Paying the dues: black documentary film and the quest for truth

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INTRODUCTION

Mapping Black Documentary Film

> Any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, it is an exercise of silences, it is an exercise of power that makes some narratives possible and silences others. In this fabricated narrative, not all silences are equal. Our job as filmmakers, writers, historians, image-makers, is to deconstruct these silences. — Raoul Peck, *Exterminate All the Brutes*. [1]

> Ultimately, the artist and the revolutionary function as they function, and *pay whatever dues they must pay* behind it because they are both possessed by a vision, and they do not so much follow this vision as find themselves driven by it. — James Baldwin, "No Name in the Street."[2]

In the spring of 1969, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) started paying attention to a documentary film by Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) titled *The New Ark*. Baraka had made the film for the National Educational

[1] See [33:35] in *Exterminate All the Brutes*, Episode 2, "Who the F*** is Columbus", directed by Raoul Peck, aired April 15, 2021, on HBO Signature, https://www.hbo.com/exterminate-all-the-brutes/episodes.

[2] Baldwin, "No Name in the Street," 460.

Television's (NET) *Public Broadcasting Laboratory* (*PBL*) and the documentary aired as part of a television special titled "Can This Be America" in 1968. The FBI's COINTELPRO listed the film as one of interest to the Bureau's investigation due to its contribution to the so-called "black extremist movement in the U.S." As far as the Bureau was concerned, the documentary was but another example of "the trash which is promulgated in the name of black art."[3] The Bureau's position should not come as a surprise. If anything, the film's documentation in COINTELPRO reveals how this rare Black documentary film was at the center of the American political arena in the 1960s. The film encapsulates how the medium of documentary film became a sphere of nexus between liberatory politics and Black visual culture, a nexus which, according to the FBI, constituted a threat and hence needed to be silenced.

The New Ark stands as an example among many other similar projects of a wave of Black engagement with the medium of documentary film in what can only be described as a Black documentary *renaissance* that swept through the 1960s. *Paying the Dues* is an examination of this partially forgotten vibrant history of Black documentary film as a form of art, cultural resistance, and self-expression. The film projects analyzed in this dissertation are: Richard O. Moore and James Baldwin's *Take this*

[3] Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum from Special Agents in Charge to Director of the FBI*, F.B. Eyes Digital Archive FOIA Request, St. Louis, MO: Washington University, March 3, 1969, Baraka part 3 http://omeka.wustl.edu/omeka/exhibits/show/fbeyes/baraka; Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum from Special Agents in Charge to Director of the FBI,* F.B. Eyes Digital Archive FOIA Request, St. Louis, MO: Washington University, April 23, 1970, Baraka part 3 http://omeka.wustl.edu/omeka/exhibits/show/fbeyes/baraka

Hammer (1964), Harvey Richards, Amzie Moore and SNCC's *Dream We'll Never Turn Back (1963)* and *Dream Deferred* (1964), Edouard (Yves) De Laurot and Malcolm X's *Black Liberation (aka Silent Revolution)* (1967), William Greaves' *Still A Brother: Inside the Negro Middle Class* (1968), Horace Ové's *Baldwin's Nigger* (1968), Gordon Parks' *Diary of a Harlem Family* (1968) co-directed with filmmaker Joseph Filipowic, Madeline Anderson's *I am Somebody* (1969), Amiri Baraka's *The New Ark* (1968), and Terrence Dixon and James Baldwin's *Meeting the Man: James Baldwin in Paris* (1970). Together, these films make up the renaissance in Black engagement with documentary in the 1960s. Most importantly, they encapsulate *how this engagement constituted a quest for truth*, which is precisely the question guiding this study. My aim is to explore how in their quest for truth, the wave of Black documentary renaissance films sought to reveal *truth-narratives* about pressing issues that confronted Black communities across the nation, bringing to the forefront discussions about Black identity, visuality, diversity, solidarity, gender, and imagination.

Since its inception as a nation under the banner of liberty and justice for all, America has been defined by a striking dissonance in character, with liberty and justice being often reserved for a select few. It is certainly true that the complicity of American history in imperialism, settler colonialism, racism, and white supremacy, has been endlessly reproducing systems of oppression and evasions of truth, however, these have never gone unchallenged by movements for resistance, with Black resistance

being often at the forefront.[4] It could be said that the 1960s were an accumulation of all that came before.[5] The era was monumental in American history marked by significant political transformations in race relations and Black citizenship. As the nation found itself in the wake of the civil rights movement and as the American racial malaise only seemed to intensify, Black communities were confronted with enormous challenges and issues facing them. Such challenges ranged from efforts to negate and privatize racial inequalities as 'individual' problems to a general national feeling of apathy towards the realities of Black struggles for freedom. But Black resistance and struggle were seeking to push the nation towards a new horizon. As such, the Black freedom struggle was being fought on different arenas, in community political organizing and activism, in national coordination, in places of worship, in cultural institutions and initiatives, and in *art.* Filmmaking as *art* has been and continues to be part of this tradition of cultural resistance. The 1960s gave rise to a revived interest in documentary filmmaking among Black artists,

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[4] Kathleen Cleaver, "Introduction," in *The Wages of Whiteness Race and the Making of the American Working Class* by Roediger David R. (New York: Verso, 2007), xix-xxvi; David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 1-13; Mahmood Mamdani, Neither Settler Nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 37- 100; Cedric Robinson, 'Preface to the 2000 edition," in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* by Cedric J. Robinson (London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983), xxvii-xxxiii.

[5] Ella Baker, "The Black Woman in the Civil Rights Struggle," address given at Institute of the Black World, Atlanta, Georgia, 1969 (Ames, IA: Iowa State University), https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2019/08/09/the-black-woman-in-the-civil-rights-struggle-1969/

communities, activists, and organizations. This renaissance in Black engagement with documentary film came at a time in which cultural resistance was engulfed in imagining a future of liberation and justice. As I will illustrate throughout this study, Black engagement with documentary film in the 1960s brought years of Black intellectual thought, radical traditions, and struggles for freedom onto the screens turning countless Black organizers, leaders, activists, artists, workers, and community members into the articulators of truth-narratives so long either denied or purposefully forgotten by an American system of selective historical amnesia.

Above all, systems of oppression have always necessitated and continue to necessitate an investment in *silencing*. Silencing here is an accumulation of the magnitude of histories and truths treated as unseen, unspoken, and unexplainable, restricted from accessing and disrupting an American sense of innocence. Many of these truths are directly related to the histories of slavery, colonization, and imperialism, and the living effects thereof. As Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot argued in his seminal book *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, "silences" in historical narratives emanate from power relations determining what is remembered, recorded, and celebrated as history.[6] Like any historical era, the 1960s were no exception to the "bundle of silences" that defined public discourses when it came to the plight of Black

[6] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995),* 26-27.

communities. Evidence of what these silences entailed and how they were resisted can be found in the surviving footage of the documentary films making up this dissertation, scattered in digitized and non-digitized archives. Every now and then we encounter clips from these films in contemporary Black documentary filmmaking, television programming, or small screenings either at universities or cultural institutions hoping to keep their legacy alive. That legacy, however, remains largely unexamined. Speaking to us from the shadows of the past, the countless voices featured in those films were paying their dues and now more than ever, given our current ongoing battles against the living forces of white supremacy, racism, and racial inequality, they are asking us to do the same.

In their quest for truth, the documentary film projects in this study crafted a creative space in which film participants could navigate various layers of silencing facing them and subvert them. With each chapter in this dissertation, my aim is to progressively delve deeper and deeper into some of the most prominent forms of silencing dominating the 1960s, which by no means were new nor exclusive to the era. Rather, they form the main apparatus of stubborn fallacies. These are fallacies that dominated the 1960s about Black communities, the state of racial relations, and American history, and I would argue continue to be vigorous discourses in our current debates on race. These discourses revolve around a set of core issues. The first issue has to do with the individualization and depoliticization of racial inequality, which for a large part of the 1960s took the form of the 'Negro Problem' discourse. Second, there is the issue of the vilification of Black

radicalism taking the form of a crafted 'myth of distance' between the 'liberal' North and the Jim Crow South throughout the 1960s. Equally damaging was the marginalization of Black womanhood and Black women's struggle for freedom as secondary to that of Black men, especially when it came to Black nationalist women. And finally, there is the issue of delegating Black radical imaginations of liberation and their cultural manifestations to the realm of transcendentalist escapism, never allowing for their consideration as dreams tethered to political realities and truths. Each of these themes serves as the focal point of each of the four chapters in this dissertation followed by a reflective epilogue. My aim is to reveal each creative instance through which the films sought to dismantle some of America's most stubborn racial myths through their deployment of a plethora of tactics, imagery, ideologies, philosophies, discussions, and aesthetics. The quest for truth in these films was following in the steps of a quest which has existed ever since America's inception: resistance on American soil has always been defined by a battle over truth.

A History of Trans-geographical Struggle

Before introducing the conceptual and methodological discussions shaping this dissertation and the production contexts of the chosen documentary film case studies, it is crucial to contextualize the history of Black engagement with documentary film between the present and the past. The challenges of 1960s and the active role of documentary film throughout

the era, are closer to our contemporary socio-political context than we might think. Modes of silencing continue to consistently targeted America's maligned 'Others.' As Haitian documentary filmmaker Raoul Peck argued in his HBO documentary series *Exterminate All the Brutes* (2021), once the story stopped explicitly revolving around how to exterminate the 'brute' or the racialized 'other,' it quickly turned into how to silence the generations of 'others' who survived.

For years, film, including documentary filmmaking, has been part of an effort to subvert these silences and reveal truth-narratives overshadowed by histories of subjugation and oppression for which white supremacy has often been the main supplier of oxygen. One of our time's most prominent Black documentary filmmakers, Raoul Peck builds his work largely on these legacies of resistance of the past, in particular those of the 1960s. In *Exterminate All the Brutes*, he explores the history of colonialism and exploitation on American and African soil. Peck sees the uncovering of silences represented in people's experiences or broader historical incidents, as one of the strengths of film/image-making. This uncovering of silences is not limited to the study of history but also includes the silences that characterize contemporary socio-political narratives moderated by power relations, as seen for instance in Peck's celebrated documentary *I Am Not Your Negro* (2016).[7] In his documentary philosophy, Peck's ultimate goal is not merely to "reflect on societies and

[7] Jamie Baron, "Introduction: The Timelessness of I Am Not Your Negro," in *I Am Not Your Negro: A Docaloague* edited by Jamie Baron and Kristen Fuhs (NewYork: Routledge, 2020), 1-2.

provide knowledge and challenges in addition to mere entertainment," but to also reflect on the medium of filmmaking as art using experimental footage, voiceover, archival footage, and unconventional documentary techniques; the aim is to "break the limits" of art.[8] The Black documentary renaissance of the 1960s was on a similar quest.

The power of documentary film as presented by Peck and, more generally, contemporary Black documentary film, offers new pathways for rethinking the nexus between politics and cultural/artistic expression. This has also been visible in a new wave of either fiction or non-fiction Black filmmaking after the 2010s dealing with questions about race. This new wave of Black filmmaking can be found in the works of Ava DuVernay, Spike Lee, Raoul Peck, Shaka King, Steve McQueen, Jordan Peele, Ryan Coogler, Barry Jenkins, Tyler Perry, Regina King, and many more. In her book *Documentary Resistance*, Angela Aguayo, argues that throughout American history in times of socio-political turmoil, documentary film has functioned as a medium for reflection, echoing and problematizing socio-political anxieties rather than being a portal for escapism.[9] Notably, Douglas Kellner has dubbed the post-2000s to be "the golden age of documentary" based on his analysis of documentary films made by

[8] Raoul Peck, "The Director's Statement," video, 03:48, 2021, https://www.hbo.com/video/exterminate-all-the-brutes/videos/directors-statement

[9] Angela J. Aguayo, *Documentary Resistance: Social Change and Participatory Media (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019),* 1.

Michael Moore and Robert Greenwald about the Bush-Cheney years.[10] Since 9/11, critical documentary films have played an essential role in American visual culture in their interpretations and analyses of historical events and political crises. The recent growth of online streaming services, more than any time in history, has provided Black documentary filmmaking with a wide platform for distribution and has opened a new window to non-fiction storytelling for audiences. Recent success and wide distribution of Black documentary films that, as Peck argues, "break the limits of art" and deal with questions about race and inequality such as *I Am Not Your Negro* (2016), *13th* (2016), *Time: The Kalief Browder Story* (2017), *LA 92* (2017), *Whose Streets?* (2017), *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution* (2015), *Traveling While Black* (2019), exemplify the "transcoding" of socio-political struggles in documentary film brought not only to the big screens of movie theaters and festivals but to millions of screens inside the homes of viewers in the U.S. and across the globe.[11]

I argue that these recent works are a continuation of a long-standing tradition of 'transcoding' socio-political struggles in documentary film as a form of cultural resistance which can be traced back to the Black

[10] Douglas Kellner, *Cinema Wars: Hollywood Film and Politics in the Bush-Cheney Era* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 52-53. He argues that the boom in documentary filmmaking in the post 9/11 era stems from a "bankruptcy" of corporate news media which encouraged a "revolution in the production and distribution of documentary film" making filming equipment cheaper and more accessible as well as the growth of new streaming and distribution services such Amazon, Netflix, etc. For similar argument see Aguayo, *Documentary Resistance*, 7.

[11] 'Transcoding' is a term introduced by Douglas Kellner which he defines as the way in which political discourses [...] are translated, or encoded, into media texts. See *Cinema Wars*, 2.

documentary renaissance of the 1960s, if not earlier. Studying the history of Black cinematic expression either in fiction or non-fiction implies studying a history of not only creative but also political and social struggle. Based on scholarly work on Black film studies which emerged in the U.S. in the 1970s and with the British cultural studies contributions to Black film studies in the 1980s and later a revival in U.S. scholarship again in the 1990s, this history of cinematic struggle can be divided into arguably five historical categories: the pre-WWI and interwar race films,[12] the post-war race films and the Sidney Poitier era, the Blaxploitation era of independent and Hollywood Black films as well as the LA Rebellion film movement, the advent of mainstream 'new' Black cinema in the 1980s and 1990s with the works of Spike Lee, Eddie Murphy, Julie Dash, and Josh Singleton,[13] and finally a contemporary wave of post 2010s Black films that emphasize explicit racial critique, all-Black casting, as well as alternative and unconventional storylines, filming techniques, and socio-political allegory.

[12] This category also includes what Thomas Cripps defines as "war movies" including African Americans, most notably the documentary film *The Negro Soldier* (1944). See Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black*: *The Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 101-102.

[13] While some scholars leave out some of these categories or merge them together, there appears to be a general consensus on the historical division of these categories. See Christopher Sieving, *Soul Searching: Black-Themed Cinema from the March on Washington to the Rise of Blaxploitation* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 4; Allyson Nadia Field, Jan-Christopher Horak, and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, eds., *L.A. Rebellion*: *Creating a New Black Cinema* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 4; Mark A. Reid, *Redefining Black Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 5-6; Cara Caddoo, *Envisioning Freedom*: *Cinema and the Building of Modern Black Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 5-7.

While most historical narratives trace this history of Black film to the rise of Oscar Micheaux's race films in the interwar period, which is attributed to the Great Migration, the emergence of entertainment culture, and technological industrial advances in the North, others trace this history to earlier Black cinematic expressions in the Jim Crow South. Using archival research, Cara Caddoo remaps the history of early cinematic engagement among Black communities across the South starting in the 1890s. From church and hall exhibitions to the establishment of the 'chitlin' circuit' in Southern and Western states, Caddoo emphasizes the importance of Black community gatherings and engagement with motion pictures as an art and vehicle for racial progress.[14] This repositioning of Black cinematic engagement in the Jim Crow South is pivotal to understanding the history of Black cinema as a *trans-geographical* struggle that is deeply intertwined with the struggle for civil rights.

In the same period as the pre-WWI race films which are generally considered to be the first cinematic works created by active Black participation, in the 1910s the Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes in the South, the latter led by Booker T. Washington, made the first known Black documentary films. They were created as part of the 'uplift movement' or what Allyson Nadia Field calls "uplift cinema."[15] These early documentary campaign films, such as *Making Negro Lives Count* (1915) and *A Day in*

[14] Caddoo, *Envsioning Freedom*, 10.

[15] Allison Nadia Field, *Uplift Cinema: The Emergence of African American Film and the Possibility of Black Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 10.

Tuskegee (1913), have important implications for the regional history of Black documentary film. In her book *Uplift Cinema*, Field reconsiders the history of 'race films' of the 1910s and 1920s as a distinct category in order to include the largely neglected fiction and non-fiction films of 'uplift cinema.' Similar to Caddoo's analysis, by repositioning 'uplift cinema' inside the race film category, Field shifts the scholarly focus from the race films of the North to the rural South:

> African American filmmaking emerged in the south at the same time as it did in the north, in the early years of the second decade of the twentieth century. […] Both northern and southern filmmakers combined popular entertainment with the positive representation of African American life at a time when its prevailing screen image was the visual manifestation of distorted white perception.[16]

Including early Black documentary films of the 1910s within this framework of 'uplift cinema' is relevant for recognizing the emergence of Black documentary film not only as a Northern but also as a Southern phenomenon.

[16] Ibid. For similar accounts on documentary film in the South see: *Robert* Jackson, *Fade In, Crossroads: A History of the Southern Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 216; Bowser, "Pioneers of Black Documentary Film." In *Struggles for Representation African American Documentary Film and Video*, edited by Phyllis Klotman and Janet Cutler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 8-12.

This early trans-geographical development and engagement with Black documentary film is essential for understanding similar dynamics in the 1960s. The study of the 1960s has produced a sea of scholarly work aiming to deal with the complexity of the era and its importance for American history. Most relevant for the contextualization of the trans-geographical development of 1960s documentary engagement is the longstanding debate on what Emile Crosby calls the "spatial and chronological context" of the civil rights movement.[17] Building on influential works by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Kevin Gaines, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodward, who argue for understanding the civil rights movement as a "civil rights unionism" or a "national black freedom movement" beyond chronological and geographical boundaries of the "classical" South, Crosby emphasizes the need for a "local" and "bottom-up" approach.[18] While Crosby takes into consideration the top-down 'national' characteristic of the movement, she aims to re-shift the focus towards 'local' stories and struggles, including those of 'classical' Southern

[17] Emilye Crosby, "The Politics of Movement History" in *Civil Rights History from the Ground Up: Local Struggles, a National Movement*, edited by Emilye Crosby (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 12.

[18] Ibid, 9-12; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American History* 91, no.4 (March 2005), 1245, https://doi.org/10.2307/3660172; Theoharis, "Black Freedom Studies: Re-imagining and Redefining the Fundamentals," *History Compass* 4, no. 2 (2006): 349-50, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2006.00318.x See also Gaines, Kevin, "The Historiography of the Struggle for Black Equality since 1945" in *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, ed. Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 211–234. Other influential works include Woodard, Komozi, and Jeanne Theoharis, ed. *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) and Woodard, Komozi, and Jeanne Theoharis, ed. *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2005).

states. The goal is to create a nuanced "synthesis" that combines local and case-study struggles, acknowledges the "centrality of the southern movement in the 'classical' period," and incorporates the national and overarching elements of the era.[19] As Crosby argues, this facilitates the conveyance of a realistic and complex understanding of the 1960s to the public (either students or broad category of an audience outside academic circles),[20] instead of superficial villains vs heroes and a "sugar-coated" view of the struggle. She argues that there is need for a "scholarship that draws on oral history and activist insights (along with traditional sources) and that brings the specificity of time and place into dialogue with broad themes and a national context."[21]

While Crosby does not focus on film in the form of local bottom-up case studies, she uses the medium to illustrate its strength in conveying a more realistic complex view of the era. She uses the film *Freedom Song* (2000) to teach her students about the movement given its success in creating a nuanced story that relies on the new kind of "scholarship" Crosby proposes.[22] Long before *Freedom Song*, early Black documentary film practice in the 1960s embodies this search for local struggles both in the North and South, oral history, activism, and a consciousness of a national struggle. Not only do the films in this study actively create the sort of

[19] Crosby, "The Politics of Movement History", 13.
[20] Ibid, 14-17.
[21] Ibid, 24.
[22] Ibid, 23-24.

synthesis Crosby presents and can help us grasp the intricate nature of the 1960s, but they can also help guide scholarship in adopting this methodological and conceptual synthesis when analyzing the era and the position of Black visual culture in it. This dissertation aims to allow these case studies of early Black documentary film practices to do precisely that. Through their storylines emerging from different geographical contexts but connected to a national struggle, the films will guide the synthesis, interlayered analysis, and bottom-up approach throughout this dissertation.

Hybridity and Independence

Apart from the trans-geographical context in which the documentary renaissance of the 1960s emerged, the issues of hybridity and independence add to the complexity of this wave of films when it comes to their historicization. While research has been done on the development of Black film towards the Hollywood-produced Sidney Poitier films and Blaxploitation in the late 1960s and the 1970s with the advent of Melvin Van Peebles *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971),[23] the position of Black documentary films throughout this era remains ambiguous in scholarly work. Among the few works that have dealt specifically with Black documentary film is Phyllis R. Klottman and Janet Cutler's *Struggles for Representation* (2000), which was also the first book to be published on

[23] For important critique of the Hollywood production 'race films' and Blaxploitation era, see James Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work* (New York: Vintage International, 1976); Reid, *Redefining Black Film*, 69-83; Cripps, *Making Movies Black*, 250-294.

Black non-fiction motion picture. More recently, Novotny Lawrence's *Documenting the Black Experience* (2014) picks up the story of Black documentary film offering a comprehensive analysis of in the post-2000 years. While these books are highly significant given their juxtaposition of a high volume of works, timeframes and filmmakers, the categorization and positioning of a new wave of Black documentary film in the 1960s remains absent. The study of Black documentary film in the 1960s has been done mostly as part of either large historiographies of Black film,[24] smaller-scale studies focusing on one or two case studies of Black documentary films in the 1960s, or large studies focusing on one filmmaker.[25] Thus, the trend has been, as Lawrence rightly argues, to study African American documentary filmmaking practices either as "stand-alone" cases or as part of larger high-volume projects dealing only with non-fiction film or Black filmmaking in general.[26] What is missing is a narrative that contextualizes Black documentary filmmaking within not only the political context of the civil rights era but also the broader Black cultural struggle throughout the 1960s.

[24] Examples include Phyllis Klotman and Janet Cutler, eds., *Struggles for Representation* and *Documenting the Black Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 8-12. Other high-volume works dealing with documentary practice briefly include Mark Reid's *Redefining Black Film*, Manthia Diawara, ed., *Black American Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Thomas Cripps, *Black Film as Genre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

[25] See for instance: Scott MacDonald and Jaqueline Stewart, ed. *William Greaves Filmmaking as Mission* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

[26] Novotny Lawrence, ed., *Documenting the Black Experience: Essays on African American History, Culture and Identity in Nonfiction Films* (Jefferson: MacFarland & Company Inc. Publishers, 2014), 2.

Another dominant aspect in scholarly work on Black documentary film of the 1960s is the exclusive association of these non-fiction films with *Black Journal* and William Greaves, also known as "the dean of black documentary directors."[27] In his book *Redefining Black Film*, Mark A. Reid identifies a "first wave of new black independent filmmaking" in the 1960s as coinciding with the inception of *Black Journal*.[28] Similar to Reid, for many other scholars the start of this documentary-style practice within 'black independent filmmaking' starts with the arrival of *Black Journal* in 1968 under the leadership of William Greaves, although according to Reid's criteria not entirely independent given the program's sponsorship and distribution by the National Educational Television (NET).[29] What one can refer to as the *Black Journal* 'school' served as a significant environment for the training of Black documentary filmmakers and producers such as Madeline Anderson, St. Clair Bourne, Charles Hobson, Tony Batten, and many more.[30] While it is certainly true that the *Black Journal* school contributed to the revival of Black documentary practice in the 1960s and provided young filmmakers with the creative space and

[27] Clyde R. Taylor, "Paths of Enlightenment: Heroes, Rebels, and Thinkers," in *Struggles for Representation African American Documentary Film and Video*, edited by Phyllis Klotman and Janet Cutler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 124.

[28] Reid, *Redefining Black Film*, 126-127.

[29] See Klottman and Cutler, *Struggles for Representation*, xvi; Michael T. Martin, "Struggles for the *Sign:* Los Angeles Collective of Black Filmmakers," in *L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema*, edited by Allyson Nadia Field, Jan-Christopher Horak, and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 218; Adam Knee and Charles Musser, "William Greaves, Documentary Film-Making, and the African-American Experience," *Film Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (1992): 13, https://doi.org/10.2307/1213220; Cripps, *Black Film as Genre*, 102-103.

[30] Reid, *Redefining Black Film*, 127; Klottman and Cutler, *Struggles for Representation*, xvi.

resources to pursue their film careers, my aim is to contextualize this wave within a larger interest in documentary practice among Black communities and Black activists that started even before the advent of *Black Journal*.

Also prominent in the few scholarly works on Black documentary film in this era, is the complete exclusion of film, including documentary film, as a category from the context of Black nationalism, Black Power, and the Black Arts Movement (BAM).[31] Similarly, the absence of film and especially documentary film within most of the literature on cultural resistance and Black Power during the civil rights era, constitutes, as Lars Lierow argues, a "blind spot in black film scholarship." Lierow's essay "The "Black Man's Vision of the World" along with Whitney Strub's "The Baraka Film Archive" are some of the few works that situate film at the heart of BAM and Black Power.[32] While both Lierow and Strub do not focus specifically on documentary film and are primarily concerned with films created by prominent BAM figures as well as their unfinished film

[31] Taylor, "Paths of Enlightenment,"124.

[32] The majority of literature dealing with the so-called 'culture wars' during the 60s either in the context of the civil rights movement, Black Power or BAM has focused on such manifestations primarily in literature, theater, and music, only mentioning black independent film practices in passing or focusing only on Blaxploitation films. See for instance: James Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Joe Street, *The Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2007); William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture*, 1965-1975, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Mark Anthony Neal, *Soul Babies: Black Popular Culture and the Post-Soul Aesthetic*, (New York: Routledge, 2002); Amy Abugo Ongiri, *Spectacular Blackness: The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010); Kimberly W. Benston, *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism*, (New York: Routledge, 2000); Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post–Civil Rights Era,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

projects, their analyses provide important insights into the role of cinematic storytelling within the "cultural politics in the Black Power and Black Arts era."[33]

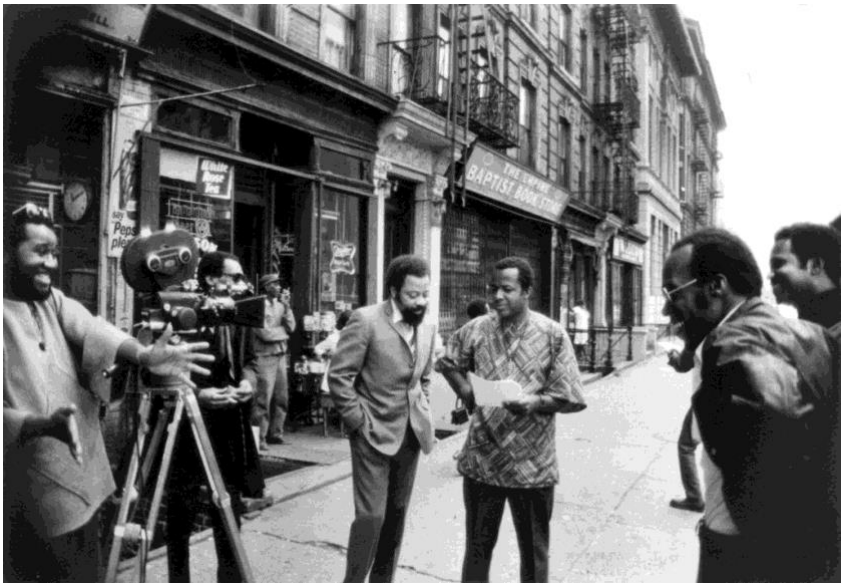

Figure 1: William Greaves on filming location with his crew in Harlem for Black Journal. Among the crew are: St. Claire Bourne and Tony Batten. (Unidentified, *William Greaves production still,* photograph, Bloomington: Black Film Center/Archive Indiana University).

Within this framework of scholarly work, early and late documentary films of the 1960s exist in an almost limbo state. They have not been situated within commercial post-war cinema or Hollywood and

[33] Lars Lierow, "The Black Man's Vision of the World: Rediscovering Black Arts Filmmaking and the Struggle for a Black Cinematic Aesthetic," *Black Camera* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 4, https://doi.org/10.2979/blackcamera.4.2.3

independently produced Blaxploitation cinema, nor are they considered to be part of BAM or the independent filmmaking category due to a scholarly focus on meticulously defined criteria for independence and Black aesthetics. But recent shifts in the study of Black Power and BAM have proven that such criteria do not reflect the complexity and flexibility of artistic expressions in this era. According to historian Peniel E. Joseph the study of Black Power and BAM has recently taken a shift similar to the study of the civil rights movement to recognize a "long Black Power Movement." Studies such as Timothy Tyson's *Radio Free Dixie* and James Smethurst's *The Black Arts Movement* "reperiodize" Black Power and BAM by tracing their roots to the post-war era and beyond.[34] As Smethurst argues, Black Power and BAM can be seen as inherently "elastic terms;" "that is to say, there was no predominant organization or ideology with which or against which various artists and activists defined themselves."[35] Smethurst contextualizes BAM within a longstanding nexus between political and cultural movements throughout history as seen in the Harlem Renaissance.

Consequently, the documentary film renaissance of the 1960s either intentionally or unintentionally captures the basic spirit of BAM when it comes to filmmaking, which is defined by Larry Neal as "the Black creative

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[34] Peniel J. Joseph, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights–Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 8; Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of the Black Power Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 3.

[35] James Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, 15. See also similar account in Benston, *Performing Blackness*, 3.

filmmaker's job to document and express the point-of-view of Black America."[36] For documentary film, the most significant cultural development in the 1960s is that when it comes to the role of art, which include film practices, "artistic activity" was "made an absolute political priority and linked to the equally emphatic drive for the development and exercise of black self-determination within a large black political-cultural movement."[37] The Black documentary films emerged in this era of heightened awareness of the essential role of cultural politics and the importance of film as a "political weapon."[38]

However, it is certainly true that some of the documentary film projects chosen for this dissertation did not fit within all of BAM's tenets, including some documentary films made by BAM artists.[39] For instance, some of the films were made in cooperation with white filmmakers and were not solely directed towards a Black audience. Nevertheless, as Lierow argues, the questions on ownership and control tied to Black aesthetics and emphasized by scholars in their discussion of Black independent cinema, were certainly

[36] Larry Neal, "Film and the Cultural revolution", *Arts in Society* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1968), 350. This goes against some contentions that black artists turned their backs towards mass media and saw it as inherently "antithetical to African-based film practice". Such arguments can be found in Sieving, *Soul Searching*, 158; Natalie Crawford and Lisa Gail Collins, eds., *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 8.

[37] Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, 15-16.

[38] Street, *The Culture War*, 6.

[39] These documentary projects include Amiri Baraka's *New Ark* (1968), *Black Spring* (1968) and Larry Neal's *Revolution in Black America* (1968).

essential within BAM, but by no means immutable. [40] The evidence found in film practices of the era, for instance, film projects by Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka, two of the most prominent figures within BAM, proves that:

> […] the ideal of a cinematic black aesthetic was not—and is not—a fixed and measurable standard that hinges first and foremost on the issue of Black control over production and content. The Black Arts activists put these questions of ownership and aesthetic authenticity at the center of the contemporary discourse on Black cinema. As artists, political activists, and filmmakers themselves, however, they were acutely aware that a black cinematic aesthetic could not spring from a template or a list of formal and institutional criteria. Instead, it had to be created to fit particular intentions of the film and the visions of the filmmaker.[41]

The era, therefore, was characterized by a dynamic, flexible, and hybrid idea of filmmaking aiming to bring Black truth-narratives onto the screens.[42] The documentary renaissance of the 1960s can thus be seen as an amalgam of ideas, techniques, themes, and strategies of cultural resistance. Many of the films were inspired by the activism and local

[40] It is important to note that Larry Neal's *Revolution in Black America* film project was in cooperation with ADF (American Documentary Films) and had a white co-director, Jerry Stoll. See Lierow, "The Black", 4,9; Neal, "Film", 349.
[41] Lierow, "The Black", 18.
[42] Neal, "Film," 350.

struggles of the civil rights movement while simultaneously borrowing from the revolutionary self-determination and boldness of BAM to create a "world-view of the film" that is entirely Black.[43]

Black Film, Film Blackness and the Problem of Definition

> To stare at the television, or mainstream movies, to engage its images, was to engage its negation of black representation. It was the oppositional black gaze that responded to these looking relations by developing independent black cinema. — bell hooks, *Black Looks*[44]

Reflecting the complexity and hybridity of the documentary renaissance of the 1960s, this dissertation contributes to the field of Black (film) studies and cultural history, through its application of a *contextual* approach and by repositioning Black documentary film at the heart of the cultural and political struggle that defined the 1960s. It challenges the view that the Black struggle movement was opposed to the active use of mass media as a form of resistance and the assumptions that the 1960s were marked by a decline in Black film practices.[45] In this sense the documentary films

[43] Ibid, 350.

[44] bells hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 181.

[45] See argument made by Collins and Crawford, *New Thoughts*, 8; See also Sieving, *Soul Searching*, 7: "It is my contention that the obsession with authenticity in the 1960s effectively retarded the development of black-cast motion pictures during that decade and beyond." For arguments against this black community art vs mass media and popular culture dichotomy see Lierow, "The Black Man's Vision", 6.

function under the umbrella of a "radical imagination" as the collective dreams imagining a better future, projecting it onto the present, and creating a sense of solidarity.[46] Several theoretical discussions are crucial to the formation of this contextual approach in this study, which as I will illustrate below, have to do with the problem of definition surrounding Black film.

Historically, film theory and practice have been devoted to the study of film on the grounds of either primarily aesthetic criteria or a cultural/social reading of storytelling. Besides this longstanding division between formalist and culturalist approaches to film, the study of Black film, in particular, carries similar deeply theoretical debates.[47] As most scholarly work has focused on studying Black cinema and Black independent film manifested in 'fiction' films that followed or preceded the Blaxploitation era, the main lines of disagreement can be found in how definitions of Black cinema, and more specifically, Black independent cinema have been formed and applied in the study of these films. While there is a consensus that what counts as Black film or what one can define

[46] My understanding of the term "radical imagination" is based on Cornelius Castoriadis' introduction of the concept in "Radical Imagination and the social instituting imaginary," in *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity*, edited by Gillian Robinson and John Rundell (New York: Routledge, 1994), 136-139. See also Henry A. Giroux, "Hollywood Film as Public Pedagogy: Education in the Crossfire," *Afterimage* 35, no. 5 (March 2008): 13, https://doi.org/10.1525/aft.2008.35.5.7; Alex Khasnabish and Max Haiven, *The Radical Imagination: Social Movement Research in the Age of Austerity* (London: Zed Books, 2014), 4-6.

[47] For a more detailed explanation of the historical and theoretical dispute between formalist, realist and culturalist approaches to film analysis and study see Graeme Turner, *Film as Social Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 1-4. Also, David Bordwell, "Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory" in *Post- Theory Reconstructing Film Studies,* edited by Noël Carrol and David Bordwell (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 1-36.

as Black cinematic manifestations have proved to be an extremely vague and complex category, efforts to reach a definition in order to study and engage critically with Black films revolve primarily around several premises. First, there is a clear division between attempts to define Black independent cinema based on either an essentialist view or a non-essentialist view. The first approach is based primarily on essentialist criteria to define Black film as found in the works of Thomas Cripps (1978) and Mark A. Reid (1993).[48] The second approach can range from moderate to overly holistic readings of Black film to include any film that "shows black faces."[49]

While the overly holistic approach may, as Gladstone L. Yearwood argues, "trivialize" a definition of Black film due to its negligence of institutional racism in film industries producing forms of whitewashing and racial stereotypes, the main issue that arises from an essentialist study of Black film stems from its emphasis on tying criteria such as independence, representation, and authenticity to essentialist determinants. Within an essentialist reading, authenticity and independence can only be found in films that are produced and created by Black people outside the parameters of commercial or Hollywood-owned production and

[48] Examples of biological essentialist criteria can be found in Thomas Cripps, *Black Film as Genre*, 3-12; Mark A. Reid, *Redefining Black Film*, 2-4, 125.

[49] Gladstone L.Yearwood, ed., *Black Cinema Aesthetics: Issues in Independent Black Filmmaking* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982), 68-69. Yearwood wrote this in critique of overly holistic approaches as found in Phyllis Klotman, ed., *Frame by Frame: A Black Filmography* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1979).

distribution studios.[50] The rationale guiding this premise upholds financial and creative independence paired with an essentialist determined perception of racial identity as the sole precursors that can produce the right representation of the politics of Black struggle and Black aesthetics. Most notably, pioneering studies in the 1990s by Black film scholars Mark A. Reid, Ed Guerrero, Manthia Diawara,[51] and Toni Cade Bambara use this essentialist dichotomy between independent and studio-produced works to judge the aesthetics and politics of Black films and many studio affiliated Blaxploitation films as 'aesthetically contaminated' failing to represent ideal Black aesthetics.[52] It is this restriction and idealization of what Black film and its independence mean that urged Tommy L. Lott to contend in disagreement with the essentialist view that there is no guarantee that a Black filmmaker with "final cut privileges" would not be able to have aesthetics of 'white discourse' or divert from a so-called ideal

[50] Tommy L. Lott, "A No-Theory Theory of Contemporary Black Cinema," *Black American Literature* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 222, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3041684; Sieving, *Soul Searching*, 6-7.

[51] Although Diawara's definition of Black independent film in *Black American Cinema* is based on essentialist criteria and a dichotomy between studio vs independent production, he does recognize Melvin Van Peebles' *Sweetback* as an independent film but with a different kind of aesthetics. For Lott this illustrates the willingness of some essentialist approaches to look beyond the mere idealized aesthetics of a film to judge its political value. See Lott, "Aesthetics and Politics", in *Contemporary Black Film Theory and Philosophy*, edited by Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 287.

[52] Mark A. Reid, *Redefining Black Film*; Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Toni Cade Bambara, "Reading the Signs" in *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge, 1993); Manthia Diawara, "Black American Cinema", in *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge, 1993).

Black aesthetic.[53] A version relying primarily on marginalizing Black films benefitting from studio affiliation or Hollywood does not do justice to the complex and hybrid nature of many Black films. As Lott argues, the wave of Black filmmaking in the 1960s conceived a "dialectical relation between the Hollywood studios and independent black film-making that has thrived on an interplay much more complex than the rigid dichotomy between studio and independent-produced film allows."[54]

The problematization of the concept of (Black) aesthetics and its role in defining and criticizing Black film while adhering to essentializing criteria prompted a wave of Black British cultural studies theorists to consider the value of aesthetics specifically in political terms.[55] By politicizing the issue of aesthetics in studying Black independent film they aimed to step away from essentializing principles to a recognition of more complex "biological and cultural criteria of black identity."[56] On the other hand, views, such as Lott's, reject aesthetic readings of Black film altogether urging for a purely political judgment of Black film. He wants Black film to be defined along the lines of political activism:

[53] Lott, "Aesthetics and Politics", 285.
[54] Ibid, 287.
[55] Important works include: Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Teshome H. Gabriel, "Third Cinema" in *Questions of Third Cinema*, ed. Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (London: British Film Institute, 1989).
[56] Lott, "A No-theory", 231; Michael Boyce Gillespie, *Film Blackness*: *American Cinema and the Idea of Black Film* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 78.

> As a primarily oppositional practice engaged in resistance and affirmation, black cinema need not be presently defined apart from its political function. […] I want to advance a theory of black cinema that is in keeping with those filmmaking practices that aim to foster social change, rather than participate in a process of formulating a definition of black cinema which allows certain films to be canonized on aesthetic grounds so as to occupy a place in the history of cinema.[57]

What he ultimately does is champion a new dichotomy between reading and defining Black independent film following what he calls "aesthetic-based theories of black cinema" or as a necessary vehicle for Black political activism as in his understanding of Third Cinema.[58] For Lott, the real value in studying Black film is directly tied to the degree to which it is able to become a "vehicle for nobler race punditry."[59]

Lott is certainly right to voice serious concerns regarding essentialist definitions of Black cinema and its independence, nevertheless dismissing efforts that take into consideration a Black film's aesthetics and their plurality presents the same issue of confining black film to an abstract

[57] Lott, "A No-theory", 232

[58] Lott uses the wave of Third Cinema of the 1960's which started in Latin America to argue for the remodeling of black independent film to political activism; see "A No-theory", 231-232. The concept of Third Cinema has also been applied to African American film by Teshome H. Gabriel in *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982).

[59] Gillespie*, Film Blackness*, 78.

idealism that he originally intended to criticize.[60] If we aim to have an inclusive understanding of Black cinema that does justice to the multifaceted way in which Black film rises from its socio-political context, it is necessary to have a reading of Black film that recognizes this complexity. In his book *Film Blackness*, Michael B. Gillespie makes his argument for an approach that sees Black film not as "a closed hermeneutics" in which each film is judged on whether or not it constitutes a "resolute act of black public policy" but as an "unfinalizable" project that allows for the "possibility of art and, importantly, the prerogative of the filmmaker as artist and the idea of black film"; that is to say black film is "a vast abundance."[61] Black films can carry a clear cultural and political policy while others can obscurify such meanings, be exclusively focused on the '*l'art pour l'art'* of their storylines, complicate the representation and meaning of blackness and Black struggle in a myriad of ways, be irresolute and abstract.[62] As such, Gillespie argues against an *a priori* prescriptive judgment of Black film which causes him to advocate for a more inclusive

[60] As found in some approach to black film by Black British cultural studies scholars.

[61] Gillespie, *Film Blackness*, 12, 78. Although Gillespie does not go into further detail on the concept of *unfinalizability*, it appears to correspond to Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of the concept in aesthetics in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. For detailed analysis of the concept see Deborah J. Haynes, "Bakhtin and the Visual Arts", in *A Companion to Art Theory*, edited by Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2002), 300.

[62] I rely here on my understanding of a similar argument made by bell hooks in *Reel to Real* p. 292; "aesthetic judgments should not rest solely on ideological or political criteria; this does not mean that such criteria cannot be used in conjunction with other critical strategies to assess the overall value of a given work. It does not imply a devaluation to engage in critical discussion of those criteria. To deny the validity of an aesthetic critique that encompasses the ideological or political is to mask the truth that every aesthetic work embodies the political, the ideological as part of its fundamental structure. No aesthetic work transcends politics or ideology."

study of 'film blackness'. He defines his use of the term blackness as a signifier for a reading practice that is concerned with the dynamic "creative process" in which blackness 'becomes' and is negotiated on the screen.[63] According to Gillespie, this "multidiscursive property of blackness" indicates its strength in producing a panoramic view of blackness that encompasses its aesthetic, cultural, and political surroundings.[64]

Much of Gillespie's methodological argument is built on the concept of 'critical dialogism' presented by Kobena Mercer in his study on Black filmmaking in Britain who develops the concept based on Mikhail Bakhtin's 'dialogic principle.'[65] Mercer also questions what he calls the expectation of Black documentary film to bring to the screen a determined 'realism' of a Black experience that has been put as a burden on the shoulders of Black artists, filmmakers, and creators.[66] Mercer underlines the unavailing way some critics insist on judging Black film as a 'transparent' portrait of Black struggle which undermines how "the possibility of social change is prefigured in collective consciousness by the multiplication of critical dialogues." The issue for Mercer is the difference

[63] Gillespie bases his argument on Kimberly W. Benston's *Performing Blackness,* who argues in his methodological outline p. 6 that " 'blackness' is not an inevitable object, but rather a motivated, constructed, corrosive, and productive process."

[64] Gillespie, *Film Blackness*, 6.

[65] Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 62.

[66] Ibid, 57; Similarly, Clyde Taylor uses the term 'burden of representation' to outline this struggle facing black creators. Taylor ultimately argues for releasing black film from this burden and recognizing that in a society afflicted by racial inequality and discrimination, both political and apolitical narratives in black film may coexist as an "effort to establish a cultural identity:" see "Black Cinema and Aesthetics," 405.

between "a *monologic* tendency in documentary black film which tends to homogenize and totalize the black experience" paired with a sense of 'Black authenticity' as well as the deterministic approach judging film by this merit. He argues for a "*dialogic* tendency which is responsive to the diverse and complex qualities of our black Britishness and British blackness—our differentiated specificity as a diaspora people."[67] The issue of realism here, which presents an even larger burden on the Black documentary genre to present an 'authentic' Black reality and positive Black representation, easily runs into this loop of *monologism* which paradoxically can produce simplified aesthetics and representations similar to the very representation it aimed to oppose.

Rather than offering a counter-discourse that problematizes a racist and derogatory public discourse on blackness and Black identity, *monologic* realism offers a counter-discourse that presents a simplified, homogenous, positive 'Other.'[68] Thus, a *dialogic* realism in Black documentary would, as Mercer argues:

> […] imply an awareness that the struggle to find a voice does not take place on a neutral or innocent cultural terrain but involves numerous modes of appropriation that disarticulate and rearticulate the given signifying elements of racial discourse. In this sense, what is "new" in the more recent

[67] Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 62.
[68] Ibid, 84; Hall, "New Ethnicities," in *ICA Documents: Black Film, British Cinema* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1988), 27.

> films is the recognition of the in-between-ness of the black British condition, not as cultural pathology but as a position from which critical insight is made possible.[69]

In his influential paper "New Ethnicities", Stuart Hall presents an analysis of what he refers to as the "new politics of representation" in Black culture that aims to break from such *mimetic* representation of reality and denotes a "recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category 'black.'"[70] According to Hall, it is in this new politics that the notion of 'ethnicity' is restructured and becomes a transformative force that allows for creative narratives that consciously speak from their historical, political, and cultural context and know that "all knowledge is contextual."[71] Ethnicity thus becomes a *dialogically* 'located' socially constructed awareness that goes hand in hand with recognizing internal diversity and difference.[72]

As I will demonstrate throughout this study, the documentary films making up this dissertation capture this strength of *dialogic* tendencies in Black documentary film, and therefore necessitate the *contextual* approach guiding this study. If there was previously a tendency to simplify and reduce Black cultural expression and art to categories and labels, entertainment industries, film critics, scholars, and media outlets continue

[69] Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 89.
[70] Hall, "New Ethnicities", 27-28
[71] Ibid, 29
[72] Mercer, *Welcome to the jungle*, 92; Hall, "New Ethnicities", 29.

to ignore this transformed notion of ethnicity and representation when speaking about blackness in films, insisting on fundamental tropes such films need to abide by. There can be no universal prescription of what a Black film must do either in a political or aesthetic sense. Building on Gillespie's argument, this dissertation recognizes the importance of understanding the diversity of Black films that produce either explicit or implicit 'political' as well as ambiguous films that explore blackness and identity in creative ways championing aesthetics. Studying the complexity, development, and miscellaneous nature of Black films, therefore, requires and creates space for the employment of multiple theories and approaches that can coexist instead of being treated as mutually exclusive. As such, the study of Black film is contingent on the context surrounding the selected visual case study. In some cases, this might entail focusing primarily on the aesthetics of a film while in other cases the focus will be on a film's 'social practice' or a combination of the two.[73] A critique or analysis of film cannot be given outside the parameters of its context. Neither can it be merely based on the ethical premise that what constitutes a good or bad Black film hinges on its need to represent a narrowly defined ubiquitous Black 'reality' and aesthetics or Black racial socio-political themes concerning the Black community.[74] A contextual approach recognizes the hybrid

[73] My understanding of this approach to film is based on its place within cultural studies coined by Graeme Turner in *Film as Social Practice* p. 3; "Film is a social practice for its makers and its audience; in its narratives and meanings we can locate evidence of the ways in which our culture makes sense of itself." A similar definition is presented by Henry Giroux in "Breaking into the Movies" p. 688.

[74] hooks, *Reel to Real,* 88-89.

vision of Black film as an artistic expression, a vehicle for political activism, and a mode of experimentation, while also recognizing that any study or critique of the film depends on the very vision the film employs. The question thus changes from '*what must the film do?'* to *what does the film do in 'x' context, how, and why?*

In addition to the problem of definition one encounters with Black film, the definition of 'documentary film' and its relation to the above-mentioned questions regarding the genre's dedication to reality adds to the complication of the theoretical and methodological framework in this research. The main definitional problem one encounters with the documentary film genre is its relation to truth and real life. As Klottman and Cutler make clear through their interviews with many Black documentary filmmakers, although the documentary genre "carries the cultural valence of authenticity" or representational authority of real life, it is futile to think of it as "unmediated" representation.[75] Nevertheless, there are certain expectations from the apparatus engaged with the documentary film, either audience, filmmaker, distributor, interviewees etc., for the film to have an 'honest' relationship with real life.[76] As Patricia Aufderheide argues in her discussion of the definition of documentary:

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[75] *Struggles for Representation*, xvii. For the interviews Kolttman and Cutler conducted with black documentary filmmakers over the years see p. 329.

[76] Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 28. For more detailed analysis on the function of realism in documentary film see pp.165- 198.

> Documentaries are *about* real life; they are not real life. They are not even windows onto real life. They are portraits of real life, using real life as their raw material, constructed by artists and technicians who make myriad decisions about what story to tell to whom, and for what purpose. A documentary film tells a story about real life, with claims to truthfulness. How to do that honestly, in good faith, is a never-ending discussion, with many answers. Documentary is defined and redefined over the course of time, both by makers and by viewers. Viewers certainly shape the meaning of any documentary, by combining our own knowledge of and interest in the world with how the filmmaker shows it to us. Audience expectations are also built on prior experience; viewers expect not to be tricked and lied to. We expect to be told things about the real world, things that are true. […] The truthfulness, accuracy, and trustworthiness of documentaries are important to us all because we value them precisely and uniquely for these qualities.[77]

While many documentary films may claim to be truthful, authentic, and objective, the films still choose in their storylines what is 'truthful, authentic, and objective.' The terms through which documentaries develop their relationship with real life are therefore complex and constantly

[77] Patricia Aufderheide, *Documentary Film*: A Very Short Introduction (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2-3.

shifting based on the films' storyline, subjects, context, and goals. My contextual approach in this study which stems from the *dialogic* tendencies in Black documentary films of the 1960s, will focus on revealing how the films are dedicated to constructing truthfulness to serve their quest. Through their dedication to dialogically represent Black truth-narratives on the screen, the films hope to create narratives which, as William Greaves argues, are "weapons in the struggle for freedom, for equality, for liberation, and self-expression."[78]

My approach in this study also draws from a number of methodological approaches regarding the methodical *watching* of the chosen body of films. In her book *Visual Methodologies*, Gillian Rose argues that the main characteristic of a "critical visual methodology" is how it is "concerned with the social effects of the visual materials".[79] For this critical methodology, she identifies four sites: 1. The site of the image itself 2. Circulation 3. Production 4. Audience, accompanied by three modalities for each of the sites: 1. Technological 2. Social 3. Compositional. While, this study will certainly look closely at the context of audiences, production, and distribution of the films, it will focus primarily on *the site of the image itself*, that is to say, the visual cinematic language and meanings found in the films. Additionally, this study is concerned with the *social modality* of the films as in the social and political context

[78] *Struggle for Representation*, xxvi.

[79] Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (London: SAGE, 2016), 22, 46.

surrounding the films. It therefore primarily engages with the films from a cultural and contextual approach focusing on film as a form of *social practice*.

The documentary films are thus studied as "*pure (overt) political films*." In their book, *Projecting Politics*, Elizabeth Haas, Terry Christensen, and Peter J. Haas, identify overt political films based on the way they project politics in their cinematic language. These films incorporate "political intent" and "political content" in their narratives and "the political nature of such films will be fairly evident to most audiences."[80] The films incorporate political content and intent as they focus not only on translating political realities and discussions thereof on the screen but they also intend to depict subverting ideas that confront and question those political realities to leave the audience with new thoughts, lessons, and challenges that might also perhaps inspire political and social actions.

My method of analysis also draws inspiration from Douglas Kellner's methodological outline of contextual analysis based on two interrelated elements: "*transcoding*" and "*diagnostic reading of film*."[81] 'Transcoding'

[80] Elizabeth Haas, Terry Christensen, and Peter J. Haas. *Projecting Politics: Political Messages in American Film* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 9-11. It is important to note that, as the writers argue, the term 'pure' or 'overt' do not necessarily imply that this category of films are superior to other in terms of their engagement with politics. Rather, the term aims to illustrate how the political messages in these films will be clear to identify for most audiences in comparison to for instance a narrative film that incorporates implicit political messages.

[81] Kellner elaborates on both terms in primarily his works: *Cinema Wars*, 2, 34-35; Kellner, Douglas, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity, and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern*

refers to studying the translation and discussion of political context into "specifically cinematic terms" found in the chosen films. A diagnostic reading of film helps study such 'transcoding' by "using *texts"* of the films "to read social realities and events, and using social and historical *context* to help situate and interpret key films."[82] Along these lines, the diagnostic reading of film possesses a "dual optic," given that it utilizes the historical and political context in order to analyze cinematic texts and in turn, uses these texts to analyze historical and political context.[83] This approach allows for an analysis of multiple elements embedded in the texts and contexts central to this study such as questions of race, class, and gender, but also discourses of resistance in film narratives.[84]

From New York, to San Francisco, to Charleston

The motivation behind the choice for the documentary films making up the body of visual case studies for this dissertation lies in their unique ability to include several interconnected themes in their narratives. Either through choosing to highlight primarily commentary on class, race, gender, political strategies, and philosophies of resistance, they still managed to incorporate

(New York: Routledge, 1995), 116-121; Kellner, Douglas and Michael Ryan, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 12-16; Kellner, Douglas, "Film, Politics, and Ideology: Reflections on Hollywood Film in the Age of Reagan" *The Velvet Light Trap* 27 (Spring 1991): 9, 22.

[82] Kellner, *Media Culture*, 116.

[83] Ibid, 116.

[84] Ibid, 121.

all the other themes in their storylines as well to present a full complex picture. Spread throughout the 1960s, what sets the chosen films apart is therefore the sophisticated ways in which they create a "synthesis."[85] They incorporated oral history and first-hand experiences by activists and members of their communities while connecting the locality of their storyline to discussions manifested in the national socio-political context.

The choice for the selected documentaries rests on three important aspects of Black documentary film. First, they represent the trans-geographical nature of Black documentary film struggle I detailed in this introduction. Each film emerges from local stories of struggle. For instance, from the streets of San Francisco in *Take This Hammer* to Cleveland, Mississippi in *Dream Deferred* to New York City in *Black Liberation*. Second, the films also engage with a large and diverse number of participants in their interviews and discussions that are not limited to prominent activists in Black political movements and those directly or indirectly involved with them, but also participants of various ages and backgrounds who are not directly involved with the movements. While the distribution and reach were different for each film, the films were mainly created with the goal of reaching a wider audience both Black and white. Despite the limited distribution and viewing of some of these films in relation to others and thus the relatively limited available audience response records, the engagement with the audience in these film projects was an

[85] See p. 6 of the introduction.

essential part of the filming process. There is therefore a dynamic level of interaction that starts at the very commencement of the film as a project made by the 'audience for the audience.' Finally, the films also exemplify the hybrid and flexible disposition of Black documentary film in this era both in terms of funding, production, and distribution as well as cooperation with white filmmakers and producers.[86] As illustrated in my discussion of the definition of Black film, this shifts the debate from the classical understanding of Black independent filmmaking, Black aesthetics, and authenticity in Black film studies.

The diversity of the films I detail above is also evident in the various production contexts for each film. In the spring of 1963, Richard O. Moore and James Baldwin joined forces to create *Take This Hammer* (1964) as they drove down the streets of San Francisco from Downtown to Hunter's Point focusing on Black experiences in the liberal metropolis. The film highlights discussions between Baldwin and young members of the Black community, as well as Baldwin's own thoughts on the city within the larger context of civil rights and activism. *Take This Hammer* was funded and produced by KQED as part of the National Educational Television (NET). Richard O. Moore, a filmmaker at the KQED film unit, developed a

[86] The chosen case studies illustrate the flexibility in Black documentary practice and engagement, while *Take this Hammer*, *Black Liberation*, and *Dream Deferred* are created in cooperation with white filmmakers, *Still A Brother* and *I am Somebody* did not involve white filmmakers in the directing process. In terms of funding, films such as *Black Liberation* and *Dream Deferred* rely primarily on private funding and personal editing equipment of Eduard de Laurot and Harvey Richards, *I am Somebody* has a hybrid funding model of commercial and public funding while *Still A Brother* and *Take this Hammer* relied on complete funding by the National Educational Television (NET) (later replaced by Public Broadcasting Service PBS).

"working relationship" with James Baldwin and they both agreed to work on a film project during Baldwin's visit to San Francisco. Baldwin and the filming crew were joined by Youth for Service's Executive Director, Orville Luster, to show Baldwin around the city. It is worth noting that upon the completion of the film, the Board of Directors of KQED demanded that 15 minutes be cut from the film footage given what they considered to be radical content found in the original Director's cut. The full Director's cut version was recovered in 2013 and is currently held by the San Francisco State University, at the J. Paul Leonard Library's Bay Area Television Archive.

In 1964, Harvey Richards, a white filmmaker and photographer from San Francisco, reconnected with Amzie Moore from the SNCC's in Cleveland, Mississippi, to work on their second film together *Dream Deferred* (1964). Unlike their first film *We'll Never Turn Back* (1963), which was filmed in secret, *Dream Deferred* was made to have a wider reach and be used for SNCC campaigning. The filming locations were extended to include Selma, Alabama, and *Dream Deferred* also depicted more activists and their testimonies on screen compared to *We'll Never Turn Back*, such as Fannie Lou Hamer, and Amzie Moore himself. Both *We'll Never Turn Back* and *Dream Deferred* were edited and filmed by Harvey Richards using his equipment. The films were produced by Richards and SNCC. Before reaching out to Amzie Moore, Richards had visited the South for photography purposes in the 1950s focusing on Black rural poverty. Through a connection with Jim Dumbrowski from the

Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF) in New Orleans, Louisiana, Richards was referred to Amzie Moore. In 1963, Richards traveled with his equipment to Cleveland, Mississippi to meet Moore for the first time. Richards had avoided making any phone calls with SNCC prior to his trip or discussing anything regarding the film projects out of fear for telephone tapping. After the completion of *Dream Deferred*, film copies were distributed for film screenings and sent to various SNCC offices.[87]

Perhaps the most unknown film among the case studies is Edouard (Yves) De Laurot and Malcolm X's *Black Liberation (aka Silent Revolution)* from 1967 filmed in New York City. Most of the production and post-production information available on the film was provided in 1997, by De Laurot's partner, the late Zoë Lund. She narrates that X was involved directly during the filming process in New York and as the film prologue states, he provided the text to be narrated by Ossie Davis. *Black Liberation* was produced and edited by Edouard De Laurot's own production company, Cinema Engagé. It remains unclear how the film was restored. It was found by Zoë Lund and Robert Lund in De Laurot's abandoned loft in the 1980s. In 1996, most of De Laurot's film materials were transferred to Anthology Film Archives (AFA) in New York City. A version was posted on YouTube in 2016 by Robert Lund, Zoë Lund's

[87] See, Paul Richards, "Primary Source Documentaries: The Making of 'We'll Never Turn Back' (1963) & 'Dream Deferred' (1964) by Harvey Richards." *Syndic Literary Journal*, no. 5. 1-19, http://www.syndicjournal.us/syndic-no-5/filmmaking-harvey-richardscivil-rights-movement-by-paul-richards/1-19.

husband who also manages an archival website about her life and work. In 2017, the popular YouTube channel *Reelblack* reposted the film and it finally reached a wider audience. The Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) screened the film as part of their 2018 film series: "Say It Loud: Cinema in the Age of Black Power, 1966—1981." This was according to BAM the "US premiere of a new scan" of the film. It was also screened for the first time in the Netherlands at the Eye Filmmuseum in 2016 as part of their "Looking for America" program.[88] According to Zoë Lund, the film suffered suppression and censorship within the U.S., limited copies were however circulated among Black communities. The film was aired on CBC Toronto's television series "The Way It Is," and according to Zoë Lund, it was also purchased by various international networks such as the BBC. It also won an award at the 29th Venice International Film Festival in 1968. Notably, the film was also nominated for Best Documentary feature at the 1973 Academy Awards.[89] It must be noted that it remains unclear how De Laurot and Malcolm X met, although one could speculate that they met through James Baldwin, a common friend between the two men.[90] James Baldwin had also screened *Black Liberation* in the late eighties when at

[88] Eye Filmmuseum. "Looking for America." Brochure. October 2016. Amsterdam: Eye Filmmuseum, 2016. https://www.eyefilm.nl/uploads/downloads/blocks/programma-brochure-Looking-For-America-NL-ENG.pdf

[89] Nicole Brenez, "Edouard de Laurot: Engagement as Prolepsis", *Third Text* 25, no. 1 (2011), 60, https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2011.545614

[90] Nicole Brenez, *Abel Ferrara* (Chicago, IL: The University of Illinois Press, 2007), 54.

Hampshire College to his students.[91] It is believed that De Laurot and X started working on the film by the end of 1964 and early 1965, just before Malcolm X was assassinated on February 21st, 1965, which means that he did not live to see the final version of the film completed in 1967.

William Greaves completed *Still A Brother: Inside the Negro Middle Class* in 1968 for the NET Journal and the film aired for the first time on April 29th, 1968, and again in September 1969. The film is part of Greaves' freelance self-produced films for NET before starting his work on *Black Journal* in June 1968. The film was written by playwright and television writer, William Branch, and was narrated by Ossie Davis. The footage was filmed in various locations and explores the struggles within the Black middle class interviewing an extensive number of subjects and activists. Interviewees included Bayard Rustin, Julian Bond, Dr. St. Clair Drake, Dr. Percy Julian, and many more. The film gained national attention and was nominated for an Emmy award in 1969 and won a Blue Ribbon Award.[92]

Madeline Anderson completed *I Am Somebody* in 1969 after being commissioned by New York's Drug and Hospital Union, Local 1199. *I Am Somebody* is the first film to be made by a female African American

[91] Zoe Lund, "'I Had To Do It In My Life As Well As In The Film:'" An Interview with Zoë Lund, interview by Nicole Brenez and Agathe Dreyfus, *Senses of Cinema*, 2002, https://zoelund.com/filmvid/SensesOfCinema/interview.html

[92] See Jaqueline Stewart, "Sisters Inside Still a Brother: Inside the Negro Middle Class: Black Women Through the Lens of William Greaves," in *William Greaves Filmmaking as Mission*, ed. Scott MacDonald and Jaqueline Najuma Stewart (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 254-257; American Archive of Public Broadcasting, "Net Journal, Still A Brother", Accessed May 17, 2021, https://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip_516-kd1qf8kh4s

documentary filmmaker registered at a film union. Madeline Anderson made the film following her work for NET with her mentor, William Greaves. After several unsuccessful attempts by Anderson to find funding by television networks, Anderson was approached by Local 1199 and was given all the necessary resources needed to make her film. While pregnant with her fourth child, Anderson completed the film with her crew by shooting on location and using archival footage made for news broadcasting. While it is unclear whether the film aired on national television, according to Madeline, the film was screened widely among the African American community. The film aimed to document the strike by female hospital workers in Charleston, South Carolina, that lasted more than three months. For Anderson, the film's strength is in the way it combines the most important "obstacles […], those of gender, racial discrimination, and politics."[93]

Gordon Parks co-directed *Diary of a Harlem Family* (1968) with filmmaker Joseph Filipowic. The film is based on Parks' photo-essay of the same title which was featured in *Life* magazine. It aired on NET's *Public Broadcasting Laboratory* (*PBL*) on its special episode named "Civil Disorders" in the aftermath of the 1967 summer uprisings as well as the Kerner Commission's report. The film consists of photo montage and is narrated by Parks himself. Parks had shot the series of photographs while

[93] Michael T. Martin, "Madeline Anderson: Pioneering an African American Documentary Tradition," *Black Camera* 5, no. 1 (Fall 2013): 79, muse.jhu.edu/article/525945. See also Shilyh Warren, "Recognition on the Surface of Madeline Anderson's I Am Somebody", *Signs* 38, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 360, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/667201

spending time with a Black family struggling with poverty in Harlem, New York. The publication of the photo-essay in *Life* had triggered an "overwhelming" response, but most importantly, "by spending a significant amount of time with his subjects, as both journalist and friend, and treating them as equals and collaborators, Parks was able to present narratives rather than snapshots, allowing readers to see parallels between their own lives and the lives of the people in Parks's stories." Park's aim both with the photo-essay and the subsequent film was to capture the lives of Black families who were cast aside as being, simply, 'inhabitants of the ghetto.' Through Park's photographs, the family's struggles and that of countless other similar families were brought to light to the public, not as an example of the pathology of the ghetto, but of the American system of neglect. The film was made publicly available through the American Archive of Public Broadcasting.[94]

Amiri Baraka's *The New Ark* (1968) was also commissioned by the *PBL* with a budget of $19000. The project started out dealing with the theme "America's Scene" and was proposed to Baraka as an invitation to chronicle the Black Arts Movement and revolving around Baraka's play titled *A Black Mass* and was supposed to start with a segment filmed on "the steps of the Capitol in Washington, D.C." It was later changed to *The New Ark* focusing entirely of Baraka's community in Newark, New Jersey. Instead of opening with a segment on the steps of the Capitol, the film

[94] *Public Broadcast Laboratory*.

opens with footage of community members on the steps of Spirit House which served as a community center. Baraka wrote the film and co-directed it with Larry Neal while most of the film editing and photography was done by pioneer Black filmmaker and photographer, James Hinton. The film features various members of the community including Baraka's wife, poet, organizer, and activist, Amina Baraka. The film finally aired on *PBL* in December of 1968 in an episode titled "Can This Be America" which featured five short films by various independent American filmmakers. Alongside Baraka, the episode included films by trailblazers Jonas Mekas and Richard Leacock among others. The film had long been forgotten but was unearthed in 2014 as part of the James Hinton Collection at the Harvard Film Archive (HFA). The film along with other materials was donated to the HFA by James Hinton's daughter, Mercedes S. Hinton in 2008. It is now part of the Harvard Film Archive's collection of rare films.

Finally, in the late 1960s James Baldwin was continuing his active engagement with documentary film by collaborating with his friend, Trinidadian-British filmmaker, Horace Ové on the film *Baldwin's Nigger* (1968). The cinema verité film is comprised of Baldwin's speech the West Indian Student Centre in London in the winter of 1968. While addressing the students, Baldwin's speech focused on experiences of the African diaspora, American imperialism, and the history of slavery. He was joined by comedian and civil rights activist, Dick Gregory. The film's title is taken from Baldwin's speech in which he explains how the ghosts of American slavery are to be found everywhere, even his last name. A few years later

during his return to Paris, Baldwin collaborated with British filmmaker Terrence Dixon on *Meeting the Man: James Baldwin in Paris* (1970). The film crew had approached Baldwin wanting to collaborate with him on a film about his literary career with a special focus on how his time in France had been formative to his work. Once the project began, the filming process would develop into heated discussions and disagreements between Baldwin and the film crew completely changing what was intended to be apolitical into a unique political cinematic experience with Baldwin seizing every minute of the film. Despite the long-forgotten status of both of these Baldwin films, they have recently gained momentum with various segments being included in Raoul Peck's work as well a growing popularity of Baldwin's cinematic contributions on (social) media following the release of Barry Jenkin's 2018 film adaption of Baldwin's *If Beale Street Could Talk*. [95]

[95] It is crucial to note that apart from the chosen film projects for this study, the body of films making up Black engagement with documentary film throughout the 1960s includes other films such as Richard O. Moore's *Louisiana Diary* I & II (1963) which he made shortly before *Take This Hammer* in collaboration with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), as well as his later film *Losing Just the Same* (1966). It also includes Madeline Anderson's first film, *Integration Report One* (1960) and later *A Tribute to Malcolm X* (1967) featuring Betty Shabazz. Other examples include *Black Cop* (1969) by *Black Journal* producer Kent Garrett, Howard Alk's *The Murder of Fred Hampton* (1971) in collaboration with the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party mostly filmed in 1969, and *A Time for Burning* (1966) by William C. Jersey and Barbara Connell famously known for its featuring of Ernie Chambers, *With No One to Help Us* (1967) by Eugene and Carol Marner produced by William C. Jersey Productions and subsidized by the 1965 Project Head Start of the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity. *No Vietnamese Ever Called Me Nigger (1968)* by David Loeb Weiss focused on the Harlem Fall Mobilization March of 1967 against the Vietnam war. *Walk in My Shoes* (1961) by Nicholas Webster was made in collaboration with Dick Gregory as well as several other prominent Black activists. *Behind Every Man* (1967) by Nikolai Ursin focused on a young trans Black woman in Los Angeles, California. *Color Us Black* I & II (1968) by Ben Land was produced by *Black*

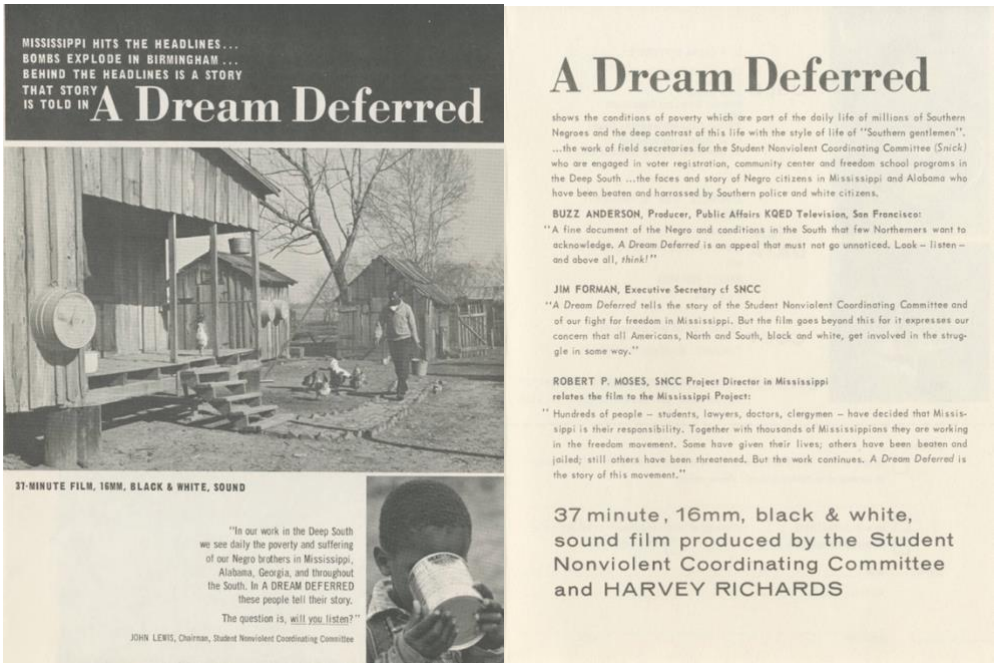
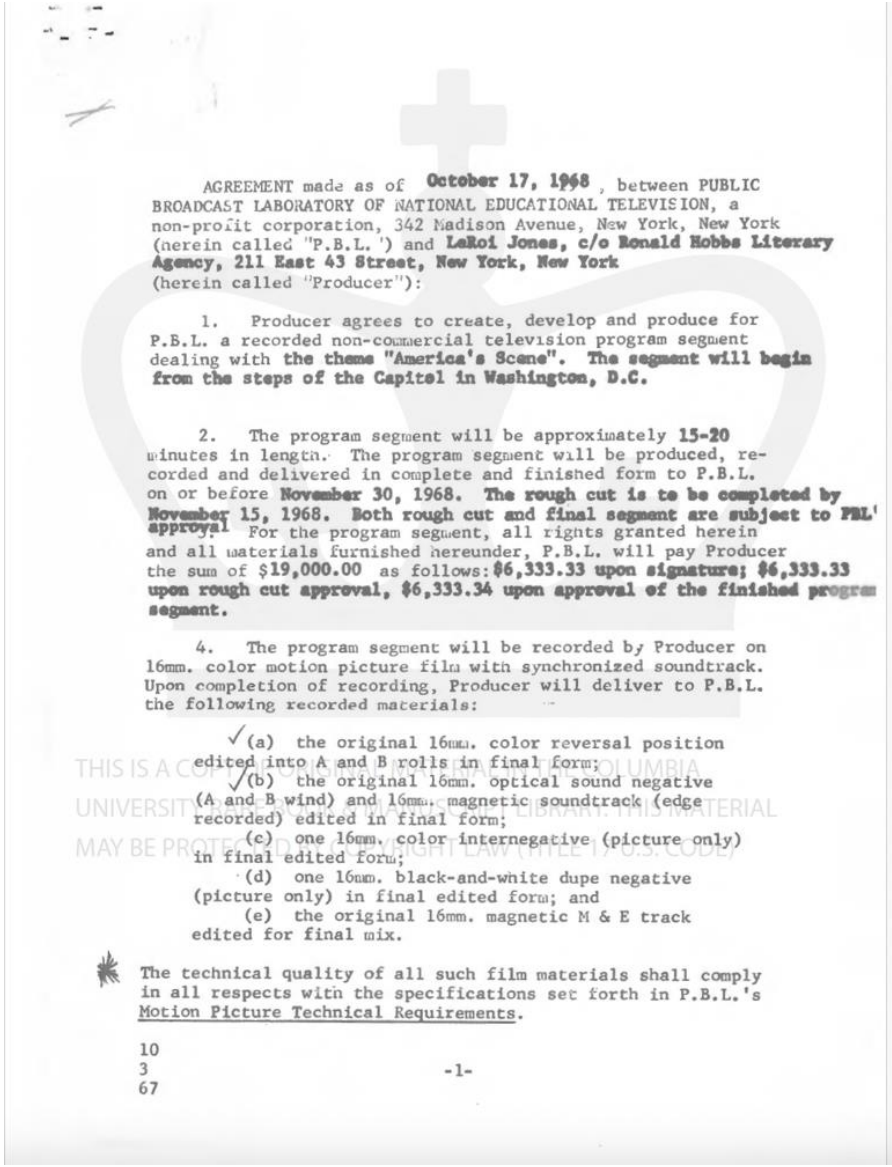


Figure 2: SNCC campaigning pamphlet for *Dream Deferred* p.1 and 3 (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, "A Dream Deferred". Promotional material/Pamphlet circa 1964-1968. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 2016).

Journal executive editor Lou Potter for Net Journal. *Off the Pigs!* (1968) by the Third World Newsreel was made in collaboration with the Black Panther Party.



AGREEMENT made as of **October 17, 1968**, between PUBLIC BROADCAST LABORATORY OF NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION, a non-profit corporation, 342 Madison Avenue, New York, New York (herein called "P.B.L.") and **LeRoi Jones, c/o Ronald Hobbs Literary Agency, 211 East 43 Street, New York, New York** (herein called "Producer"):

1. Producer agrees to create, develop and produce for P.B.L. a recorded non-commercial television program segment dealing with **the theme "America's Scene". The segment will begin from the steps of the Capitol in Washington, D.C.**

2. The program segment will be approximately **15-20** minutes in length. The program segment will be produced, recorded and delivered in complete and finished form to P.B.L. on or before **November 30, 1968. The rough cut is to be completed by November 15, 1968. Both rough cut and final segment are subject to PBL' approval.**

3. For the program segment, all rights granted herein and all materials furnished hereunder, P.B.L. will pay Producer the sum of $**19,000.00** as follows: **$6,333.33 upon signature; $6,333.33 upon rough cut approval, $6,333.34 upon approval of the finished program segment.**

4. The program segment will be recorded by Producer on 16mm. color motion picture film with synchronized soundtrack. Upon completion of recording, Producer will deliver to P.B.L. the following recorded materials:

✓(a) the original 16mm. color reversal position edited into A and B rolls in final form;

✓(b) the original 16mm. optical sound negative (A and B wind) and 16mm. magnetic soundtrack (edge recorded) edited in final form;

(c) one 16mm. color internegative (picture only) in final edited form;

(d) one 16mm. black-and-white dupe negative (picture only) in final edited form; and

(e) the original 16mm. magnetic M & E track edited for final mix.

The technical quality of all such film materials shall comply in all respects with the specifications set forth in P.B.L.'s Motion Picture Technical Requirements.

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Figure 3: The signed contract between *PBL* and Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) in 1968. Ronald Hobbs Literary Agency Records 1964-1992. Series II: Amiri Baraka Files, 1965-1979. MS#1665. Box 4. New York: Columbia University Rare Books & Manuscripts Collections.

The thematic outline of the chapters in this dissertation reflects the inter-layered contextual analysis of the documentary films forming the method of analysis in this study. The first chapter, 'I Give You Your Problem Back": The Quest for Substantial Visuality,' starts by addressing the thread between the 1960s' documentary renaissance and the past, focusing on one of slavery's and Jim Crow's most tenacious remnant discourses dominating the 1960s, namely, that of the so-called 'Negro Problem.' It explores how the film projects struggled against the individualization and depoliticization of racial inequality signified by the discourse of the 'Negro Problem.' Starting at the surface level of silencing, I examine how the films use the element of *substantial visuality* to subvert the 'Negro Problem's' fixation on confining racism and racial inequality to the level of surface. The second chapter, '"Black Life is Revolution": The Quest for Radical Survival,' considers the deeper layers of silencing that often guided many of the discussions of the 'Negro Problem.' I explore the silencing of Black solidarity, which emanated from an insistence that one of the 'problems' with America's Black population is that there is an irreconcilable moral and ideological distance between those in the American North and the South. This myth of distance also posits an irreconcilable moral and experiential distance between the North and the South when it comes to racism and racial inequality. I argue that the films solidify solidarity rooted in Black *radical survival* and the need for radical

change, which does not by default mean homogenizing different tactics and ideologies of Black resistance.

The third chapter, '"The Black Woman:" The Quest for Radical Womanhood,' focuses specifically on the silencing of Black womanhood. The chapter considers the role of Black women within the Black documentary renaissance while focusing primarily on Newark's Kawaida Black nationalist women who participated in Amiri Baraka's *The New Ark*. Each from their own positionality, these women were on their quest for *radical womanhood* and formed an integral part of the Black radical tradition, the Black Power Movement, and Black Power. They actively sought to use the medium of documentary film to express themselves and their womanhood cultural and politically demanding radical structural change on a national level but also within their own communities and organizations. The final chapter, '"We Can Plot Against the Master": The Paradox of Imagination and the Quest for Truth,' blends together many of the ideas discussed in the first three chapters to bring forward what I consider to be the prerequisite of imagination to the films' quest for truth. In this concluding analysis, I discuss *the paradox of the radical imagination*, a process that made much of the subversive elements in the films possible within an environment that perpetually attempts to silence, confine, and police their imagination. Focusing primarily on the Baldwin films, I explore how, those freedom dreams, radically imagining a better future play out in the sphere of documentary film. Standing against all odds, the activists, organizers, and community members, collectively taking the

position of the artists behind the films, refuse to let their imagination be a designated tool for escapism and transcendentalism, but rather one that guides their quest for truth.