

## Male-Directed New Black Independent Cinema

The production history and critical reception of *Which Way Is Up?*, *Giant Step*, *Raisin*, *Sweetback*, and *Do the Right Thing* describes the problems that befall studio-distributed black-oriented films. Though many white-oriented films encounter studio restrictions, black film projects normally receive extremely low production budgets, narrow race-specific marketing strategies, and limited access to first-run movie theaters.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of these artistic and financial limitations, many blacks will seize any opportunity to work for a major motion picture studio because studio films receive company sponsored distribution and marketing as well as a guaranteed production budget. Blacks involved with major film studios also receive automatic publicity, which increases their sense of self-importance. Finally, a financially and critically successful black filmmaker, such as Spike Lee or John Singleton, gains a discernible amount of control over future projects, crews, and production budgets. Nevertheless, there are some black filmmakers who resist the calls of fame and increased production budgets. These filmmakers rely on financial sources such as grants from governmental agencies and philanthropic organizations as well as distribution contracts with foreign television stations such as Germany's ZDF, France's Antenne 2, and Britain's Channel Four.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter seven returns to the first chapter's discussion of the cultural history and production process of black independent filmmaking, but focuses on more recent examples of male-directed films in which empowered images of black women and men dominate the screen. These independent films, unlike those made by the early black film companies of

the 1920s and 1930s, dramatize the lived experiences of the black lower-classes. I now return to the mid-1970s, a period when the black action film was popular, to discuss how black filmmakers renewed the tradition of black independent film production.

For the most part, the first wave of *new* black independent filmmakers of the sixties and early seventies received its training as interns in television studios and as students in university film school programs. However, documentary filmmaker and producer William Greaves had to leave the United States to acquire his film production skills. "It was pretty clear to me back in 1952," he states, "when I was trying to break into the industry that there was a wall of racism and discrimination that I could not possibly penetrate."<sup>3</sup> Greaves left the United States and found work in Canada. Between 1952 and 1963, he worked as an assistant director, sound engineer, film editor, photographer, and scenarist. The National Film Board of Canada gave William Greaves a well-rounded education in film production. By 1963, he had worked on nearly eighty Canadian films, yet on his return to the United States, major television and film studios still refused to offer him film production work.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, his film production experience supplied him with the necessary managerial skills and self-esteem to establish William Greaves Productions in 1964.<sup>5</sup> Four years later, he accepted a job in public television and helped other blacks to obtain film production jobs.

In 1968, National Education Television (NET) hired Greaves as executive producer of the black-oriented news program *Black Journal*. NET initiated this program in response to the social activism of both the civil rights movement and the sporadic urban uprisings. *Black Journal* was "the first black national news program on American television" produced and directed by African-Americans.<sup>6</sup> It featured social documentary films that focused on issues such as segregated housing, discriminatory hiring practices, and other problems that affect middle-class and lower-class blacks. NET programs were aired on national public television stations, hence, *Black Journal* was seen by a national audience. The program influenced major commercial networks to schedule other black-produced news magazine programs. Later in 1968, for example, WABC-TV hired Charles Hobson, a veteran of *Black Journal*, to produce the program *Like It Is*. Hobson then hired a black staff to work on the new show.<sup>7</sup>

The critical success of *Black Journal* is apparent in its 1969 nomination for an Emmy Award and its 1970 Emmy Award for "Outstanding Achievement in Magazine-Type Programming." This recognition gave NET enough confidence to continue both the program and its production internship for aspiring young black filmmakers and news reporters.

While producing *Black Journal*, Greaves won awards for individual

documentaries that were segments of the series. These *Black Journal*-sponsored documentaries include *Still a Brother: Inside the Negro Middle-Class* (PBS, 1968), a semidocumentary that discusses the growing schism between blacks of different socioeconomic levels, and *In the Company of Men* (1969), which documents labor conflicts. In 1970, Greaves left NET to direct, write, and produce social documentaries for private companies, governmental agencies, and the Public Broadcasting System.

Greaves's commitment to the development of black filmmakers was apparent from the numerous opportunities he offered to black filmmakers that major film studios had refused to hire. Under the experienced guidance of Greaves, NET's *Black Journal* gave such blacks as Madeline Anderson, Stan Lathan, Tony Batten, and St. Clair Bourne some of their first professional opportunities.<sup>8</sup> Bourne directed *Black Dance* (1970), Batten directed *Focus: South Africa* (1969), Lathan directed *Black Athletes* (1969), and Anderson directed *Malcolm X* (1969). In 1970, Anderson, after leaving *Black Journal*, produced, directed, and edited *I Am Somebody*, a documentary about four hundred female hospital workers who struggle with racial and economic oppression. In 1971, NET's Children's Television Workshop hired Anderson to produce, direct, and edit such programs as *Sesame Street* and *Electric Company*. Bourne, formerly an associate producer at *Black Journal*, gained additional recognition outside the show and produced over thirty productions. His *Let the Church Say Amen* (1971), a powerful documentary on the black church, has already become a classic in film courses across the country.

Because of NET's sponsorship, *Black Journal's* critical acclaim, and the enlightened guidance of Greaves, black documentary filmmakers and their films became an important part of the American documentary tradition. Needless to say, however, these opportunities would never have materialized without pressure and inspiration from black political activists in the form of urban uprisings and organized civil rights lobbying.<sup>9</sup> Finally, since governmental agencies wanted to ameliorate the socioeconomic causes of urban uprisings and educate the American public, they preferred to finance and distribute social documentaries rather than experimental and fiction films.

During the late seventies, university film production programs offered black students opportunities to gain experience in fiction and experimental film production, and many black independent filmmakers received technical training in white educational institutions. Los Angeles, as might be expected, seemed to attract the largest group of black filmmakers who, because of personal choice or studio-imposed conditions, remained outside the production doors of the neighboring film

studios. For example, Haile Gerima, Charles Burnett, Larry Clark, Ben Caldwell, Billy Woodberry, Alile Sharon Larkin, Julie Dash, Melvonna Ballenger, Carroll Blue, and Barbara McCullough are all MFA graduates from the University of California at Los Angeles and the University of Southern California. This generation of university-trained filmmakers, with the exception of Burnett, has remained independent of the major studios. Of this group, the first to produce black independent feature films were Gerima, an Ethiopian, and Burnett and Clark, African-Americans. Gerima's *Bush Mama* (1975), Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* (1977), and Clark's *Passing Through* (1977) typify the new black independent feature-length films made by black filmmakers on the West Coast.

Although Gerima, born in Ethiopia, did not come to the United States until 1967, he does not consider himself different from black American filmmakers. He says, "Even if I were to return to Africa, I would always protect my direct links with black America. It has given me the courage to discover myself. . . . At first, I considered myself Ethiopian rather than connected to black America. Black America helped to humanize me."<sup>10</sup> Gerima's *Bush Mama*, according to Bourne, epitomizes the nonlinear black independent narrative film from the West Coast.<sup>11</sup> *Bush Mama* tells the story of the awakening consciousness of Dorothy, a welfare mother whose husband is imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. Dorothy must raise her daughter in Watts, a Los Angeles inner-city neighborhood. On her return home, Dorothy discovers a white policeman attempting to rape her daughter. Like Sweetback's assault on two officers to protect Moo Moo, she protects her next generation and kills the rapist. Dorothy's violence is self-protective and leads to her psychological liberation.

Although *Bush Mama* typifies the black independent family film in several ways, it is also different from studio-distributed black action and black family films. Studio-distributed black action films portray interracial violence between black and white men. In contrast, Dorothy's violence protects her daughter from a sexual assault. Whereas black action films traditionally portray the empowerment of a black male hero such as Sweetback or Shaft, Dorothy's violence empowers the mother-daughter relationship. Dorothy's violent actions do not permit her to escape her socioeconomic conditions. In contrast, Sweetback's, Shaft's, and Superfly's violence is a vehicle of liberation. Dorothy must develop a consciousness that shields her family from further physical and sociopsychical destruction.<sup>12</sup> Violent spectacles are not the central focus of *Bush Mama*—violence here merely shows that Dorothy will no longer passively endure psychological and physical abuse directed at her and her family. Dorothy becomes an agent rather than an object.

Even though such black family films as *A Raisin in the Sun* (Columbia, 1961), *The Learning Tree* (Warner, 1969), *Sounder* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1972), *Claudine* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1974), and *The River Niger* (Columbia, 1976) portray injustices, they either avoid or make ludicrous the development of the hero(ine)'s political consciousness. Unlike some black family films produced by major studios, *Bush Mama* shows violence and sexuality as acts that protect and sustain the African-American family. Therefore, the film establishes Dorothy's maternal aspects without denying her sensuality. Gerima also avoids some of the stereotypes rife in American popular culture; Dorothy is neither a sexless mammy, an oversexed exotic primitive, nor a passively long-suffering black woman. Her husband is neither a sexless coon, an ebony saint, nor an oversexed and demanding tyrant.

Pre-1968 independent black-oriented films portray black hero(ine)s who nobly endure socioeconomic hardships and sociopsychic abuses. In contrast, *Bush Mama* suggests that protagonists who proudly endure dehumanizing situations are not to be idolized. Consequently, *Bush Mama* resists conventional closures that would reunite Dorothy's family or would permit her to escape her socioeconomic conditions. The film expresses the sentiment that permanent changes in the social system cannot take place within a fictional narrative. Yes, Dorothy retaliates against black-on-black crime, insensitive welfare workers, and police brutality, but the film suggests that these are personal changes and not socioeconomic or sociopsychic. Characteristic of his generation, Gerima believes that the practice of black independent filmmaking must be evident in the film's narrative form as well as its ideological content. Therefore, *Bush Mama*'s nonlinear narrative style, illustrated in the use of collages and abrupt editing, is a self-conscious formal technique to deter a classical Hollywood-like reception. Burnett, Clark, and Larkin also use this technique for similar political purposes. Avant-garde and experimental camera techniques also thwart the critical and spectatorial relationships that classical narratives usually enjoy.<sup>13</sup> I, however, recommend the use of a camera style that alternates between classical, avant-garde, and experimental techniques, such as Spike Lee's film style, which both guards against alienating many members of the black audience and ensures crossover appeal.

In 1973, Gerima began the production of *Bush Mama* and by 1975 he had received the finished print.<sup>14</sup> Since the demise of the Los Angeles-based Lincoln Motion Picture Company, this was the first time that a black California-based filmmaker independently produced, directed, edited, and distributed an independent feature film. In 1977, Burnett and Clark, also residents of Los Angeles, created and distributed their black independent films, respectively, *Killer of Sheep* and *Passing Through*.



Like Gerima, they used a nonlinear narrative style to describe the Los Angeles inner-city neighborhood of Watts.

*Killer of Sheep* also resembles *Bush Mama* in its pessimistic tone and its implication that no permanent changes have occurred or will occur in the socioeconomic status of the protagonists. Despite these similarities, there are important differences between *Bush Mama*'s portrayal of an unemployed mother and her awakening consciousness and *Killer of Sheep*'s portrayal of an employed father and his inability to achieve such an awakening. The major problems of Stan, the protagonist of *Killer of Sheep*, are different from those of Dorothy. Stan works in a slaughterhouse killing sheep. He remains faithful to his wife, despite an attempted seduction by a white woman, but he loses his ability to show her tenderness. Moreover, unlike the sensual Dorothy, Stan becomes so overwhelmed by his job and the social environment that he becomes bored with his wife.

*Killer of Sheep* also shows how sociopsychic circumstances create tension in a black lower-class family. When Stan's friends attempt to persuade him to join them in crime, Stan's wife chases them from the house. Stan responds to neither their request nor her action. Instead, he channels his frustrations into a critique of his son. Whereas Dorothy develops insight into the socioeconomic system, Stan never understands why the system has failed him. *Killer of Sheep* is quite different from most studio-distributed black family films because the film is devoid of the sort of optimistic ending seen in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Stan is a frustrated and impatient hero. His family does not escape their working-but-poor existence. A \$10,000 check and a move to a better neighborhood never comes. Instead, Burnett shows that serious problems disrupt black family life even when black fathers are employed and are barely able to financially support their families.

Clark's action film *Passing Through* also depicts racially-based socioeconomic problems. Warmack, a jazz musician, wants to maintain the independence of his black jazz band. Believing that blacks must stay together as a community, Warmack refuses a contract offered by a white music company. To weaken Warmack's ensemble, the music company tries to implicate it in drug dealing and, later, authorizes the murder of a black friend of the band. Warmack avenges the death by killing the murderer; Warmack is then caught and imprisoned. After Warmack is released from prison, the band conspires to kill the head of the music company who had been controlling the drug trade in the black neighborhood. The violence in *Passing Through* typifies the action film genre. There are important ideological distinctions, however, which separate this film from those action films distributed by major studios. First, Warmack's approach to violence differs from that identi-

fied with *Sweetback* because Warmack's actions are premeditated and receive punishment—his jail sentence. Second, black action films like *Shaft* feature heroes who lack ties to the black community. *Passing Through*, however, shows how Warmack's political consciousness develops as a consequence of his ties to the black community of musicians. Adam, the hero of *A Man Called Adam*, never achieves Warmack's realization and dies a lonely and embittered man.

Generally, black independent filmmakers on the West Coast, such as Gerima, Burnett, and Clark, prefer to create characters who live in black inner-city communities and do not escape these communities. Both Clark and Gerima dramatize the developing self-assertion of the major protagonist, and Burnett presents characters who never achieve this empowerment. All three filmmakers, like those who followed them, create ordinary black characters whose sense of self is determined by sociopsychic and socioeconomic forces.

Because most of these black independent filmmakers are funded by art agencies, they can avoid the conventions that determine how a studio-distributed black film dramatizes social problems and controversial issues. For instance, meager production grants from both the National Endowment for the Arts and the American Film Institute do not permit the hiring of popular black stars who demand costly salaries. The form and narrative content of black independent films may be experimental, avant-garde, and highly political as long as they receive the approval of the boards that oversee the administration of film and video production grants. These production and stylistic freedoms permit black independent filmmakers to experiment with audio, visual, and performance methods that seem unrefined to audiences and film critics reared on Hollywood films. Thus, the use of non-star talent, innovative aural and visual narrative techniques, and abrupt editing (all of which are at odds with the classical Hollywood narrative style) make black independent films different in content and form from studio-distributed black films.

On the East Coast, the late seventies also witnessed a wave of new black independent fiction filmmakers. For the most part, these filmmakers acquired their technical skills in university film programs like those of their West Coast counterparts. For example, Warrington Hudlin earned an MFA degree from Yale, Marco Williams from Harvard, Ayoka Chenzira from New York University, Alonzo Crawford from Columbia, and Michelle Parkerson from Temple University. Two of these East Coast filmmakers, Hudlin and Crawford, have produced three independent feature films. Crawford's *Dirt, Ground, Earth and Land* (1978) imaginatively describes the effects of urban renewal on one black neighborhood. Like *Bush Mama* and *Passing Through*, this film dramatizes

the developing political consciousness of a black community that organizes against the real estate speculators. Hudlin's *Black at Yale* (1974) and *Street Corner Stories* (1977) are documentaries and, therefore, are beyond the scope of this study as are several other black documentary films made by St. Clair Bourne and Parkerson.<sup>15</sup>

When I began this study in 1982, there were few examples of black independent filmmakers who also worked on studio productions. Now there is a growing number of black independent filmmakers (such as Charles Lane—*Sidewalk Stories*, Reginald Hudlin—*House Party*, Burnett—*To Sleep with Anger*, and Lee—post-*She's Gotta Have It* films) who have made and continue to make studio-distributed black films. These black filmmakers and their films usually have a double-edged relationship with studios. This relationship creates a sort of dual consciousness in which filmmakers attempt or pretend to entertain the tastes of the broadest audience (read static phallogentrism) while acting under the influence of what Richard Wright calls "a folklore molded out of the rigorous and inhuman conditions of life" and moving toward a re-visioning of Wright's social notion of black folklore to include those marginalized because of their gender and sexual orientation. Surely black folklore, like any other folklore, has its phallogentric elements that resist the indeterminate nature of reception. This indeterminate quality reminds one that studio-distributed black films have to attract white and black audiences. Therefore, this mixed purpose permits (or requires) some studio-distributed black films such as *A Raisin in the Sun* to be saturated with potentially subversive readings.

Conventional film narratives refuse certain forms of racial and gender empowerment that threaten the expectations of a conventional audience. Hence, studio executives and black filmmakers and writers must find a happy medium between disparaging blacks and entertaining the larger white audience. One need only recall the Columbia executives who refused Hansberry's early screen drafts of *Raisin*. These films also use conventional closures in which plots progress toward the reunion of family, community, or nation. This formula demands a generic homogenized morality in which malfeasance is punished. In contrast, black folklore empowers black artists to include the rigorous and inhuman conditions of black life. Studio-distributed black films may borrow from black folklore elements and use inventive forms but they cannot deny conventional morality and its narrative rules. Thus, studio-distributed black-oriented narratives and womanist story lines are diametrically opposed because a black-oriented womanist practice confronts and disrupts the existing racist and phallogentric hierarchies that construct conventional morality and its narratives. Many, but not all, of the black university-trained filmmakers in the 1960s and 1970s express a black womanist

ethic. A few of their younger black colleagues of the late 1970s and 1980s found studio distribution for their films that appropriated pan-Africanist and womanist ideas; *She's Gotta Have It* is but one example. This newer generation of black films exhibits double-talk that reverses the racial hierarchy, creates rupture and tension, and avoids any direct critique of the system of hierarchical construction such as was seen in *Bush Mama*, *Passing Through*, *Killer of Sheep*, and *A Different Image*. The satiric hybrid minstrel form exemplifies this racial reversal.

Next, there are the advertising, distribution, and exhibition demands that studios consider when attracting a crossover audience for black films. Burnett's *To Sleep with Anger* (Samuel Goldwyn, 1990) and Singleton's *Boyz n the Hood* (Columbia, 1991) received studio financing but were insufficiently advertised and had a limited distribution. Both films experienced distribution problems that resulted in the box-office failure of Burnett's *To Sleep* and canceled screenings of Singleton's *Boyz*. The failure of *To Sleep* and the success of *Boyz* exemplifies how certain black films resist, by their hybrid design, particular forms of commercial appropriation.

Burnett's film portrays a black middle-class family in which sibling rivalry and a demonic old friend threaten to destroy the family. The plot develops with occasional narrative interruptions that disorient the audience. The use of black southern folklore and superstition seasons the plot and differentiates the film from any previous studio-distributed black middle-class family film. Unfortunately, the film's failure at the box-office is evidence of the disturbing truth that black avant-garde techniques are not welcomed by and will not sustain the interest of the mainstream black moviegoer. This dilemma forces studios to refuse certain types of black films. Independent black filmmakers must rethink their options and decide whether the benefits of a studio are worth the corresponding artistic limitations.

Singleton's work is an instance of a film narrative that accidentally disrupts the distribution and consumption of a black action film. *Boyz* dramatizes the efforts of two black youths who want to attend college and thereby escape their violence-prone existence in south central Los Angeles. The black narrative is a conventional one that requires lower-class blacks to escape the community rather than ameliorate the conditions that spur such escapes into the mainstream. The screening of *Boyz* created outbreaks of violence in several cities. These outbursts from an audience of mostly black youths presented Columbia with the problem of guaranteeing the safety of the audience as well as the property of theater owners. Following the pattern of other controversial action films that evoked black eruptions of urban violence, such as Mario Van Peebles's *New Jack City* (New Line Cinema, 1991), the news coverage of the





From *Boyz n the Hood*. Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archive.

gang-related shootings increased the desire of inner-city youths to see *Boyz* while the reports of violence deterred both theaters and their middle-class audiences from participating in this cultural exchange. Consequently, some exhibitors will limit the screening of certain black films, and so, studios will allocate smaller budgets for future black-action films. Low production budgets confine black films to an “underdeveloped” look that black directors can neither control nor aesthetically defend. Each filmmaker must weigh the (dis)advantages and ask if this form of production ensures them and their films a respectable longevity. Film studios that market black products must establish *lasting* relationships with the black press, church, and advertising agencies as well as create new strategies to effectively market these films to nonblack audiences as well as an ever-changing black audience.

Because black independent feature-length filmmakers have a style that is different from that of studio-distributed films, film critics and historians must not evaluate independent films on the basis of their



From *New Jack City*. Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archive.

correspondence to, or deviation from, studio films. Instead, the critics and historians must analyze the independent film in terms of the filmmaker’s efforts to create films that explore serious social issues and present balanced images of black women, men, and the African-American community. In developing such a cultural, ideological, socio-economic analysis of black film, critics and historians must describe how, by what means, and to what extent black independent filmmakers have chosen to be responsive to the needs of the black community. For example, one should ask why certain black independent filmmakers use rough editing techniques in both the visual and audio narratives of their films and what purpose it serves. Another question one should ask is how black filmic images, which have been mainly created by white men either to denigrate or to entertain black audiences, are now used by blacks to educate their community. These questions can show how traditional film styles and conventional black stereotypes, which proliferate in studio-distributed films, now compete for the approval of an interracial audience.

In summation, chapters two through five discuss how ideological processes have determined the representation of race and gender in particular studio-distributed black films. Underlining the determinist nature of the narratives of studio-distributed black films, I also add that a film’s uncertain reception permits subversive readings. I discuss the reception of *Sweetback* as an example of the uncertainty that reigns in the black

audience. But I argue for politicized readings that disrupt the master discourses of racism and misogyny. I employ the terms minstrelsy, hybrid minstrelsy, and satiric hybrid minstrelsy to describe how race and gender are represented in comedy, family, action, and black comedy narratives. In their imitation of sexist and racist imagery, films such as *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, *Hallelujah*, and *Shaft* betray a colonial relationship to the dominant narratives on race and gender. When films such as *A Piece of the Action*, *Raisin*, and, to a lesser degree, *Sweetback* use popular generic forms but resist sexist and/or racist imagery, they reveal a postcolonial relationship between the black artist and the studio system.

In chapter five, I describe the satiric hybrid minstrelsy narrative form as a dualistic process in which an individual is racially or sexually objectified. Implicit in this description is a criticism of racial and sexual binarisms that promote essentialism. This book celebrates black filmmaking and the integration of black artists into the film industry. The celebration of blackness is a worldly affirmation and resists practices that create racial essentialism and homophobic and misogynist images. Edward Said writes,

The whole effort to deconsecrate Eurocentrism cannot be interpreted, least of all by those who participate in the enterprise, as an effort to supplant Eurocentrism with, for instance, Afrocentric or Islamocentric approaches. . . . It was always a matter of opening and participating in a central strand of intellectual and cultural effort and of showing what had always been denied and derogated.

In this book I applaud the work of black filmmakers, their use of inventive camera techniques, and their blurring of film genres (the elements of a black postmodern rather than postNegritude practice). In the same breath, I acknowledge that these practices do not necessarily produce narratives that resist misogynist and racist forms of subjectivity. The work of black women filmmakers and a "womanist" ideological practice, however, will help future filmmakers resist a raceless feminism and a misogynist and overzealous pan-Africanism. We live in and against such master narratives. This study has shown when, how, and why certain black films imitate or resist dominant representations of race and gender. It also describes the agential processes by which black films and their audiences resist, appropriate, or assimilate racist and misogynist ideas that surround and, at times, consume them.

### Notes to Chapter Six

1. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), xi.
2. Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 8.
3. See Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (New York: Methuen, 1980), 104–105.
4. *Ibid.*, 105.
5. Abiola Irele, *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1981), 67.
6. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 46.
7. Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 180.
8. Vickie M. Mays, "I Hear Voices But See No Faces," *Heresies* 3, no. 4 (1981): 75.
9. Alile Sharon Larkin, "Your Children Come Back to You and A Different Image," lecture presented at the 8eme Festival Du Cinéma Des Minorités Nationales (Eighth Festival of National Minority Cinema) a Douarnenez, France, debate "Lutte Actuelle des Noirs Americains" (Debate on "The Afro-American Contemporary Struggle"), August 28, 1985.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Alile Sharon Larkin, "Black Women Film-makers Defining Ourselves: Feminism in Our Own Voice," in *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television*, ed. E. Deidre Pribram (New York: Verso, 1988), 158.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, 158–159.
14. Hortense J. Spillers, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," in *Pleasure and Danger*, ed. Carole S. Vance (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 78.
15. Greg Tate, "Of Homegirl Goddesses and Geechee Women," *The Village Voice* (Voice Film Special), 4 June 1991, 72, 78. Unfortunately, a review copy of *Daughters* was not available when I wrote this essay.
16. David Nicholson, "A Commitment to Writing: A Conversation with Kathleen Collins Prettyman," *Black Film Review* 5, no. 1 (1988–1989): 12.
17. Loretta Campbell, "Reinventing Our Image: Eleven Black Women Film-makers," *Heresies* 4, no. 4 (1983): 62.
18. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, *Le Cinéma Africain: Des origines à 1973* (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1975), 162.
19. Safi Faye, interview with author, Paris, France, 26 May 1986.
20. *Ibid.*

### Notes to Chapter Seven

1. For an example of these studio practices see Michael Martinez, "NAACP Branch Drumming Up B.O. Business for 'Anger' Film," *The Hollywood Reporter* 314, no. 4 (October 1990): 3, 8.



2. Charles Burnett, interview with author, Chicago, 4 May 1984. Burnett stated that at the Berlin film festival showing of *Killer of Sheep*, he was approached by a representative of ZDF television who was interested in purchasing the German television rights to his next film *My Brother's Wedding* (1984).

3. James P. Murray, "William Greaves: Documentaries Are Not Dead," *Black Creation* 4, no. 1 (Fall 1972): 10.

4. Janine Euvrard, "William Greaves," in *Le Cinema Noir Americain*, ed. Mark Reid et al. (Paris: CinemAction/Cerf, 1988), 151–154.

5. Pearl Bowser, "Homage to William Greaves," in *Independent Black American Cinema*, ed. Pearl Bowser and Valerie Harris (New York: Theater Program of Third World Newsreel, 1981), 2.

6. For discussions of a black film aesthetic see Vattel T. Rose, "Afro-American Literature as a Cultural Resource for a Black Cinema Aesthetic," in *Black Cinema Aesthetics: Issues in Independent Black Filmmaking*, ed. Gladstone L. Yearwood (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for Afro-American Studies, 1982), 27–40; Gladstone L. Yearwood, "Towards a Theory of a Black Aesthetic," in *Black Cinema Aesthetics*, 67–81; and Thomas Cripps, *Black Film as Genre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 3–6. For a more production-oriented black film practice that views film style and film content as equally important to building a black independent cinema, see St. Clair Bourne, "The Development of the Contemporary Black Film Movement," and Haile Gerima, "On Independent Black Cinema," in Yearwood, *Black Cinema Aesthetics*, 93–105 and 106–113, respectively. Bourne writes, "Minority programming in the electronic mass media has had a relatively brief history. There have been sporadic appearances of minority oriented films or television programs on the commercial networks, but it was public television that took the first major, yet tentative, step in the wake of the urban disorders of the nineteen sixties with 'Black Journal'—the first black national news program on American television. The purpose was clear: to provide minorities with an opportunity to address each other on issues they considered important" (97).

7. Gil Noble, *Black Is the Color of My TV Tube* (Secaucus, N.J.: Lyle Stuart, 1981), 43.

8. According to Donald Bogle, "Images of Independence: African-American Filmmakers," in *Gallery of Greats 1991: Black Filmmakers*, edited by Donald Bogle (Milwaukee, Wis.: Miller Brewing Company, 1991), Madeline Anderson gained her first film production experience with documentary filmmaker Richard Leacock. In 1964, New York's WNET television, a PBS affiliate, hired Anderson to work on *Black Journal* from 1968 until 1969. In Michael Mattox, "St. Clair Bourne: Alternative Black Visions," *Black Creation* 4, no. 3 (Summer 1973): 32, Bourne states, "Bill Greaves is really to me, the Black Godfather of film in many ways. He was my first boss at N.E.T. He allowed me to do the things I never would have been able to do in my first year or second year. Also as executive producer of 'Black Journal' he helped start the N.E.T. Workshop from which . . . the majority of your black filmmakers and technicians are coming."

9. Bourne, "Development," 93–94. Bourne writes, "When I began to make films, the money and financial backing I received to produce these films was not

because of any kind of 'do-good I want-to-help-you' attitude. The power structure reacted to the political pressures which came from the black protest movement. . . . the whole poverty programs were created with black staff; access to the air was allowed; and in 1968, the Public Television Network created what was called 'Black Journal,' which was the first national one-hour monthly news investigation program."

10. Louis Marcorelles, "Haile Gerima: 'J'appartiens à la fois à l'Ethiopie et à l'Amérique noire,'" in *Le Monde* 7 July 1984, 11. Gerima says, "Même si je retourne en Afrique, je garderai toujours des liens étroits avec l'Amérique noire. Elle m'a donné le courage de me découvrir moi-même. . . . Au début je ne me sentais pas du tout appartenir à l'Amérique noire, j'étais éthiopien. . . . l'Amérique noire m'a aidé à m'humaniser."

11. Bourne, "Development," 104–105.

12. Steve Howard, "A Cinema of Transformation: The Films of Haile Gerima," *Cinéaste* 14, no. 1 (May 1985): 28–29, 39. Gerima says, "If I was interested in her violent act, the next logical scene would be prison. . . . But the stages of her assertion were more entertaining. In the first stage of her consciousness a young person snatches her purse. She is incapable of even defending her purse from a little kid. The second stage is the oppressive woman who represents the state [a clerk at the welfare agency] and commits silent violence against her; Dorothy retaliates in fantasy by breaking a bottle over the woman's head. The third level was when it affected her daughter.

"My obsessive theme deals with consciousness. . . . When do you begin to become aware of the fact that the world has to be changed, and what are the processes that lead towards that awareness? For Dorothy, when the oppressive tool came down on her daughter. . . . She stood her ground and asserted herself in very physical terms. . . . [I]t is with her consciousness that I ended the film and not at the logical conclusion of a conventional drama that would show that she went to jail," (29).

13. Yann Lardeau, "Haile Gerima: Pour un mouvement de libération culturelle," in *Le Monde Diplomatique* 364, July 1984, 5. Gerima says, "Traditional film narrative techniques require that filmmakers narrate their film in a similar style. Implicit in this requirement is the assumption that there exists only one narrative style. . . . Thus, we have a responsibility to reproduce this style. If black filmmakers perpetuate this Hollywood style for all the world . . . black film will be judged and evaluated according to the Anglo-Saxon cinematic tradition. It is not sufficient to merely reject these conventions, the struggle must be carried on within the film's narrative itself." ["Le cinéma conventionnel dit qu'on ne peut pas s'exprimer tel que nous avons l'habitude de le faire. Cette dictature implique qu'il y a seulement un langage cinématographique et un tempérament cinématographique. Nous avons donc une responsabilité linguistique. Si on perpétue cet Hollywood monolithique, cette règle d'un langage pour tout le monde, le cinéma ne représente aucun intérêt pour moi. Le cinéma Noir sera jugé et évalué selon le baromètre des Anglo-Saxons. Il ne s'agit pas seulement de ne pas accepter les conventions: la lutte doit porter sur le médium lui-même."]

14. Marcorelles, “Haile Gerima,” 11. Gerima describes the production history of his two films *Bush Mama* (1975) and *Harvest 3000 Years* (1975): “J’ai tourné simultanément *Bush Mama* et *la Récolte de trois mille ans*. J’ai commencé *Bush Mama* en 1973, je l’ai achevé [en] mi-1974. Je suis alors parti en Ethiopie l’été de 1974. En dix jours, j’ai tourné *la Récolte*. Le montage m’a pris une année. En même temps j’achevais le montage de *Bush Mama*. Fin 1975, les deux films sortaient des laboratoires.”

15. Because I have focused this study on feature-length fiction films (except for the shorter films created between 1913 and 1931 by the first black independent filmmakers), I am not including work of black independent filmmakers who made comedy or nonfiction films, most of which use a short format or a nonfiction style.