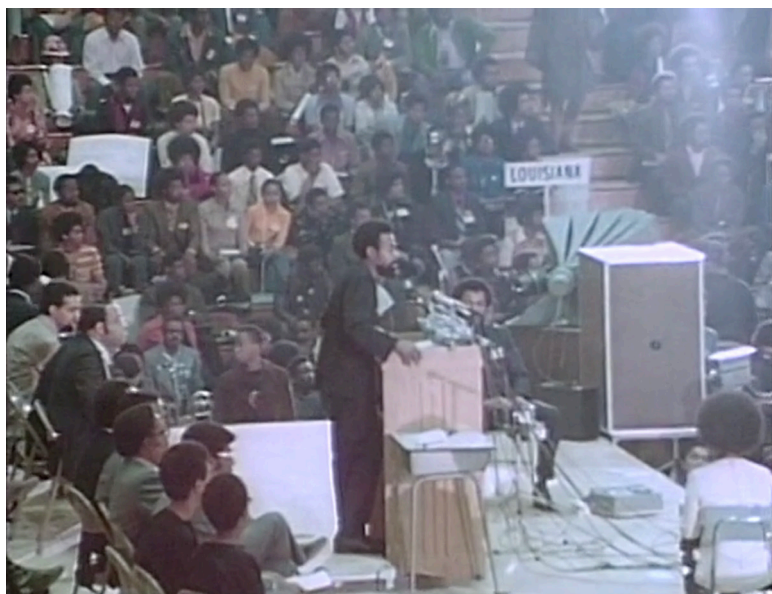
**MS:** I think Sondra Perry does that very beautifully, as I'm also thinking of Simon Leung, another filmmaker I love whose work does that using fiction, fantasy, music, and so on to create a departure point. So in the midst of this kind of realism, there's another genre or "mode of address" that's deployed. I appreciate that it shows how constructed the reality is, and when you put them back-to-back and cut to a kind of overture, it shows that they're equally constructed. That it's prescriptive. What about repetition in Greaves' work?

**FB:** In *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm*, there is the banal, soap opera-like script with the brief exchange between two characters that gets rehashed throughout the film in different iterations, like a refrain that refuses character development and the classic dramaturgical arc of climax and release. It becomes allegorical as actors become types. Together, the repetition and the banality create the itch in the crew to create a revolution on the set.

**MS:** Absolutely. With repetition, I think a lot about how it is used to kind of aestheticize a type of exhaustion. There's something about the kind of content of that pretty inane conversation that happens in the movie that frustrates everyone, but it contains enough pressure points—whether that's through misogyny or homophobia or just the sort of stereotypical relationship that it's depicting—that it does get exhausted. The different crew members respond to it like they're just tired of hearing it. Repetition is an interesting way of showing exhaustion.

**FB:** Apart from Psychodrama, Interruption, and Circulation, Repetition is another of the many strategies that Greaves used to revolutionize how to make films. They are all still relevant and helpful tools or gifts for us now as artists.

**MS:** That's a great way of saying it. I think as an artist, though he's been so influential to so many artists, he's been underrecognized. Clearly he was somebody who wanted his work to be what he was doing for a living, and have it be shared with his audience. It's becoming clear as art museums and collections try to rectify the holes that have been in their canon, those opportunities weren't really available to him. He worked around that by working in documentary, working for public television, working in theater, as well as being an independent filmmaker. I think these kinds of inheritances we have—these tools—I definitely use in almost all my work. It's nice to put Greaves back into this art context and broaden our notions of moving image work.



Stills from *Nationtime*—Gary

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# AN EXCHANGE OF FAITHS: THE CINEMA OF WILLIAM GREAVES

## JARED SEXTON

William Greaves *should* be a household name. And I don't mean "in an ideal world" or "if he had his due," but rather given the basic facts of his career: an auspicious start as an actor boasting credits with Broadway and Hollywood productions; a prolific filmography exceeding 200 entries and spanning more than half a century, including dozens of commissions from public offices and funding agencies across the country and around the world; reams of critical acclaim and a shelf of coveted prizes, among them an Emmy, membership in the Actor's Studio, induction into the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame, a citation for Lifetime Achievement from the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers; a résumé of collaboration with some of the biggest names in culture and politics, from Amiri Baraka and Toni Morrison to Sidney Poitier and Anthony Quinn. Greaves was high-profile and highly accomplished, yet one can be forgiven for never learning the first thing about his life and work, even as a film scholar or, more modestly, as a fan of black cinema broadly defined.

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Some of this has to do with the relative obscurity in which documentary production teams generally labor, only more so in the case of black documentarians. There are, to be sure, niche audiences for documentary filmmaking—aided of late by digitization and video streaming services—and educational institutions still ensure a captive market for mainstream fare and a living library for specialized output; but, in contrast to popular narrative genres, even when documentary films achieve the occasional broad appeal—winning an Academy Award, for instance—it is unusual that a writer or director or producer becomes well known as a result. Greaves himself described his own prodigious body of work with characteristic understatement: "I thought I was going to be a hurricane, but I ended up becoming merely a single raindrop. Hopefully there are other raindrops of similar mind." Fortunately, there are creative intellectuals like Fia Backström and Martine Syms who are dedicated to recovering lost works in Greaves' vast catalogue, building upon their rich legacy, and convening public forums to begin exploring their profound significance. Raindrops may yet gather into a storm.

Greaves' career reminds us that the lines between documentary and fiction filmmaking are blurred at best in the development of black cinema. This is so because, as anthropologist Dionne Bennett reminds us in a survey for the *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*, many black artists trained in varied formats, styles, and techniques,

moving across generic conventions as needed; and because, as cultural theorist Valerie Smith noted a generation prior in the canonical *Black Popular Culture* anthology, “the documentary impulse” in black film requires, for better or worse, formal permeability, where neither realist nor fantastic tendencies can easily be cordoned off from the other, given the peculiar demands of black representation unfolding between the force of historical facticity and the vagaries of lived experience, individual and collective. This impulse can no doubt serve to stifle the imagination and naturalize what are in actuality troubling ideological positions, but it can also, in a fortuitous twist, imbue documentary film itself with a unique artistic license that respects the facts of the matter while addressing the subject at hand in ways that, far from merely enlightening audiences, foster a productive *uncertainty*, a dark illumination.

One of the first things a careful viewer may notice about Greaves’ many films—whether an early work for the National Film Board of Canada like *Emergency Ward* (1959), his coverage of major historical events in *The First World Festival of Negro Art* (1966) or *From These Roots* (1974), his later biographical treatments like *Ida B. Wells: A Passion for Justice* (1989) or *Ralph Bunche: An American Odyssey* (2001), or perhaps especially his most experimental project and magnum opus, *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One*, and its latter day sequel—is that presentation of the most elementary data (e.g. facts, figures, names, dates, places) or emplotment within received narrative structures is approached therein as an unavoidable but insufficient point of departure. His cinema is well versed in and relentlessly critical of the form and substance of the ruling ideas, not unlike many of his colleagues influenced by currents of *cinéma vérité* and social documentary photography; but its nuanced relationship to interrogation as a value is the hard-earned result of endlessly frustrated efforts to tell it like it is, time and time again.

This is not, then, primarily a philosophical disposition interested in eschewing the liberal constraints of empiricism or positivism or rationalism, though I think it manages to do so quite persuasively. With Greaves, the camera, whose frequent long takes alternate between unassuming establishing shots and intensive close-ups, is not simply pensive or quizzical for the sake of more adequate intelligence; and the commentary, whose vernacular erudition cannot but arouse yearning for greater levels of mass political literacy, does not delight in ambiguity or skepticism for its own sake. Rather, the ensemble of questions—and the questioning *spirit*—that sit at the heart of each production, in image and text alike, are raised as concrete effects of an ongoing effort to describe and explain and chronicle the strivings of black people, however grave or grandiose or granular, and finding that *none* of this can be done well in the terms of a morality tale or a natural science or a general law. All of the work exhibits that sensibility, even when black

people are not the central focus.

There is a relatively straightforward reading of Greaves' *oeuvre* that suggests it documents precisely what literary scholar Hortense Spillers rightly claims is most denied the black personality in the modern world: "the dynamic principle of the living that distinguishes the subject from his/her objectification." To my mind, though, Greaves' cinema reveals, in ways sly and sincere, how that testimonial aspect of the film's mechanical witness is rendered quotidian and mundane, almost unremarkable, a point made more subversive because it happens along the way to another meditation regarding the dynamic *persistence* of structures that cannot be fled or forgotten, despite our best efforts; a meditation, that is, on the *experience* of structure rather than its suspension or transcendence. The Struggle—for "freedom, justice, and equality," or for the "unity of purpose" supposed to make all else possible—does not inhabit this cinematic universe as something external or extrinsic to the structural conditions of racial slavery or the living legacy of colonialism or the predicament of nominally free black populations throughout the diaspora. Put differently, the will of the people is not heterogeneous to the circumstances that seem to call upon it to find or forge an historic mission.

On this score, Greaves' documentary practice could be said to resonate with the contemporaneous theoretical enterprise of philosopher Alain Badiou. Over the same decades of the late twentieth century, Badiou drew creatively from mathematics to elaborate a materialist ontology of "being and event" meant to move beyond the perceived limitations of "the linguistic turn" and the currents of romantic vitalism among the left intelligentsia. And, as a lifelong militant like Greaves, his labors were engaged with the most pivotal social, political, and economic transformations of the period: from the decolonial convulsions of May '68 to the neo-imperialism of the War on Terror, from the post-Cold War ascendance of neoliberalism to the post-recession assertions of reactionary populism today. Since at least the publication of his 1969 *The Concept of Model*, Badiou has mobilized the combined resources of art, literature, psychoanalysis, and science in attempts to understand how truth makes itself known in the world as "the materiality of the new." As he once put it in conversation with his foremost English language translator, the Latin Americanist Bruno Bosteels: "What is the new in a situation?"

Badiou expanded upon his aim in that aptly titled interview—"Can Change Be Thought?"—by clarifying, with no small amount of exasperation, that "the principal contribution of my work does not consist in opposing the situation to the event," but rather "in posing the following question: what can be deduced, or inferred...from the point of view of the situation itself?" I quote here at length:



In the end, therefore, I would like to be evaluated or judged on this part of my project, because in my opinion that is where the heart of the matter lies as well as its novelty, even as far as the attempt is concerned to illuminate the militant dimension of a procedure of truth. However, I am very surprised to see that, in general, for reasons due to their own interests, the commentators jump on the event to qualify it as transcendence.... Truth, for me, is not the name of the event, even though that is how it is often interpreted. Truth is what unfolds as a system of consequences, secured by an unheard-of figure of the subject as a consequence of the rupture of the event...without any guarantees from the event's transcendence in and of itself. [...] My unique philosophical question, I would say, is the following: can we think that there is something new in the situation, not outside the situation...can we really think through novelty and treat it in the situation? [...] But, of course, to think the new in the situation, we also have to think the situation, and thus we have to think what is repetition, what is the old, what is not new....

Cinema “from the point of view of the situation itself” may be the most suitable caption to Greaves’ output. From first to last, despite the wide variance of venue, audience, running time, and operating budget, Greaves is concerned to think the situation, as it were, to understand what repeats and what continues in order to deduce or infer what is new within it, a novelty that becomes discernible as a result of the emergence of a figure—a leader, a movement, a work of art—but that should not be confused for the agency of that figure itself. The subject of the event, to stay with Badiou’s terminology, is not the cause of our efforts; it is an element of their conditions.

This insight has a profound bearing on the leitmotif of Greaves’ most celebrated titles: solidarity. That is perhaps most evident in a film like *Nationtime–Gary*, with its explicit interest in the conscious and deliberate efforts of black political organizations to formulate a radical agenda, “a dynamic program for black liberation,” within and against the two-party system of governance in the U.S. The diverse array of constituents gathered together under the black nationalist banner are tasked with forging a policy platform that might afford sufficient common ground while navigating cross-cutting issues and internal conflicts of interest. We see this tension staged again in *Still A Brother: Inside the Negro Middle Class* regarding the sustainability of “linked fate” across the growing divisions between the black middle and working classes and the black poor. Or, adjacently, in *La Raza* (1972), which poses questions of solidarity among the galvanized Latinx populations of the U.S. in the 1960s and ‘70s (e.g. immigrant communities from Cuba and Mexico and Puerto Rico challenging white supremacy and U.S. imperialism across differences of race and national origin) and between the multiracial Latinx demographic and (overlapping) non-Hispanic black



communities from New York to Los Angeles.

But, to my mind, the underside of this overarching thematic exploration of solidarity regularly complicates, and perhaps suspends, even the aspiration for alliance or coalition. What Greaves discovers anew in each investigation, and what cannot fail to shock us (even when it does not fully surprise us), is an inconsistent multiplicity—sometimes strained, sometimes conflictual, sometimes antagonistic—related to a concealed or disavowed truth in the field of encounter. Nothing better illustrates this facet of Greavesian filmmaking than the vignettes featured throughout *In the Company of Men*. Ostensibly a consideration of the dilemma of the “hardcore unemployed” in black communities and the muted attempts by state and civil society to redress it with affirmative action, the film is, in effect, an extended examination of the everyday torments of “human relations” and “industrial psychology” in the early post-civil rights era workplace, torments that continued by other means the racist repression making headlines on the streets of dozens of American cities at the time.

One aspect of this halfhearted remediation involves the use of “psychodrama,” or role playing, to seek “ways to get the supervisor and the worker to communicate, to get through to each other, to make the other face-to-face, peaceably, instead of hand-to-hand.” The method of psychodrama covers the permutations of workplace interaction—between (white) supervisors, between (black) workers, between (white) supervisors and (black) workers—and often involves role reversals in order to gain some appreciation of the perspective of the other party, their hopes and fears, their expectations and experiences. Importantly, one is meant not only to better grasp the meaning of another’s statements, but also, by hearing one’s words repeated by another’s voice and from another’s place, to grapple with the sound and fury of one’s own demands. It has the added benefit of demonstrating that power derives, in theory, from the institutional position rather than the individual person, but racialization has the effect of permanently conflating that fundamental distinction. Moreover, reversibility within hierarchy does not beget reciprocity, much less recognition. To the contrary, it can entrench and compound dominance, adding insult to injury. The resultant racial pantomime is tragicomic.

In this vein, Greaves juxtaposes two powerful scenes early on in the film: one the one hand, a rap session among young black men, all presumptively unemployed, in which they muse about how “you can also be militant on a large scale,” not unlike their counterparts some years later in *Just Doin’ It: A Tale of Two Barberships* (1976); on the other, a dramatization of the related ordeal facing black men “once classified as unemployable [who] can now compete successfully and obtain good jobs.” Charles Darby, one of those interviewed for the documentary, recounts his desperation navigating the segregated labor market and soul-crushing conditions of employment: “I keep getting

fooled, I keep getting these promises, and it actually hurts me. I don't like to get too emotional, but the way I feel now, I'm ready to give up on life...." A white actor, playing a typically callous supervisor, replies on cue: "I don't understand why you're making such a big thing out of it... you're getting the money...you're getting paid." The look on Darby's face registers the dreaded futility, his eyes downcast and averted, betraying restrained anger and inadmissible sadness.

This is not to say that Greaves' cinema is morose or melancholic. But neither is it upbeat or rousing. It is informative and educational as far as it goes, but well beyond its undeniable pedagogical function it is an archive of unspoken or unspeakable acknowledgement. Of what? Something captured well, I think, by Wanda Coleman's poem, "Office Politics," included in her powerful 1983 collection *Imagoes*. There a black woman narrator relays comments made to her by the diverse occupants of her contemporary workplace in a rough approximation of the race-class-gender vertical array, including: "the white boss," "the jewish foreman," "the white feminist co-worker," "the mexican co-worker," and "the japanese accountant." The boss lays out the operative terms:

stops at my desk to see how i'm doing. it's something, what a  
good strong work horse i am. nothing like those lazy mexicans  
and them power hungry jews can't be trusted  
who knows what's on the oriental mind  
but we negroes understand what the white man is about  
we understand that his best interest is ours  
that's why we've always made such fine employees

Hot on his heels, others share their thoughts and feelings in turn, soliciting forced or facile solidarity, confiding their preferences and prejudices, quietly insulting others without logical consistency or ethical coherence, or, in one case, plainly ignoring the narrator's presence altogether. Finally, there is another appearance:

my black co-worker

comes over to my desk, looks deep  
into my eyes. opens his mouth. moans  
shakes his head  
and goes back to work.



## 14 Stills from *In the Company of Men*



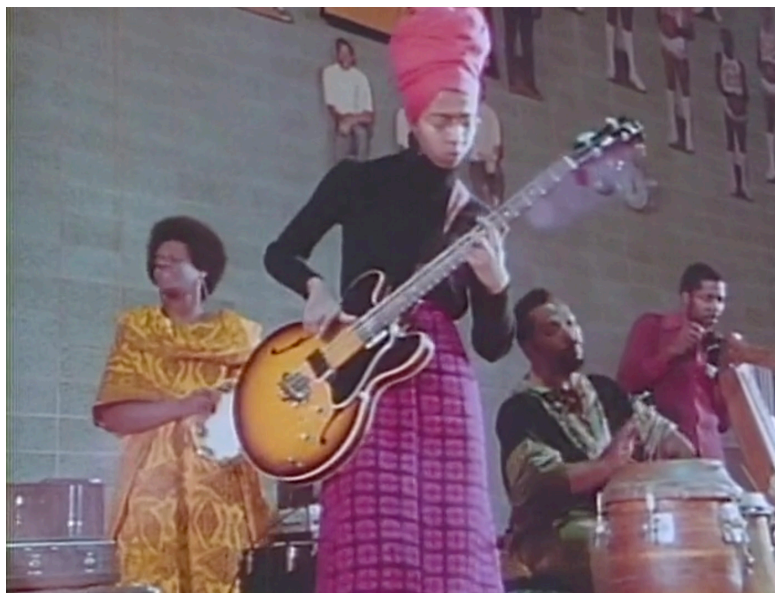
# REFLECTION

## ARIA DEAN

“Now more than ever” is often a cheap shot, but the phrase finds a rare, apt application in the oeuvre of William Greaves. While much of his work fits under the umbrella of “documentary,” Greaves’ engagement of the documentary form—unlike most of the film objects that are deemed as such—shows us more about the artifice of social structures, human engagement, and our engagement with said structures than they do document an “objective” reality. In front of Greaves’ camera, we see the real through the fake and the fake through the real.

Of course, Greaves’ work exhibits the usual layer of documentary functioning as a journalistic medium, shining a light on that which we Had No Idea About. A film like *Nationtime–Gary* is a very special document in this sense, reminding us of the actuality of discourse in black radical political circles circa 1972. Specifically of interest: the formulation of the relationship between a black radical agenda, global anti-colonial efforts, and good old fashioned class & labor politics. We could call this dynamic “extreme solidarity.” No better time to be reminded of it.

However, alongside these more traditional efforts, Greaves spent much of his time using “documentaries” to interrogate the utter fakeness of the real. This is, of course, most evident in his “meta-documentary” *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm*. Aside from that, throughout his career, Greaves was interested in a method of group therapy called “psychodrama,” a technique that involves role-playing situations from a person’s life alongside other group members, who play various characters within the narrative, in order to assist in participants’ understanding of themselves and their own history. The documentation of these gatherings are uncanny objects where everyone is performing. Some perform self, some perform otherness, some perform their perception of homogeneity. Though staunchly documentary in process, these works remind us that embodied reality is and always has been malleable.



16 Stills from *Nationtime*—Gary





# EXCERPTS FROM BLACK POWER TV

## DEVORAH HEITNER

### Black Power, White Institutions:

*Black Journal's Self-Reflexivity in the Greaves Era*

As Black editorial control strengthened, *Black Journal's* critical lens on powerful white institutions grew sharper. What role for Black empowerment could organizations like the school system, the police, and the army offer to African Americans, the program asked. In November 1968, after a year full of brutal clashes between police and Black communities, *Black Journal* aired a documentary framing “the dilemma” of the Black cop. Framing the coupling of “Black” and “cop” as a dilemma suggests just how far the program had moved from what the executives at NET initially planned. The critical position of the program’s staff on policing was more aligned with Black Power organizations than with the police. Kent Garrett, who produced the segment, recalls the choice to do a piece on Black cops as “obvious” in that moment: “At that time, the issue of police brutality, how police were dealing with Blacks, if I am Black cop, I am facing a real dilemma. . . . How do I deal with my people? What’s my loyalty to my partner?” Given the “issues naturally facing a Black cop at these times,” Garrett explains, “It made sense to check out a Black cop to see where his head is at how he’s relating to this.”<sup>31</sup> While to Garrett and his Black colleagues it may have been an obvious choice to produce this segment, the piece pushed the program toward a more complex Black perspective than the earlier segments had achieved.

The documentary called *The Black Cop* offers a meditation on the challenges of protecting Black communities while remaining conscious of the overwhelming taint of the history of police violence against African Americans would feel. The segment features intimate discussions with police officers, interviews with a number of other cops, and discussions with community members that consider the role of the Black cop and special pressures faced by Black police. Much of the segment is taken up with the portrait of a single, thoughtful, and somewhat conflicted New York City police officer reflecting on his work (see figure 3.5). He addresses the compromises inherent in his role serving the community, as well as the problematic way white officers expect him to be an expert on Black problems. The film is shot experimentally, including long takes of New

York City at night with long cross-fades. In the tradition of experimental cinema, the segment uses long cross-fades that linger to show doubled exposures of urban landscapes. By intentionally not editing for narrative consistency, the segment emphasizes the challenging position of the officer caught in between allegiances. Monologues by the officer are intercut with footage of his daily encounters with the public, such as a close-up of a person lying in the street, the subject of a “drunk and disorderly” call, and a sustained confrontation with an angry driver whose keys are being taken away after an accident. Such images, now commonplace on television due to “reality” cop shows, would have been unusual for the sensibilities of the time. The portrait-of-a-cop segment of the film juxtaposes images of the neighborhood, images from the chaotic interior of an apartment that appears to be a crime scene, and images of close-ups of the officer’s face. The editing seems designed to make the difficulties of police work more apparent to the viewer, emphasizing the difficulties of dealing with people in vulnerable and aggressive states of mind.

The featured officer thoughtfully discusses other police who are trigger-happy, shooting nonviolent criminals during apprehension. He states that he refuses to be complicit in such violence and instead puts his faith in the rule of law. “Why should I shoot a kid?” he asks, observing, “I’m executing him at the same time.” The next shot is of the sign at 120th and 3rd Avenue, locating the scene in Harlem. The frame tilts down from the sign to the police officer at a pay phone, with jazz horns playing on the soundtrack. The odd angles and displacements underscore the complex feelings of both police and community members about encounters with one another. As the officer continues to unfold for the viewer, he clarifies his relationships with white colleagues. “I’m just as loyal as any other cop,” he says defensively, but his white peers do not necessarily trust his loyalty. “I feel them feeling for my loyalty,” he remarks perceptively. His feeling of being caught between the community and the police force comes up several times: “I am careful. I feel I am being used as a shield.” Meanwhile, he perceives that Black community members suspect he will treat them worse than white people. Painfully, he reflects, “I don’t feel completely together inside. I know I am caught in the middle.”

Rather than offer a narrative about Black Power to frame the officer’s position, the producers directly ask the officer his opinions about Black Power. They do not directly reference alternative proposals about community self-policing from Black Power organizations such as the Black Panther Party, but these discourses are implied by their question. Initially, the



officer responds with ambivalence, remarking, "Anything that can help our people is good to me . . . as long as you don't overdo it." He is critical of what he calls "militants in the streets" who, he says, "exaggerate the point one day, and run away the next." Calling these individuals "extortion artists," he nonetheless seems to be interested in Black activism. Hearing this description and seeing the look of the crime-scene apartments and the littered and colorful streets of Harlem traversed by this officer daily, this segment resembles *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970), a film directed by Ossie Davis and set in Harlem, in which two Black detectives pursue a huckster who has made a fortune by defrauding poor Black people. The reality, as explored on *Black Journal*, is more complex, however, and the cop acknowledges that some people are doing good things under the moniker "Black Power." Ultimately, the viewer gets a portrait of a man who does not trust his white colleagues or Black Power activists fully, but relies on his own sense of right and wrong.

The context of the recent trauma of the Watts riots frames a considerably shorter segment about Black police in Los Angeles, which seems to be included, in part, to showcase *Black Journal*'s national range. Brief interviews of police officers in their offices and on the street offer background to the situation. One officer remarks, "Don't ask me as a Black cop to shoot looters," possibly in response to the haunting images of looters being shot in Watts, images that must have dominated the consciousness of some of *Black Journal*'s viewers. At several points in the film, the filmmakers use "man or woman on the street"-style interview footage to interject critical perspectives about Black policing. A man in a barber shop insists that Black policemen have to treat the public "like the white man treats you," in order to qualify for the force. A number of community members speak out in agreement, saying that Black police are even more repressive than white police. One woman, interviewed through the window of her car, says that it "takes a certain kind of person" to be a policeman, someone "brutal," who enjoys "the instant authority that comes with a badge and uniform." The commentary that closes this documentary asks a pressing question: In a community that is demanding change, which side is the Black police officer on?

In structure and form, *The Black Cop* is quite different from the documentaries of the episodes preceding the strike. Rather than offer their own editorializing directly, the newly empowered staff uses editing to create contrasts and seeks the "expert" opinions of African Americans in the community, as opposed to featuring a journalist's opinion at the end of

the film. The segment includes a very sympathetic police officer and some very thoughtful critiques of African Americans who choose to work as police, emphasizing multiple and complex opinions. Ultimately, this piece, made just as *Black Journal* came under full Black editorial control, asks hard questions about whether Black people can operate ethically in white-dominated institutions. In creating this documentary and others like it, the staff of *Black Journal* raised issues central to African American concerns and also reflected their own challenging position in white-dominated PBS.

As *Black Journal* under Greaves progressed, the opening theme, studio setup, and camera work grew more dynamic and compositions grew more complex. In one segment about Black employment, Greaves and House are parted like curtains, and behind them appear enlarged images of Black labor protesters. As usual, Lou House speaks in the first-person plural: "This is happening all over America—which has prevented us from getting our fair share in America." As the documentary transitions from images of general labor struggles showing striking construction workers and other tradespeople, a short film shows a speeded-up series of images of commuters on the subway, with scintillating electronic music. A voice-over centers this experimental film clearly on the story of efforts to organize transit workers in New York, but its appearance is more in line with the experimental films of its era.

At the end of Greaves's tenure at *Black Journal*, the program raised the stakes once more on covering provocative questions about the relationships between African Americans and institutions. For episode 22, *Black Journal* took the ambitious step of sending Kent Garrett with a two-man crew (sound and image) to Asia to cover Black enlisted men in Vietnam, Japan, and Okinawa. The result of the three men's month-long travels—often at considerable risk—was one of *Black Journal*'s most exciting, fully realized segments: a full-length, hour-long piece about the Black GIs that broadcast on the NET network in May 1970, when the United States was still in the thick of the Vietnam War. This path-breaking documentary included footage that put a face on the reports of racial tension coming out of Vietnam.

While newspapers at the time were reporting on the racism and dissatisfaction of Black troops, the kind of extended discussion with Black GIs offered by *Black Journal* was a rarity. News stories on mainstream television, when they focused on Black soldiers, tended to consider individuals who had succeeded in the army despite racism. Chet Huntley reported a story on the *NBC Evening News* on September 17, 1968, about Frederic E.



Davison, the “third Negro general” in the U.S. Army. In this piece, Davison is portrayed as a “self-made man.” When asked about the setbacks he has faced, he replies: “Well, I’d be less than honest if I didn’t say there were obstacles. It’s been a requirement to prove my capabilities. But I can say this, that in recent years, the opportunity has been there, you just have to do the job . . . it’s up to the individual to make the grade or not make the grade.” An *NBC Evening News* report from October 1969 focused on “integration in the armed forces.” “One of the problems the armed forces face is the integration of black and white fighting men,” Huntley reported. “It is something that is always on the minds of the Blacks.” The story goes on to emphasize the sense of togetherness that unites Black soldiers even in this “twenty-four-hour-a-day integrated situation.”

*Black Journal*’s documentary examined some of the same problems as NBC’s but offered a more complex, disturbing, and painful look at the isolation and ennui experienced by Black soldiers. Garrett and his crew created a portrait that gave viewers a chance to watch Black GIs work and socialize in something like “real time.” Incredibly, Garrett got permission from the Pentagon to make the documentary. Pentagon officials encouraged him to focus on officers such as Davison and to counteract the “bad press” they knew the armed forces were getting about racism and anti-war sentiment in general. Garrett and his crew were “shepherded through” Asia by public information officers, but every official data-gathering experience was followed by Black soldiers approaching Garrett and his crew, excited to talk to Black journalists for the first time about how they felt about the racism in the service, about being displaced from home, and about the violence and terror of being at war.<sup>32</sup> Interviews with servicemen in mess halls, USO clubs, on a riverboat in Upper Saigon, and aboard a helicopter are interspersed with footage of the men working and off-duty in a variety of locations. The soldiers describe the way they use Black culture to resist the conformity demanded by the armed forces, and they critique both the daily racism they experience and the larger implications of racism for their military careers and future prospects.

A long segment that follows a group of Black naval soldiers on a river ambush boat captures the boredom, loneliness, and terror of the job. While the images focus on mundane facets of everyday work on the boat, including long takes of the boat’s moving through the water, discussions with the men and voiceovers taken from their interviews offer a sense of the men’s subjectivity. One explains that he is “just on this boat to do a job: river ambush.” He describes feeling obligated to fight—“I feel that we’ve got to

fight” — but does not mention his opinion about the mission of the war. Another man describes his resistance to simple narratives about the war — “I am not gonna be no tyrant” — yet he also talks about his wish to be back in the United States with longing in his voice, saying, “I be thinking about going home,” and he reveals his fear of being killed. “I been thinking about Charlie [enemy soldiers] . . . it’s hard.” Garrett recalls actually being able to see North Vietnam from the boat. “We were ‘embedded’ before they used that term.”<sup>33</sup>

The film’s visual language aestheticizes the men on the boat, gliding through the seemingly empty landscape, to underscore that the men are not necessarily simply victims, though they are clearly caught in circumstances beyond their control. Powerful images of the men at work highlight strong bare arms holding machine guns (see figure 3.6) and firing round after round onto the shore. Later on, the documentary includes long shots of the Vietnamese landscape taken from harbors, tanks, and helicopters. The viewer is left with a sense of the soldiers’ isolation and longing, but also of their pride in doing their work well. The closing shot in this sequence, featuring the men on the navy boat doing a Black Power salute (see figure 3.7), reinforces a sense of the community that exists among the men despite the oppression they describe.

The role of Black culture, in the forms of music and fashion, in keeping the men’s spirits up and fostering a sense of individual and collective resistance to the military’s racist and dehumanizing practices is a pervasive theme of the documentary. The Black soldiers explain that army dress codes were at times more open-ended for white servicemen, whereas Black men faced constant discrimination when officials enforced regulations against bracelets, dashikis, and afros. The men describe challenging the dress code, emphasizing that both white and Black men were using costumes in a performative way to underscore their identities and resist the conformity mandated by their positions in the armed forces. “If you are white, a ‘cowboy costume’ is allowed, but [for Black men] a dashiki is not,” said one soldier.

Music in off hours was an important battleground as well. Listening to musicians such as Bobby Jenkins was a diversion and also an important way of affirming solidarity and community with other Black soldiers, a lifeline to Black culture at home, and a form of resistance to the army’s racism. One man describes being court-martialed after a fight with white men who wanted to listen to country and western in a bar. “We had soul music [on the base] a couple of nights, and they said they didn’t dig it . . . so they



put me on restriction for disobeying orders and refusing to stop dancing.” Speaking of the emergence of Black Power, the enlisted men remark that the movement gives them “a real feeling of power” from which they take heart, and this explains their strong preference for Black identity-oriented clothing choices. Black and white higher officials in the army were dismissive of these everyday performative acts that men were using to constitute themselves and their identities. After this segment, one Pentagon official dismisses the cultural activism of the Black soldiers while acknowledging that they face discrimination. “Soul is a handle; behind it are not very good conditions,” said the unnamed official, slighting the cultural activism of the African American soldiers.

In addition to tensions over defining themselves and their space through music and dress, the enlisted men describe encounters with imperialism and racism. They speak of the way white servicemen are teaching anti-Black racism to the Vietnamese, of being in the painful position of becoming part of the white American army’s imperialist project and the racist American values that accompany it. They complain of discrimination in Saigon. One soldier comments, “Vietnamese girls called me a nigger—I know it’s not part of their language.” At the same time, they are aware that as American servicemen they are perceived as savage monsters, as terrifying “beasts” who act like animals toward the Vietnamese. The soldiers speak of the complex role of African Americans taking part in American foreign policy. Several of the interviewees say in no uncertain terms that Black men should not be drafted. “If they want to fight for a country where they are mistreated, fine, but don’t force them to fight. Why should I fight? When I come home I can’t even buy a house in [the Chicago suburb of] Cicero.”

*Black Journal*’s documentary highlights the overwhelming segregation of the military, in contrast to the emphasis on the “twenty-four-hour-a-day integrated situation” described in the NBC report. The men on the riverboat point out that the frontlines, in particular, are predominantly African American. “I’ve seen a bunch of Black guys, a whole bunch of them out there. I don’t know why they are out there. I go up there, I’ll see about forty men, half of them Black. I don’t know why the army does that. I don’t think it’s right,” says a soldier. Another man sums it up: “There are two armies.” The men also describe the drawbacks of military service as a career path for African Americans. Various officers detail the challenges they have faced with promotion, saying that when the promotion boards come, white officers engage in sabotage, intentionally blocking the progress of Black men



**Figure 3.7.** A Black Power salute on a Navy boat.  
Courtesy of the Yale Film Study Center.

in their careers by tampering with service records and other techniques. One remarks, “It is not a democratic club.” While many men are discouraged, some are positive. “We can’t go no way but up,” one says. Yet the dangers of speaking out are clear: “Don’t be too quick to jump out,” a soldier says. “Furthermore, you have to fall in line.” The dangers of appearing in the documentary are addressed both directly and indirectly. After a group of men speaks with *Black Journal*’s reporter at some length, one acknowledges, “We might be looking for attorneys first thing tomorrow.” Describing his frustration, another soldier says, “If I got back and they tried to treat me like this, I’ll pick up a weapon and I’ll go down with them even in the world. . . . I shoot pretty good . . . they taught most of us how to shoot this weapon pretty good.” This threat hangs in the air, giving the viewer time to imagine the United States repopulated with armed, trained, and frustrated Black soldiers. The final segment of the documentary takes the viewer to a military base in Okinawa and features a group of off-duty men walking around in hand-decorated “Black Power” jackets in front of businesses that cater to Black fashions and hair maintenance (see figures 3.8 and 3.9). The segment closes with a long take of men giving each other a special hand shake, knocking fists, and walking off down the street together in a relaxed way, performing their sense of community for the



camera. Garrett recollected that these businesses catering to Black servicemen were run by African American men who had completed their service or perhaps deserted.<sup>34</sup>

Like the school reform documentary and the episode focused on the Black cop, *Black Journal's* investigation of the Black GI raised crucial questions about the possibilities for Black roles within institutions of power in the United States. Unlike these earlier programs, however, the Black GI episode showcased *Black Journal's* ability to cover not only national stories but international stories, and to do so with depth, style, and nuance. Furthermore, the Black GI episode featured a chorus of radical critique and moved the program completely away from the "balanced" approach it had taken under white leadership. The program on the Black GI serves as evidence of the growing assertiveness of *Black Journal's* staff and the changing times—by this point, in 1969, the remnants of an integrationist tone sounded hollow, Vietnam was falling apart, and the country's schisms were well known. The appeal of Black Power grew in many circles, as increased militancy seemed an appropriate response to the violence met by Black activists and the intense neglect of Black communities' needs.

In the face of these changes, the episode that followed the GI documentary offered an alternative to participation in white-controlled institutions: Black self-help organizations. The program proposes a response to the marginalization facing urban African Americans in a documentary segment on a Los Angeles-based self-help initiative called Operation Bootstrap. Greaves introduces the program, stating his own positive judgment of Bootstrap's effectiveness. "In many parts of the country, Black Americans are looking to self-help programs as a way toward self-realization. Operation Bootstrap in South Central Los Angeles is one of these programs. And Bootstrap seems to be working." This documentary cuts to the heart of a question, the question regarding the role of money in the African American community. Many Black self-help initiatives of this era explicitly rejected capitalism. Operation Bootstrap was an independent, Black Power-oriented organization, and its businesses were collectives. When a man in an encounter-group-style discussion asks heatedly how he can "be Black and a capitalist," he answers his own question, saying, "Blackness says, I love my brother. Capitalism says screw your brother!"

After showcasing the leader of Operation Bootstrap as he examines the theoretical foundations of the organization's work, the program transitions into the style of a traditional documentary, complete with voice-overs, interviews, and long sequences showing staff members working in





Figure 3.9. A Black soldier in Okinawa. Courtesy of the Yale Film Study Center.

**26** the various industries that Operation Bootstrap developed. The organization's goal of "uniting Black men to function in society" motivated its nine subsidiary "self-help" economic enterprises, including a company that produced Black dolls (Shindana Toys) and a machine shop (the Body and Thunder Shop). These enterprises provided training and wages to African Americans in South Central Los Angeles. The segment features images of men working in the machine shop and of men and women making the Black dolls. The documentary enumerates the range of services created by Operation Bootstrap, which serves as a reminder of the numerous economic and cultural arenas potentially involved in the struggle for Black empowerment. Doll-factory workers discuss the challenge of getting manufacturers not to "whiten" the features of the dolls. A shot of a young African American girl choosing her doll in the store reminds viewers what is at stake in the production of new icons for children.

A discussion of Operation Bootstrap's funding evoked familiar concerns about Black participation in institutions, as well as concerns about being dependent on funding from outside the Black community. Operation Bootstrap's officer explained her aversion to foundation support, because of the strings attached and the resulting vulnerability to funding cuts:

We started in 1965. We don't accept any government funds or large

foundations funds— We wanted it to be a self-help group. We know by looking at what happens to other projects and organizations, when you get that large check you run into hang-ups. You got people telling where to do, how to do, and what to do. There have been times when the big money has come to a project, but there was always that psychological threat . . . you never knew when that money was going to go. Organization after organizations come into existence, go through that money and go out of existence in the time we have developed from nothing to about a dozen businesses.

This concern about being ideologically compromised by funding organizations was extremely controversial among African American organizations, and it clearly resonated with the staff of *Black Journal*.<sup>35</sup>

In the same episode, a fictional and allegorical sketch asks related questions about when it is appropriate for Blacks to resist white help and practice “self-help” instead. The short film depicts a white man wearing an “I Give a Damn” button who has observed a fire blazing in a tenement building during his commute home to an unnamed suburb. He attempts to use a pay phone to call the fire department, but it is in use when he arrives. The encounter turns into a confrontation, with the African American man who is currently using the pay phone asking the white commuter, “You are concerned about the fire, but are they your kids?” When the commuter responds, “Of course they are not my kids,” the Black man points out his hypocrisy, saying that the white man’s kids probably live far away in a fireproof house. The Black man presses on, “What are you doing about the rats and the junkies and the other problems around here? You’re the white knight and come uptown to save us Black people.” The white man counters, “You won’t help your own people.” Their conversation echoes the divide between well-intentioned white liberals who want harmony but do not want to give up life in a racially exclusive neighborhood and Black ghetto-dwellers tired of liberal rhetoric.

In another exploration of Blacks working outside white institutions— this time mainstream American religious organizations—*Black Journal* traveled to the Midwest for a segment on the Nation of Islam. Lou House opens the segment on the Nation of Islam, so often the subject of mainstream media spectacle, by describing the nation’s various initiatives: an elementary school for six hundred K–12 children in Chicago, a “Muslim farm operation” in Casapolis, Michigan, and the newspaper *Muhammad Speaks*. Each of these initiatives is profiled in a segment with its leaders offering a televised “tour.” Next, Muhammad Ali gives his views on



Malcolm X, calling him a man who “fell victim to publicity, to applause.” For this episode, the Nation of Islam’s powerful and charismatic leader, Elijah Muhammad, granted *Black Journal* his first extensive interview on American television.<sup>36</sup> Though not unsympathetic, the interview is not particularly revealing. St. Clair Bourne, who worked on that segment, later recalled that Muhammad was “a bit senile” at the time, although he had moments of lucidity that enabled Bourne to understand his charisma and vision as a leader.<sup>37</sup> *Black Journal*’s episode on the Nation of Islam accentuates the scope and ambition of the nation’s project, without offering comment on its beliefs or tactics. In this way, it showcases the nation’s efforts to offer its members alternatives to participation in white-controlled institutions, without scratching too far below the surface of the nation’s internal politics.<sup>38</sup>

### **Picturing a Global Black World:**

#### **Looking beyond the Urban North**

28

In its search for positive examples of Black self-help, *Black Journal* frequently looked to the South. Interestingly, the program’s national inclusiveness was most pointed when it covered the American South. Whenever Lou House spoke of southern Black people, he used the words “we” and “us,” as in “We are having trouble with voter registration in the South.” Early episodes focused on business development, health care, and educational initiatives in the South, from basic literacy initiatives to student activism at Duke that led to the formation of Malcolm X University. One story features an innovative fishermen’s collective that shared a boat among a number of poor Black fishermen who had previously been unable to purchase their boats and had had to work for white boat-owning fisherman. *Black Journal*’s research staff reached out to local activists and leaders with phone calls to find stories like this.

While covering dynamic new initiatives in the South, *Black Journal* also insisted on giving airtime to the brutality and privation that many African Americans continued to face even after the southern civil rights movement, along with a focus on the ingenuity of various individuals and organizations in addressing southern injustices. In one episode, the privations of tenant farmers and their families in the Mississippi Delta and the brutal effects on the health and life chances of poor southern Blacks are exposed. Through interviews and in wide images that situate the subsistence farmers in a lonely landscape reminiscent of the Dust Bowl photos of Walker Evans, they are starving before the viewer’s eyes. A scene fea-

tures a long conversation with a woman who has thirteen children, whose husband makes sixty-five dollars a month tending a local farmer's cattle. Another segment focuses on the continued challenge of Black disenfranchisement in the South even after the Voting Rights Act. Representative Robert Clark derides the attempts to divide and conquer Black publics as he drives *Black Journal's* reporters from an outpost of wooden shacks back to the town where his office is located: "See, this is the age-old thing! In the past, they have been good to the so-call top niggas, and then they expect the top niggas to be satisfied and don't say anything about what happens to the rest." The next scene shows Clark in his office, helping desperately poor people whose food assistance has been cut inexplicably. Lou House angrily narrates: "The outrageous violation of our rights is an everyday occurrence in the Delta, and Representative Clark spends much of his time dealing with the criminal and discriminatory practices of most state agencies." Far from the disinterested voice-over of an "objective narrator," Lou House's voice bristles with anger as he describes, emphasizing the first-personal plural, the "arbitrary raising of polling fees" and "restricting to dilute *our* vote." At a time when other media tended to separate the southern civil rights struggle from the experiences of northern and urban Blacks, emphasizing contrasts such as rural versus urban and southern versus northern, *Black Journal* purposely sought to resist those divisions, framing the national civil rights struggle as one struggle of unified African American people — despite acknowledged differences in priorities and approaches.

*Black Journal* also continually defined and redefined its commitment to a "Black world," by regularly including Africa and the Caribbean along with their American coverage. At the beginning of the second season, Lou House enthusiastically introduced an "exclusive" film of the Pan-African Cultural Festival of 1969. *Black Journal* began to produce African coverage, bringing Black Americans into dialogue with African liberation struggles. By August 1970, the program had attained the resources to open a bureau in Addis Ababa — an ambitious move that defined the show as cutting-edge and peerless, underscoring the importance of Africa to African American thinking and politics.<sup>39</sup> Reflecting in 2010 on the program's emphasis on African coverage when other media were all but ignoring Africa, Wali Siddiq said resolutely, summing up the complicated but powerful resonance of Africa to some African Americans passionate about Black liberation: "We wanted to do more on Africa. We should do more on Africa. There should be more done on Africa. Africa is your whole soul land."<sup>40</sup>

The final Greaves episode, which aired in August 1970, opened with a direct interrogation of audience members' preconceived notions of Africa. "One thinks of Africa and thinks of . . . what? Rhythms . . . Black people in the jungle dancing, naked and perhaps scarred with body marks." Setting aside "such clichés, such Western myths about Africa," he announces that *Black Journal* examines "the current situation in Kenya and Tanzania" for its viewers. Contextualizing the struggle for Kenyan independence, the narrator explains the delicate balance between Kenya's citizens and the European colonizers, many of whom were still in residence. He explains cooperative farming in Kenya and notes its similarity to agricultural cooperatives in the American South. Over images of both urban and rural Kenya, the narrator speaks of the different economic and cultural changes occurring in the land, a place far from the center of most reporting based in the United States. The narration editorializes as it describes: "Morning in Nairobi is filled with the snarl of thousands of workers entering a city in which most cannot afford to live. And yet it is this growing mass of Black humanity on which the future of Africa depends. A combination of struggle and endurance shapes the African's nature. His soul, his happiness. Superimposed over everything in Nairobi is a desire for American and European modernity."

At first, this opening sounds like a typical documentary, but as the narration continues, the narrator dryly acknowledges the legacies of colonialism in Africa. "The African in Kenya is prone to reassess the worth of the European from time to time." Following this opening, Tony Batten, who ran the newly created African bureau, interviews James Muigai, the brother of President Jomo Kenyatta, as well as President Julius K. Nyerere of Tanzania. Muigai describes how the planters' cooperative union is thriving because of new economic policies. In a long and heady discussion, Nyerere theorizes about socialism and capitalism, explains how the agrarian, communal society of Tanzania offers an indigenous base for socialism, and discusses the need for manpower to modernize his country, directly soliciting African American engineers, doctors, and architects to consider how they could contribute to Tanzania's emergence. The episode also offers an interview with a field commander from the Mozambique Liberation Front, who speaks of the challenging conditions faced by decolonizing forces in Mozambique. While the content of the discussion was undoubtedly long-winded for some viewers, *Black Journal's* refusal to simplify the complex issues of decolonizing nations demonstrates the respect that the program had for its audience. This episode offers a clear impression that



the African leaders saw *Black Journal* as a vital opportunity to reach out to American Blacks.

Other Africa-focused episodes stressed the connection *Black Journal's* African American viewers had to their counterparts in Africa—connections that many in *Black Journal's* audience eagerly sought. An episode features an interview with David Simbeok, head of mission from the Pan-African Congress, saying it moves him that his “brothers” are wearing their hair “natural.” While in the previous episode Nyerere had effectively invited skilled African Americans and Black Europeans to join the struggle for modernization in Tanzania, Simbeok asks for and acknowledges a more symbolic connection and support, suggesting that Black Americans were doing their part by decolonizing their minds—two very different messages to Black Americans about what kind of solidarity African nationals might have been seeking. Both episodes show how vitally important African Americans were to Africa.

*Black Journal's* coverage of Africa responded to an equally strong interest in Africa and African culture by Black Americans in the late 1960s. This coverage offered specific ideas to African Americans eager to think through the possibilities of a relationship with Africa. *Black Journal* provided in-depth television news reporting about Africa at a time when such reporting was hard to come by. The decolonization and the emergence of new nations in Africa was inspiring, as Fanon Che Wilkins argues: “SNCC activists initially identified with anti-colonial activity in Africa as a source of moral and political inspiration for their own movement for social and political change in the United States.”<sup>41</sup> Many American Black organizations in the Black Power era were inspired by the anticolonial struggles. A sense of the value and significance of African languages and cultures to African Americans emerged in the wider culture, as well. Reports such as *Black Journal's* segments on African nations provided a much needed and much appreciated context for redefining Blackness in art, culture, and politics to American audiences.

31 Garrett, interview.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 See Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*. For an examination of the role of foundations, especially the Ford Foundation, in the creation of African American Studies departments at universities, see Rooks, *White Money/Black Power*.

36 *Black Journal* press release 23, transcript. National Public Broadcasting Archives University of Maryland, College Park.

37 Alexander, *Why We Make Movies*.

38 Though the Nation of Islam was pleased with its representation in this episode, it took issue with *Black Journal* soon afterward for starting a bureau in Ethiopia.

39 Laurent, “*Black Journal* in Ethiopia.”

40 Wali Siddiq, interview with author, July 5, 2010.

41 Wilkins, “The Making of Black Internationalists,” 469.

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### ***Symposium***

Keynote: Jacqueline Stewart

Panel: Malik Gaines, Naeem Mohaiemen, Alex Pittman, Martine Syms, and Fia Backström, moderated by Erin Christovale

### ***Exhibition***

William Greaves — Sondra Perry — Martine Syms

### ***Screening***

*Nationtime*—Gary is a report on the National Black Political Convention held in Gary, Indiana, in 1972, a historic event that gathered black voices from across the political spectrum.

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Presented by the Princeton University Program in Media + Modernity, Department of African American Studies, Department of Art and Archeology, and Program in Visual Arts

A note on the type: headlines are set in MARTIN, named for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and designed by Tré Seals. Body text is set in Karmina, designed by Veronika Burian and José Scaglione.