



REGENERATION: BLACK CINEMA 1898-1971 CURRICULUM GUIDE



**History is not the past.
It is the present.
We carry our history with
us. We are our history.**

-James Baldwin, 1980

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I. Introduction

With this curriculum guide, we welcome teachers and high school students to experience *Regeneration: Black Cinema 1898–1971*. The most extensive museum exhibition of its kind, *Regeneration* offers a rigorous and celebratory exploration of the achievements and challenges of BLACK filmmakers in the United States from the dawn of cinema to the civil rights movement. The temporary exhibition is on view at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles from August 21, 2022, through July 16, 2023, and was curated by Doris Berger, Vice President, Curatorial Affairs at the Academy Museum, and Rhea L. Combs, Director of Curatorial Affairs at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery.

While DOMINANT NARRATIVES of history suggest that Black people were not active participants in early American cinema, in fact Black filmmakers have been part of the art of moviemaking since nearly the beginning. Their opportunities have been limited, however—and complicated. Hollywood offered few options, and most roles for actors were fraught with STEREOTYPES. Despite economic and social obstacles, Black people did indeed make films, but outside of the white-dominated industry in the so-called classic era of Hollywood. At a time when the US was still racially segregated, productions made with predominantly Black casts and crew offered a greater variety of stories to Black audiences hungry to see their lives reflected on screen. In the late 1950s, as Hollywood expanded, so did opportunities for some Black filmmakers and actors—and many chose to use their craft to advocate for change and inspire others. They worked toward shifting conversations about race, identity, and culture to explore not only sociocultural limitations but also cinema’s possibilities for telling suppressed stories. The *Regeneration* exhibition presents this more inclusive history, filling in the gaps to show the steady and potent contributions of Black artists, filmmakers, entrepreneurs, and critics.

The history of Black cinema is one that ebbs and flows. There are moments of flourishing and periods of frustration. Throughout, Black artists have found ways to persevere. Sometimes this requires working within the Hollywood system and delivering stellar performances despite the limitations of the script. At other times a complete rupture with the system is necessary to ensure that the message is not co-opted. Traversing this landscape has involved tremendous sacrifice and has given rise to extraordinary creativity. —Doris Berger and Rhea L. Combs, *Regeneration: Black Cinema 1898–1971* (2022), p. 21

The exhibition’s namesake, the all-Black-cast film *Regeneration (A Romance of the South Seas)* from 1923, today survives only in fragments. The title embodies the aspirational goals of the exhibition, which seeks to revive lost and forgotten films and film artists and “regenerate” them for a contemporary audience. Alongside the cinematic history, the exhibition weaves in contemporary artworks and provides spaces for dialogue on how we, and artists, grapple with lost histories and their reverberations in the present.

Included in this guide is information about the Academy Museum’s pedagogical approach to INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING, along with content connected to both the museum exhibition and catalogue: select biographies of significant Black thinkers and filmmakers; one-sheet guides about the contemporary artists and artworks featured in the exhibition; unique, in-depth film companions connected to the museum’s film programming; a topical essay exploring stereotypes and TROPES in Black Cinema; and a resource section with a glossary of key terms and concepts and California Common Core Standards. Discussion questions and activities are incorporated throughout the guide.

II. Goals of the Curriculum

By participating in components of the Academy Museum *Regeneration* Curriculum, students will:

- Examine and expand their own understanding of histories highlighting the plurality of the filmmaking experience with emphasis on the subjects of race, gender, and culture
- Acquire knowledge of film studies terms, timelines, and key movements
- Analyze and determine their own definition(s) of Black cinema
- Increase their media literacy and recognize and understand the visual aesthetics of cinema explored throughout this exhibition
- Engage in critical thinking and discourse
- Develop projects that connect historical context to original ideas and creative perspectives

In this guide we aim to provide teachers with inspiration to engage students in the celebration of various kinds of Black cinema while also connecting to broader topics such as the visual aesthetics of stereotypes. By returning to the layered question, “What does Black Cinema mean to you?” we hope to inspire students to consider the myriad questions that spark from this one. For example,

- Who defines culture and identity?
- How can we create art and films that allow for different perspectives?

We encourage you to ask your students to think creatively and critically about history itself, and to consider what happens when you think about the multiplicity and plurality of history: What are the *histories* of America?

III. How to Use the Curriculum

The *Regeneration* Curriculum is modular and can be used in a wide variety of subject classrooms. Classes of History, Social Studies, English, Film Studies, and more can adopt elements of the curriculum to encourage critical thinking, dialogue, self-directed learning, and collaborative projects.

The exhibition and this guide delve into a specific question: “What is Black cinema?” This question is inspired by a college course that filmmaker Charles Burnett took at UCLA in the 1960s. His professor posed the question that he, and now we, realize is open to discussion and debate, revealing deeply personal opinions and generating new, self-created definitions of the meaning of Black cinema. We invite teachers and students to develop their own answers to this question by participating in the dialogues and activities found in the curriculum.



Film poster for *Stormy Weather* ©1943 Twentieth Century Fox

*Words set in ALL CAPS are defined in the Glossary of Key Terms and Concepts (section F of this guide).

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IV. Regeneration Curriculum Resources

A. Biographies with Activities

1. Black Historical Figures

ABOLITIONIST **Frederick Douglass (1818–1895)** founded and edited *The North Star*, one of the most influential antislavery publications of the pre–Civil War period. He was also the most photographed man of his era. At a time when African Americans were not considered full citizens, Douglass used photography and his newspaper to demonstrate their humanity. Born into slavery and gaining freedom as a young man, he dedicated his life to the cause of freedom and equality. A revered orator, social reformer, writer, and statesman, Douglass was a living example defying the belief that enslaved people in America lacked intellectual capacity.

W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) dedicated his life to the fight for equal rights for African Americans. The educator, activist, and writer cofounded the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE (NAACP) in 1909 and edited its house publication, *The Crisis* magazine, which addressed topics like racial prejudice, women’s rights, and voting rights. Its arts and letters section occasionally referenced motion pictures by BLACK filmmakers.

Du Bois challenged the notion that equal and fair treatment is contingent upon merit or excellence as defined by white people. As a social scientist, he documented the dynamic and varied lives of Black people through photographs. In 1900, he organized the immensely influential exhibition on the American Negro at the Paris Exposition that featured 500+ images, charts, and maps, as well as a display of 200 books written by African Americans. Du Bois’s well-known theory of “double-consciousness” explores the difficulties of navigating the dual identities of Black and American, and his ideas inform the ideology of many Black social justice movements today.

Educator and reformer **Booker T. Washington (1856–1915)** was one of the most influential Black leaders of his time. Born into slavery, he taught himself the basics of reading and writing after his mother gifted him a book at the age of nine. In the early 1880s, he established the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (now Tuskegee University) and built it into a thriving training ground for African Americans. Washington’s book *Up from Slavery*, which charts his life from enslavement to educator, is considered a foundational document on race relations of the era.

Washington advocated for African Americans to accept social segregation in the short term, encouraging Black people to focus instead on uplift through hard work and economic growth, a position famously opposed to the more radical approach of W. E. B. Du Bois. While both men laid a pathway to the civil rights movement, they had very different ideas about how freedom could be achieved.

Sojourner Truth (ca. 1797–1883), born Isabella Baumfree, escaped enslavement in 1826. Orator, abolitionist, and staunch advocate of women’s rights, she traveled the country giving speeches. Truth attracted large crowds and, like Frederick Douglass, understood the power of the image. Although illiterate, she published an autobiography with the assistance of abolitionists and sold the book—along with her photograph—to support the antislavery movement. The photo is captioned: “I sell the shadow to support the substance.”

In the mid-1850s, Truth introduced the topic of women’s rights into her lecture tour, delivering the “Ain’t I a Woman?” speech in Akron, Ohio, that became famous for its challenge to belief systems supporting racial and gender inequalities. While she and Douglass shared much common ground, they ultimately clashed over the timing of women’s suffrage. Douglass argued that Black men should gain freedoms before Black women, while Truth endorsed their simultaneous liberation.

James Baldwin (1924–1987) was a writer and cultural critic who spent much of his adult life outside of America, but his work explored social issues impacting the United States and challenged prevailing STEREOTYPES related to race, class, gender, and sexuality. In addition to essays, novels, and plays, Baldwin produced film

criticism. *The Devil Finds Work* is a book-length essay chronicling his experience watching movies while at the same time offering a critique on racial politics in American cinema. He wrote a SCREENPLAY based on Malcolm X’s autobiography that was adapted into a 1972 DOCUMENTARY FILM by Arnold Perl and a 1992 biopic by Spike Lee. It also served as inspiration for Raoul Peck’s documentary on Baldwin, *I Am Not Your Negro* (2016).

2. Black Filmmakers

Hattie McDaniel (1893–1952) performed in VAUDEVILLE with her siblings and recorded blues songs before arriving in Los Angeles in 1931. Like many Black actors in Hollywood, she was TYPECAST in servant roles, but she often infused her characters with sharp wit and personality. McDaniel made history as the first Black person to win a competitive Oscar as Best Supporting Actress for her role as Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* (1939). At the awards ceremony held in the whites-only Cocoanut Grove, she and her guest were seated separately from the rest of the cast. To criticism that she perpetuated stereotypes, McDaniel famously retorted: “I’d rather play a maid than be one.”

Oscar Micheaux (1884–1951) wrote, directed, produced, and distributed more than forty features from 1919 to 1948 and is probably the best-known maker of RACE FILMS. Often drawing from his own life story as well as news headlines—about interracial relationships, passing, lynching and other social injustices—Micheaux used his motion pictures as morality tales to instruct the African American community. His stories could be empowering and controversial. They featured a broad range of characters including some stereotypes circulating within the Black community. His approach was daring, complicated, and influential.

Herb Jeffries (born Umberto Alexander Valentino, 1913–2014), also known as the “Sepia Singing Cowboy,” was well recognized for his silky baritone voice. He performed in clubs in the United States and Europe from the 1930s to the 1950s. Although of mixed racial heritage, he is often called the first Black singing cowboy. He made his acting debut in *Harlem on the Prairie* (1937) and performed in westerns such as *The Bronze Buckaroo* and *Harlem Rides the Range* (both 1939).

Louise Beavers (1902–1962) stars in *Reform School* (1939) as Mother Barton, a probation officer who institutes drastic, progressive changes in a juvenile prison that have a positive impact on the young men in her care. Her leading role in a social drama that criticizes the prison-industrial complex was a departure from the minor servant characters Hollywood typically offered Beavers.

The career of composer, pianist, and big-band leader **Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington (1899–1974)** spanned from his teens in 1914 to his death sixty years later. His worldwide legacy is unparalleled. He composed hundreds of scores and also made significant contributions to films. The “elegant Ellington” charmed audiences around the globe with his unique melodies, subtle sonic moods, and swinging rhythms.

Trinidad-born pianist, singer, and actor **Hazel Scott (1920–1981)** impressed audiences with her jazzy renditions of classical pieces and became the darling of Café Society, an integrated nightclub in New York’s Greenwich Village. In Hollywood in the 1940s, she rejected singing-maid roles and insisted on playing herself. In 1950, Scott became the first Black woman to host a TV program, although allegations of communist ties by the House Un-American Activities Committee shut down the show within a year.

Cab Calloway (1907–1994) was a singer, actor, and big-band leader known for his dynamic style. His swinging music, trademark white tuxedo, oversized baton, and exuberant moves created an unforgettable image. He performed regularly at the Cotton Club in Harlem and played himself in movies such as *Stormy Weather* (1943) and *Hi De Ho* (1947). In his late-career appearance in *The Blues Brothers* (1980), he sings his signature hit “*Minnie the Moocher*.”

The mesmerizing performances of dance team **Fayard Nicholas (1914–2006)** and **Harold Nicholas (1921–2000)** remain unmatched. Growing up in Philadelphia in a show-business family, the duo began performing as children, with Fayard teaching himself and his siblings how to sing and dance. The Nicholas Brothers’ popularity in Philadelphia landed them a gig at the Cotton Club in Harlem in 1932. While there, they were spotted by movie producer Samuel Goldwyn, who

invited the duo to appear in *Kid Millions* (1934), their first Hollywood film. After appearing in various Broadway shows, the Nicholas Brothers moved to Los Angeles, working regularly in films and television, on Broadway and touring around the world. Today, family members of the Nicholas Brothers operate a dance studio for all ages in the Leimert Park neighborhood of Los Angeles.

Josephine Baker (1906–1975) achieved immediate stardom when she moved to Paris, where she enjoyed opportunities and successes in film, theater, and business that would not have been possible in the United States. From the year of her first film to well into the 1940s, she adorned the covers of major French cinema magazines, which illustrated and helped cement her fame and influence.

Baker moved to Paris at age nineteen to perform in *La Revue nègre* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and quickly became the main attraction. She played lead roles in four French features between 1927 and 1945; she worked for the French Resistance against the Nazis in World War II; and she dedicated her life to human

Portrait of Paul Robeson, 1933. Courtesy of Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences



rights causes. She was the first Black woman to receive a state funeral in France, and was inducted into the Pantheon, the nation's mausoleum of heroes, in 2021.

Paul Robeson (1898–1976), a true twentieth-century Renaissance man, was a celebrated singer, actor, athlete, and activist. Robeson's powerful dual-performance screen debut in Oscar Micheaux's silent drama *Body and Soul* (1925) is an example of the skill and talent he delivered. He rose to success notwithstanding the limitations of JIM CROW LAWS and effectively counteracted problematic on-screen narratives authored by white filmmakers by highlighting the lived reality of Black people in America. With the power of his baritone voice, Robeson brought Negro spirituals and Black folk traditions to greater public attention. Promoting world peace and human rights, he sang in more than twenty languages, including Russian, Chinese, and various African languages.

Sidney Poitier (1927–2022) was the first Black performer to win the Academy Award for Best Actor, for his role in *Lilies of the Field* (1963) as a charismatic handyman who befriends a group of Eastern European nuns. Acutely aware of his unique position, Poitier said in his acceptance speech: "Because it is a long journey to this moment, I am naturally indebted to countless numbers of people." In the late 1960s, he was one of the highest paid actors in Hollywood.

In his screen acting debut, *No Way Out* (1950), Poitier plays a doctor who must deal with a patient's blatant racism. While he played dignified roles ranging from doctors, a detective, and a teacher, his success was complicated. The Black press criticized him as embodying the "ebony saint," since his characters would often either save whites or help them feel more comfortable. In 1972, Poitier began directing movies.

Activist, actor, and screenwriter **Ruby Dee (1922–2014)** is considered one of the most significant actors of our time. With a career spanning more than seventy years, Dee transcended the limitations placed on Black women and landed in dynamic and dignified theater and movie roles, often quietly yet strongly appearing alongside high-caliber performers like Sidney Poitier, Denzel Washington, and James Earl Jones. An ardent and vocal supporter



Ruby Dee at the March on Washington, 1963. Courtesy of Getty Images

of the civil rights movement along with her husband Ossie Davis, she stood by Martin Luther King Jr. as he delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech.

Ossie Davis (1917–2005) was an actor, director, writer, activist, and devoted husband of Ruby Dee. Davis's debut role in film was starring alongside Sidney Poitier in *No Way Out* (1950). With a career spanning fifty-plus years, Davis and Ruby Dee spoke in support of progressive and humanitarian causes throughout their lives. Both were cast in Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989).

The son of Jamaican-born parents, singer **Harry Belafonte (b. 1927)** made his film debut in *Bright Road* (1953). Dissatisfied with the roles on offer, Belafonte founded HarBel Productions in 1957. The first African American-owned production company developed by someone working in Hollywood, HarBel advertised itself as being openly dedicated to ensuring more positive, nuanced representations of the Black community and creating stories that defied color barriers. *Odds Against Tomorrow* and

The World, the Flesh, and the Devil (both 1959) were co-produced by HarBel, while *The Angel Levine* (1970) was produced by Belafonte Enterprises.

A close friend of Martin Luther King Jr., Belafonte was very active in the civil rights movement. He participated in many political marches, including one from Selma to Montgomery in support of voting rights for Black people in 1965. After King's assassination, Belafonte turned more of his attention to international humanitarian causes, in particular supporting communities in Africa in the fight against poverty, HIV/AIDS, and apartheid.

Bahamian-born vaudevillian **Bert Williams (1874–1922)** achieved mainstream fame thanks to his headlining roles in the popular Ziegfeld Follies. Although performing in *BLACKFACE*, Williams developed a signature act that elevated the otherwise troubling performance practice. His superb comedic timing is evidenced in his first feature film, the all-Black-cast *Lime Kiln Club Field Day* (1913), which was unfinished until it was reassembled by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 2014.

Williams and his onstage partner **George W. Walker (1873–1911)** began their performance duo in 1896 on the vaudeville stage. Blackface performance—the practice of applying darkened facial makeup to make eyes and lips look disproportionately large while performing stereotypical Black characters—was then commonly used by white actors. Because of its popularity, Black performers wore it as well, notably Williams, and even Walker for a brief period early in his career. Their remarkable musical sensibilities and expressive body language attracted huge crowds, and their success helped create employment opportunities for other Black entertainers.

Sam Lucas (1840–1915) was one of the most celebrated entertainers of his day and the first Black actor to play the Uncle Tom character adapted from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *UNCLE TOM’S CABIN* on the US stage and screen. In stage adaptations, per the MINSTREL tradition, he performed in blackface. Toward the end of his life, Lucas was cast as Uncle Tom in the 1914 film version of the story, while previous film versions had white actors performing the character in blackface.



Portrait of Josephine Baker, 1940.
Photo by adoc-photos/Corbis. Courtesy of Getty Images

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William Greaves (1926–2014) played an outsized but under-recognized role in Black INDEPENDENT FILM production. The trained actor starred in films and plays in the 1940s, then shifted to producing documentaries and television news programs. He noted: “It became clear to me that unless we Black people began to produce information for screen and television, there would always be a distortion of the ‘Black image.’” His verité-style *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One* (1968), which reflects on his own status as a Black director, was daring in its production and storytelling approach.

Photojournalist **Gordon Parks (1912–2006)** was the first African American to direct a feature film produced by a Hollywood studio: *The Learning Tree* (1969) at Warner Bros. Parks also composed and produced the music of this coming-of-age story based on his semi-autobiographical novel of the same title, which follows a Black teenager growing up in rural Kansas. In 1971, Parks directed *Shaft*, a classic of the so-called Blaxploitation genre.

Madeline Anderson (b. 1923) is an independent producer and director and is known for being one of the first women to join a union of film editors. She has dedicated her career to making films that honor and celebrate the lives of Black people. Anderson started making films in the 1950s. Her passions grew from a young age, sparked by a desire to fight the injustices that Black people faced in America. She was aware of the harmful media stereotyping of Black people and wanted to create work that countered those images. She regularly speaks about simultaneously being a filmmaker, a wife, and a mother. In the same way, her films engage audiences in the dynamic aspects of lived events and experiences.

As one of the first women in the New York editors’ union, she was mentored by documentarians like D. A. Pennebaker and Shirley Clarke. She wrote, produced, directed, and edited the documentary *I Am Somebody* (1970), about Black women medical workers on strike for equal pay and better working conditions in Charleston, South Carolina.

Lena Horne (1917–2010) started out as a Cotton Club dancer in New York when she was still a teenager. Lured by a seven-year contract with Metro-Goldwyn-

Mayer, she moved to Hollywood and starred in the all-Black-cast musicals *Cabin in the Sky* and *Stormy Weather* (both 1943). In the latter film, she wore the sequined gown that has been restored for display in the *Regeneration* exhibition. Horne refused to play stereotypes and was often passed over for more substantial roles or relegated to stand-alone singing parts. She later leveraged her public persona to become an effective and outspoken civil rights activist.

William D. “Bill” Foster (1884–1940) was the first African American film producer and an influential figure in the Black film industry during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He established the first African American film production company, called the Foster Photoplay Company. Foster saw promise and prosperity in making films about Black people that pushed against harmful racial stereotypes and portrayed African American communities as they wanted to be seen, not through a white lens. His film *The Railroad Porter*, released in 1912, is known for being the world’s first film with a Black director and entirely Black cast.

Activity: Dive in and research

Explore *Regeneration* through the exhibition, the *Regeneration* microsite at www.regenerationblackcinema.org, the catalogue, and the curriculum, then choose one notable figure or filmmaker to research. Some of the most prominent people in *Regeneration* are Hattie McDaniel, Oscar Micheaux, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Sidney Poitier. And there are many more! Use our short biographies to help make your selection and then start researching.

Research questions

- What can you discover about your person’s life in the *Regeneration* exhibition and website?
- Are there works on view related to your person? How do these items (objects, clips) help us to understand their achievements and contributions?
- How did their childhood impact their path to adulthood? Was there a significant moment in their early life that inspired them to pursue their passions?
- Did a particular movie influence them?

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Portrait of Hattie McDaniel, 1941.
Courtesy of Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

- What obstacles did they overcome?
- How did they use films, community, or forms of activism as a means to overcome these obstacles?
- Did their work influence others?

In addition to articles and essays, you can research home movies, oral histories, and photography collections. Use your local library to dive deeper. We also encourage you to reach out to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Margaret Herrick Library and ask a film librarian for resources and info by following this link: ref@oscars.org.

As you research, consider how different elements provide different insights and layers of meaning.

- How do objects teach us more about a person?
- How do films further our insights into a significant historical figure?

Activity: Create and write

Develop a biography of your notable figure. Create a short video, poem, or essay exploring your person and what impact they had on film, culture, and American history. Share it with the museum education team at museumeducation@oscars.org.

B. Exploration of Contemporary Artworks with Activities

1. Glenn Ligon (b. 1960)

Double America 2, 2014
Neon and paint
Edition of 3, AP 1/2, produced 2022

Reflect

When looking at a photograph of this artwork in your classroom, we invite you to consider these questions:

- Take a moment and “read” this artwork to yourself. How would you describe it?
- What does this artwork communicate to you?
- What message is the artist trying to convey and how does it relate to issues raised in the *Regeneration* exhibition?

Information

Glenn Ligon’s *Double America 2* is formed from an outline of black paint and neon lights. Two neon signs spelling out the word AMERICA are mounted one on top of the other. The top word reads legibly from left to right; glowing white light emanates from the letters. The bottom word is dark and in shadow; its letters are upside down and backwards. The two words flash on and off in a random rhythm. The neon is powered by several cables that hang from the letters and connect to power boxes on the floor, creating another set of lines.

Double America 2 evokes the notion of two Americas—one for white people and one for BLACK people, one for those on top and one for those at the bottom. It also recalls the Black sociologist and activist W. E. B. Du Bois’s notion of double-consciousness, which he described in 1903 as central to the Black experience:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged

strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

Considered within the context of *Regeneration*, Du Bois’s idea offers insight into some of the ways in which Black people responded to a harsh reality: they created spaces free of the burdens of the white gaze and produced, directed, and exhibited their own films.

In the *Regeneration* exhibition, this painted neon artwork is situated alongside the two versions of the short film *Something Good—Negro Kiss* (1898) as a reminder of not only a divided US history, but a divided cinematic one as well.

Explore: Group discussion

In groups of three or four students, re-read the quote by W. E. B. Du Bois: “It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”

- How do you think Ligon’s *Double America 2* and Du Bois’s idea of double-consciousness are related?
- What meaning can be drawn from considering these together?
- Ligon is considered a CONCEPTUAL ARTIST. What concepts does he communicate with this artwork? Share the group discussions in the classroom, noting similarities and differences across the groups in their responses to the questions.

Activity: Create a word map

In your group, collectively choose a word that has multiple meanings—like America. It is a place, but it also conjures an idea. Write the chosen word on a big piece of paper and have everyone write out their personal associations with the word. Take time to make connections and note differences. Add graphic elements to create new meanings—like drawing lines from one idea to another, or using color to demarcate similarities and differences. Reflect on the group’s definition: Do new meanings emerge from the word map?



Glenn Ligon, *Double America 2*, 2014. ©Glenn Ligon; Courtesy of the artist, Hauser & Wirth, New York, Regen Projects, Los Angeles, Thomas Dane Gallery, London, and Chantal Crousel, Paris

2. Kara Walker (b. 1969)

The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven, 1995
Linocut paper on wall

Warning: This piece contains explicit imagery that may be disturbing for some audiences

Reflect

- Describe what you see in this image?
- In what ways does this artwork relate to filmmaking?

Information

This large-scale installation by Kara Walker is made with linocut black paper and adhesive on a curved white wall created in the style of a popular form of portraiture from the Victorian era called silhouetting. The work is an imagined visual history that probes the violent characterizations in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* (1852). "Reading" from left to right, the first depiction is of a woman with her child, described by Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw as "involved in a moment of mutual nursing." Next are images of enslaved children holding various objects circling a young woman wielding an ax above her head; a silhouette of an aging man engaged in sexual activity with a young girl; and finally, a very old man holding his hands in prayer while a fetus dangles from a cord hanging from his backside. Walker's artwork rejects the mainstream narratives of a glorified ANTEBELLUM SOUTH, including depictions by white filmmakers well into the twentieth century, and presents a frank and graphic visual history from an African American woman's perspective.

Activity: Create your own Victorian silhouette portrait

In pairs, take a photograph of your classmate in profile against a blank background. Print out the photo and tape it to a black piece of paper. Using very sharp scissors or an X-Acto knife (under the supervision of an adult), cut out the background. You will be left with the cutout of the person's profile and an exact copy on black paper. Tape the black paper to a white background or put it in a white frame.

Explore: Group discussion

How might the Victorian silhouette portraits of you and your classmate tell a story of a lived experience? In pairs, write down a story, fictional or non, steeped in emotion. What other silhouettes might you add to your portraits that convey this story? Take photographs of your installation and share the image and your writing with our education team at museumeducation@oscars.org.

Further reading

Jordan Giles. "The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven," in *Afterlives of Slavery: An encyclopedia documenting contemporary representations of transatlantic slavery*, at <https://afterlivesofslavery.wordpress.com/visual-art/the-end-of-uncle-tom-and-the-grand-allegorical-tableau-of-eva-in-heaven/>.

Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw. "The 'Rememory' of Slavery: Kara Walker's *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven*." In *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, edited by Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg. Dartmouth College Press, 2006, pp. 158–88.



Kara Walker, *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven*, 1995

3. Gary Simmons (b. 1964)

Balcony Seating Only, 2017
Oil paint on aluminum, mounted on steel

Reflect

- What do you notice when looking at this artwork? What are the first thoughts that come to mind as you view it?
- Why do you think the artist smudged the letters? How would the meaning of this piece change if the letters were not smudged?

Information

Gary Simmons's large-scale sculpture, created from oil paint on aluminum mounted on steel, is inspired by a historical photograph of the exterior of a segregated theater in Anniston, Alabama, with signage that indicates a separate entrance for people of color. In *Balcony Seating Only*, the racially charged word COLORED is rendered with the artist's "erasure drawing" technique whereby the text is smudged, giving it a ghostly quality. The word is set on an incline, suggesting stairs leading to a different space: a visual reminder of the segregated spaces African American moviegoers were forced to inhabit as both viewers and filmmakers. Simmons here conjures the past with his technique of partially erasing but at the same time draws sharp attention to the injustices suffered by African Americans throughout US history, and particularly the history of cinema in America.

Explore: Group discussion

- What can we learn from the past by referencing it in the present? In what ways have we progressed since the time period of segregation? In what ways have we not?
- How does Simmons's work convey the physical experience of being separated and segregated because of one's race? How do his choices magnify that experience?
- How would the meaning of this installation change if the word COLORED were small? Not angled? Not blurred?

Activity: Text as art

Choose a word from the word map and explore how different presentations of that word convey different meanings and interpretations. Write the word small, big, backwards, smudged, in color, in line or not. Which version is most successful in expressing your intentions as an artist? What do your classmates think? Select the most effective rendition and write an artist statement explaining your intention and the reasons for your artistic choices. Photograph and share the statement with museumeducation@oscars.org.



Gary Simmons, *Balcony Seating Only*, 2017

4. Theaster Gates (b. 1973)

Some Remember Sock Hops, Others Remember Riots, 2020
Wood, denim, and fire hose

Reflect

- Take some time to look closely at the materials used to make this artwork. What are some things you notice?
- Does this object/format remind you of anything?

Information

The strips of decommissioned fire hose covering the surface of this work reference the high-pressure water jets that police employed to attack people—including children—during nonviolent protests against segregation in the 1950s and 1960s. Using the aesthetics of abstract and minimalist painting, Gates also creates a dialogue between the history of art making and the record of racial injustice in this country. The title comments on the stark racial disparities of the civil rights era: while Black protesters were being assaulted, white people were dancing shoeless to avoid scuffing school gymnasium floors. Denim, a fabric associated with both the working class and the COUNTERCULTURE, here pays homage to the overalls worn by members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the main channel of student involvement in civil rights actions.

Explore: Group discussion

- How is this piece like an abstract painting? What sets it apart from a painting?
- How do materials make meaning? What do you think the materials in this piece mean to the artist? What do they mean to you?
- Without knowing Gates's intention, this work can be interpreted very differently. How does knowledge of his choice of materials add layers of meaning and complexity to the artwork?

Activity: Assemblage

While Theaster Gates's piece reads like a painting and can also be considered sculpture, another method of art making with found materials is called assemblage. An assemblage is a three-dimensional collage of layered materials. Create an assemblage using materials found inside your home. Consider what you want your artwork to convey about your life, family, or home. Assemble your materials on a board, canvas, or painted piece of cardboard. Take a photograph of your work and share it with museumeducation@oscars.org.



Theaster Gates, *Some Remember Sock Hops, Others Remember Riots*, 2020

C. Film Companions with Activities

1. *Reform School*

Reform School, 1939

82 minutes, sound, black and white

Director: Leo C. Popkin

Screenplay: Zella Young

Music: Lou Frohman

Photography: William Hyer

Editing: Bart Rauw

Cast: Louise Beavers, Reginald Fenderson, Monte Hawley, Eugene Jackson, Freddie Jackson, Eddie Lynn, DeForrest Covan, Bobby Simmons, Maceo B. Sheffield, Edward Thompson, the Harlem Tuff Kids

Producer: Harry M. Popkin

Production: Million Dollar Productions

Distribution: Million Dollar Productions

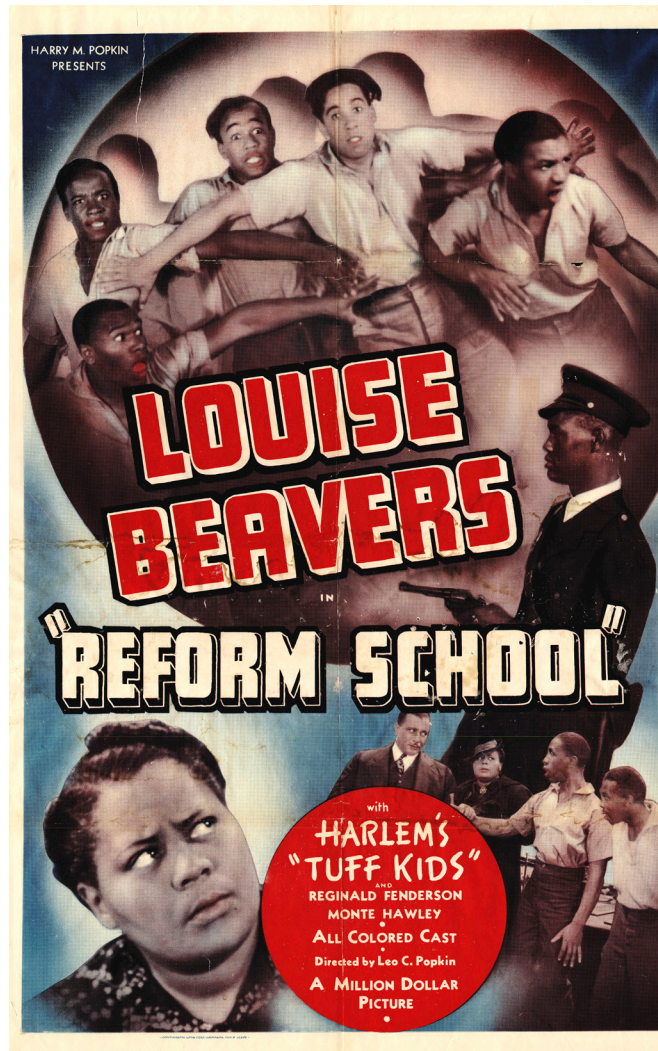
Keywords: reform, transformative justice, race films, production, justice, prison-industrial complex, script, cinematography, editing

Disclaimer: This film companion contains historical examples of content and language that may be harmful to view and may reflect outdated, biased, and offensive ideas.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE YEAR 1939

Many film historians single out the year 1939 as the greatest in Hollywood studio history. The list of films released that year includes famous titles such as *Gone with the Wind*, *Stagecoach*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Gunga Din*, *The Women*, *Dodge City*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*. From 1927 to 1948, five movie studios had total control of their individual ecosystems, and the films produced in 1939 were made at the peak of the Hollywood studio system. Loews Incorporated (which owned Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer), Paramount Pictures, Warner Bros. Pictures, Twentieth Century Fox, and RKO Radio Pictures all owned production studios, distribution networks, and theater chains, and contracted performers and filmmaking personnel. This enabled studios to determine every aspect of how films were made and how they reached audiences.

Also in 1939, RKO released *Way Down South*, the first



Poster for *Reform School*, 1939. Courtesy of Black Film Center & Archive, Indiana University, Bloomington

Black-scripted studio film, written by Clarence Muse and Langston Hughes. However, most movies from that period that were produced for BLACK audiences, featuring Black casts, and distributed to movie theaters in Black neighborhoods—movies called RACE FILMS—existed outside of the Hollywood studio system. Due to segregation and racial inequities, Black filmmakers were not afforded the same opportunities that white filmmakers had in Hollywood. In addition, studios that did hire Black actors only offered them supporting, usually stereotypical roles, with little or no backstory. Race films lacked the resources of the studio system. They had smaller production budgets and fewer theaters where they could be shown. Yet as film historian Ellen C. Scott observes: “Often these films had an epic scope and a real, if uneven, complexity in their depiction of Black life: they portrayed

aspirational narratives of Black success while also revealing, if sometimes inadvertently, the realities of racial injustice and poverty” (*Regeneration*, p. 119).

Reflect

Consider various types of media that are made with a particular audience in mind.

- How does the conversation around the message and meaning of movies, media, and content in general change when you consider by whom and for whom?

PRODUCTION STUDIOS

In 1939, the production company Million Dollar Productions released *Reform School*, a film that serves as the embodiment of Ellen C. Scott’s description of race films from that era. Founded in 1937, Million Dollar Productions was a white-owned production company that specialized in “all-colored cast, modern, Class A talking pictures with themes taken from modern Negro life.” The company was owned by the brothers Harry M. Popkin, a theater owner, and Leo C. Popkin, a movie producer. They partnered with Ralph Cooper, a multitalented Black entertainer who founded amateur night at Harlem’s famous Apollo Theater and served as the original emcee.

Around this time, several other studios focused their production on race films, including:

- The Foster Photoplay Company, founded by William D. Foster in Chicago in 1910
- Lincoln Motion Picture Company, founded by actor Noble Johnson in 1915, with his brother George P. Johnson joining a year later to manage booking and publicity
- Michaux Film and Book Company, founded by Oscar Michaux in 1918 in Chicago

A few white-owned film and distribution companies, like the Norman Film Manufacturing Company and Toddy Pictures, made and released films outside of the Hollywood studio system targeted to Black audiences. These entrepreneurs saw Black communities as an untapped audience. For many of these white-owned

race film companies, the collaboration with Black filmmakers suggested meaningful allyship, though some Black film producers like Oscar Micheaux and George P. Johnson did not always see it so. What is clear, however, is that race films allowed Black people to see and experience themselves on screen.

Explore: Group discussion

In 1913, Black film producer William D. Foster stated: “Nothing has done so much to awaken the race consciousness of the colored man in the United States as the motion picture.”

- What are some of the impacts of seeing oneself and one’s experience reflected in a movie?
- What power lies in representation?
- In what ways does Foster’s statement apply today?

SYNOPSIS

Reform School features Louise Beavers as Mother Barton, a crusading probation officer who comes to the defense of Freddie, played by Reginald Fenderson, and his friends, played by the Harlem Tuff Kids. When Mother Barton investigates the situation, she runs into a corrupt bureaucracy that is indifferent and downright hostile to her. Despite this, she institutes drastic changes in a juvenile prison offering a sharp critique of the prison-industrial complex and its effects on Black youth.

SCRIPT

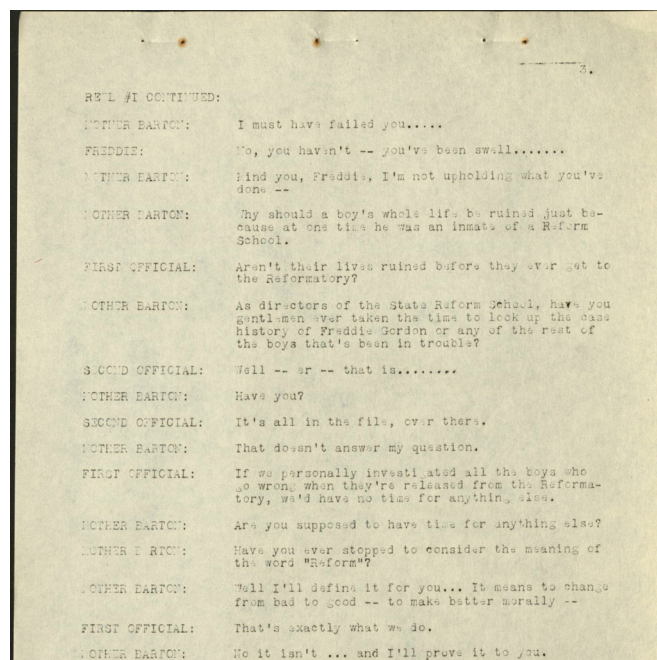
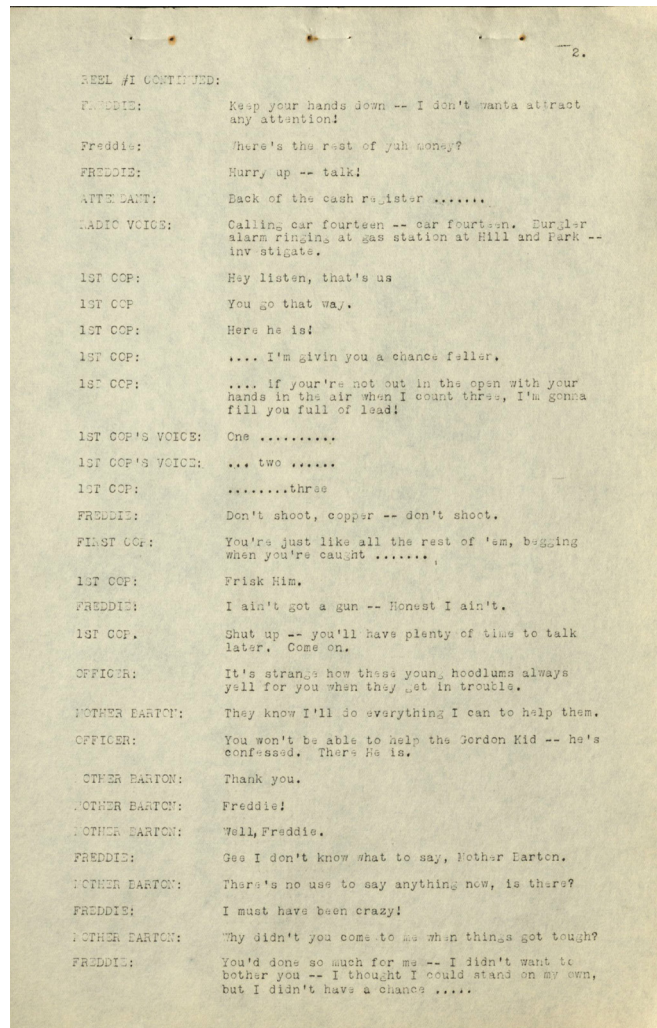
Pages 3–4 of the *Reform School* script. Courtesy of Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

The dialogue in the SCRIPT, based on a story by Hazel Jamieson and Joseph O’Donnell, and SCREENPLAY by Zella Young, shows Mother Barton in conversation with the reform school officials, proposing new ways to enact change in the system. Here are some of her key lines from the script:

“Unfortunately, there’s a disgrace attached to anyone coming from a reform school and when the news circulates that boys were inmates, they can’t get jobs. They finally become desperate and disillusioned. There’s

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Pages 3–4 of the *Reform School* script. Courtesy of Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

only one last resort for them—they turn to crime, just to get enough food to keep life in their bodies.”

“Discipline must be tempered with justice and understanding.”

“I would change the system in handling the youngsters. There’s no reason for treating them like caged animals. They should be permitted to talk, to sing, to dance, to play games, to have regular hours of recreation. In other words, to live life as normal as possible. Educate the public and businessmen of this country to know that when reform schoolboys are released, they’re not criminals. They’re ready to take their place in society.”

Explore: Group discussion

- How do scripts directly and indirectly communicate a message or theme?
- Consider the dialogue in this movie. How were the filmmakers, both in front of and behind the camera, making a statement about what was happening in the real world?

CASTING, CHARACTER, AND PRODUCTION DESIGN

Louise Beavers was cast as the lead, Mother Barton, and is the only woman in the movie. Born in Cincinnati in 1902, Beavers was a prolific actress in SILENT FILMS. She made the transition to TALKIES and appeared in over 100 films and TV shows. She was usually cast as a servant, maid, or enslaved person. Thus, Mother Barton was a radical departure from these subservient characters, with Beavers’s strong performance providing emotional depth and a persuasive perspective on educational values. As Mother Barton carries on her battle for justice, one cannot ignore the filmmakers’ keen attention to CHARACTER DESIGN. She is impeccably dressed, confident, and carries herself with the dignity her position requires. To see a Black woman on the screen not dressed as a servant was making a big statement.

A remarkable aspect of the CASTING in *Reform School* is that the film features Black people from all walks of society and resists the STEREOTYPES prevalent in mainstream cinema of the day. We see a working-class parent, a middle-class probation officer, management-



Film stills from *Reform School*, 1939, showing the changing office decor before and after Mother Barton’s intervention. Courtesy of the Academy Film Archive, Academy

class reform school officials, police officers and guards, and young boys who are talented, caring, and willing to learn and grow. Together these depictions create a complex society, and each role is essential to the story of reform. The humanity afforded the characters on screen is reinforced by the casting of people of various skin tones and the treatment of the characters as equal, again pushing back against the TROPE of dark-skinned Black people as less civilized or intelligent than Black people with lighter skin.

In addition to casting, PRODUCTION DESIGN plays an important role in communicating the trajectory of a story. Here, the visual space of the film transforms as the story unfolds, as illustrated in two images from before and after Mother Barton moves into the office of the reform school:

Stills from *Reform School*, 1939, showing the changing office décor before and after Mother Barton’s intervention

Explore: Group discussion

- How does the complexion of the characters challenge stereotypes?
- Consider the set, and particularly the office after Mother Barton moves in. How does the change in furniture, décor, and lighting reflect the different leadership styles of Mother Barton and Mr. Stone?
- Louise Beavers is the only female actor in the film. How significant is it that her character, Mother Barton, has so much power and that she wields it with moral courage?
- Reflect on images you have come across in recent social media, movies, or episodic shows. Have you seen images that you would classify as stereotypes? If so, in what ways are they stereotypical? Can you trace any of these new stereotypes to old Hollywood stereotypes and tropes?

CINEMATOGRAPHY AND EDITING

Despite budget constraints, the filmmakers tapped new CINEMATOGRAPHY and EDITING techniques to shape the *Reform School* storyline. There are noticeable differences between the films of the early and late 1930s. Technological advances in cameras, sound, film stock, color technology, and editing propelled story construction to new heights. These advances are evident in Million Dollar Productions’ *Reform School*.

Ellen C. Scott writes: “What the Popkins’ scrappy outfit lacked in budget for props and sets it made up for with complex cinematography and editing. Diverging from the bare-bones, B-cinema visual style of race films, the cinematographer William Hyer, a veteran of Hollywood westerns, artfully filmed *Reform School* using complex shot structure and stylized tracking shots. The editing was efficient and creative as in the film’s cross-cut opening chase scene, which builds drama and subverts Hollywood’s ideology by leading the audience to root for the ‘criminal’ to escape” (*Regeneration*, p. 120). breakdown to analyze the techniques the filmmakers used to build tension in the scene.

Activity: Individual writing assignment

Rewatch the chase sequence and create a shot breakdown to analyze the techniques the filmmakers used to build tension in the scene. Incorporate the following elements:

- **MISE EN SCENE**
- **Number of cuts**
- **Duration and pacing of shots (Where does it speed up? Where does it linger?)**
- **Type of shot (long shot, medium-shot, CLOSE-UP)**
- **Sound**
- **Dialogue**

Explore: Group discussion

- After completing the analysis, write about how the filmmakers achieved their goals on a tight budget.
- How did the filmmakers communicate visually?
- Think about the editing and cinematic style of *Reform School*. How would you recreate this chase sequence with the more advanced technology available today?

THEME: TRANSFORMATIONAL JUSTICE

The running theme of *Reform School* is the impact of the penal system on Black youth and the roots of criminal justice reform in the late 1930s. This theme resonates today as we grapple with shockingly high rates of Black youth incarceration and the inequities of the juvenile justice system. According to the Haywood Burns Institute, a Black-led national nonprofit working to transform the administration of justice: “Research affirms the significant overrepresentation of youth of color in arrests nationwide, and these patterns re-occur in Los Angeles County. In 2019, Black youth in Los Angeles County were nearly 8 times as likely as white youth to be arrested and Latino youth twice as likely. Together, Black and Latino youth represent 70% of all youth in Los Angeles County (8% and 62% respectively) but almost 90% (27% and 60%, respectively) of youth arrests.”

To learn more, see the report here: <https://burnsinstitute.org/wp-content/>

[uploads/2020/12/YJC_report_11.pdf](https://burnsinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/YJC_report_11.pdf).

Explore: Research and group discussion

The timeline of the exhibition *Regeneration* spans from 1898 to 1971.

- What are some significant markers of US history during that time period?

Reform School was released in 1939.

- Compare the Depression-era film to our present context. How have conditions changed? Remained the same? Regressed?

Since the release of *Reform School*, the United States has gone through World War II, the civil rights era, progressive social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the Vietnam War, the War on Drugs, the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act and the resulting mass incarceration, 9/11 and the War on Terror, Black Lives Matter protests against police assaults on unarmed Black citizens, the elections of Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden. Each of these moments has had consequences, positive and negative, for the incarceration and RECIDIVISM rates of Black citizens. In *Reform School*, Mother Barton expresses her hope for the future as she leaves the office of the cynical reform school officials: “It’s a dream, yes, a dream that’s going to come true.” Here, the filmmakers plant the seeds of future change.

Reform School ends on an optimistic note. Yet, at the time of this writing in 2022, we know how many truths and frustrations still persist around racial inequity. While we as a country have not been able to eradicate systemic inequality, people and organizations carry on the struggle and effectively make incremental change.

Let’s revisit some of the dialogue from *Reform School*:

Mother Barton: “Have you ever stopped to consider the meaning of the word ‘reform’? Well I’ll define it for you. It means to change from bad to good, to make better, morally. ... You gentlemen will agree that reform school boys are not trusted by the public when they are released?”
Reform school official: “Whose fault is that?”

Mother Barton: “Basically, the reform school system.”
Reform school official: “I wouldn’t say that, Mother Barton.”
Mother Barton: “It’s the truth, and you know it!
Unfortunately, there’s a disgrace attached to anyone coming from a reform school and when the news circulates that boys were inmates, they can’t get jobs. They finally become desperate and disillusioned. There’s only one last resort for them—they turn to crime, just to get enough food to keep life in their bodies.”

Explore: Group discussion

- What is Mother Barton’s position on reform schools? How does the dialogue convey her views?
- What happens if you swap the words “reform school” with “prison”? Does that change the dynamic of her statements?
- Reflect on Mother Barton’s statements about reform and how American society treats people who need another chance after making mistakes. Do you think this is still a problem in society? Do you think social media has made this issue better or worse?
- “Discipline should be tempered with justice and understanding.” How does that philosophical viewpoint fit with modern criminal justice reform? What is your reaction to Mother Barton’s statement “Guns and clubs are a thing of the past”? Do you think such a statement is true today?

Activity: What is YOUR vision of reform?

1. Choose one quote or section of a quote to frame your own theme of reform.
2. Choose a platform for delivering your message. Some ideas: a PSA, podcast, or social media campaign.
3. Write an outline, shot list, or script detailing and refining the message. Consider how your idea of reform can impact change.
4. Present the vision using tools such as Canva, iMovie, or Soundtrap and share it with museumeducation@oscars.org.

Further reading

5. Graeme Ross. “Why 1939 Was the Greatest Year in Film History.” *The Independent*, April 4, 2019.

“Perhaps it was just serendipity that so many classics were released in 1939 or just the inevitable culmination of great art. Talkies had been established for a decade, with film techniques improving all the time, and European emigres were putting their own very personal stamp on directing and screenwriting. And then there were the leading actors, of course, mostly discovered, nurtured, and launched into superstardom by the studios and eagerly embraced by audiences who, in 1939 alone in the US, purchased cinema tickets at a rate of 80 million a year. Films were devised with the stars in mind and prestigious novels such as *Wuthering Heights* and blockbusters like *Gone with the Wind* would be purchased and filmed brilliantly with no expense spared. So, all these reasons and more contributed to a golden year for movies, and perhaps also there was a feeling even among the insular and self-absorbed of Hollywood that war was inevitable, and things could never be quite the same again afterwards.”

6. “*History of Million Dollar Productions*,” scvhistory.com, at <https://scvhistory.com/scvhistory/cp3908.htm>.
7. Michelle Alexander. *The New Jim Crow*. Tenth-anniversary edition, 2020.
“And yet, in the midst of all of this, we also have vibrant racial justice movements led by new generations of activists who are working courageously at the intersections of our systems of control as well as growing movements against criminal injustice led by those who are directly impacted by mass incarceration. Many of these movements aim to redefine the meaning of justice in America.”

“Today, there is bipartisan support for some prison downsizing, and hundreds of millions of philanthropic dollars have begun to flow toward criminal justice reform. A vibrant movement led by formerly incarcerated and convicted people is on the rise—a movement that has challenged or repealed disenfranchisement laws in several states, mobilized in support of sentencing reform and successfully organized to ‘ban the box’

on employment applications that discriminate against those with criminal records ...”

8. The W. Haywood Burns Institute at <https://burnsinstitute.org/>.
9. The 74, a nonprofit, nonpartisan news site covering education in America, reported that, in part as a response to the murder of George Floyd in 2020, “the LA school board in February 2021 [approved a plan](#) to cut \$25 million—a third of the school police budget—and shift those funds into a \$36.5 million initiative called the Black Student Achievement Plan.” The goal of this plan is to support the mental and academic well-being of Black students by adding psychiatric social workers, counselors and “climate coaches,” and restorative justice advisors to schools with predominantly Black students. You can read more about this plan here: <https://achieve.lausd.net/bsa>
10. Kim Tran. “Transformative Justice, Explained.” *Teen Vogue*, November 15, 2018, at <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/transformative-justice-explained>.
11. “How Car Chase Scenes Have Evolved for Movies,” *insider.com*, at [https://www.insider.com/evolution-of-making-filming-car-chase-](https://www.insider.com/evolution-of-making-filming-car-chase-scenes-for-hollywood-movies-2021-3)

Film still from *Reform School*, 1939. Courtesy of Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences



*Words set in ALL CAPS are defined in the Glossary of Key Terms and Concepts (section F of this guide).

[scenes-for-hollywood-movies-2021-3](#).

2. *Stormy Weather*

Stormy Weather, 1943

78 minutes, sound, black and white

Director: Andrew L. Stone

Screenplay: Frederick J. Jackson, Ted Koehler

Writers: Jerry Horwin, Seymour B. Robinson (story), H. S. Kraft (adaptation)

Music: Cyril J. Mockridge (uncredited), Harold Arlen, Fats Waller, Shelton Brooks, Cab Calloway, Jimmy Hughes, Dorothy Fields, Bill Robinson, Alfred Newman

Photography: Leon Shamroy

Editing: James B. Clark

Cast: Lena Horne, Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, Dooley Wilson, Cab Calloway, Katherine Dunham, Fats Waller, Nicholas Brothers, among many others

Producer: William LeBaron

Production: Twentieth Century Fox

Distribution: Twentieth Century Fox

Keywords: minstrel show, vaudeville, Jim Crow laws, close-up shot, over-the-shoulder shot, cakewalk, *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, entertainment industry, Cotton Club, musicals, genre

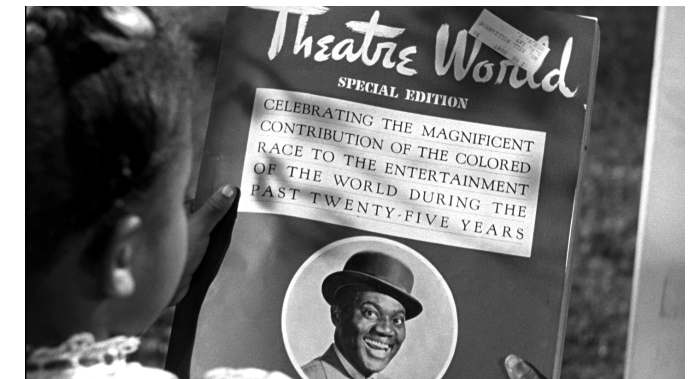
Disclaimer: This film companion contains historical examples of content and language that may be harmful to view and may reflect outdated, biased, and offensive ideas (Negro, pickaninny, sambo, coon, uncle tom, mammy, tragic mulatto, black buck, blackface).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1943, the United States was involved in World War II. Schools, corporations, churches, and all levels of government mobilized for the war effort. These conditions created a unique opportunity to address racism in the United States.

During the 1940s, the United States experienced a tentative surge of liberalism. As World War II was fought against the avowedly racist Axis nations (Germany, Japan, and Italy), many people in the United States felt the need to examine racism within our own country. Also, since much of the nation’s workforce had become

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Film still from *Stormy Weather* ©1943 Twentieth Century Fox. Courtesy of the Academy Film Archive, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

part of the armed forces, home front industries began hiring both women and racial minorities.

—Harry M. Benschhoff and Sean Griffin, *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies* (2021), p. 89

Hollywood, with the backing of the US government, pitched in with its own effort to boost morale among both white and BLACK audiences. In 1943, two Hollywood studio films featured all-Black casts: *Cabin in the Sky*, released by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) in April, and *Stormy Weather*, released by Twentieth Century Fox in July. *Stormy Weather* stars Lena Horne, Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, and Dooley Wilson in character roles, as well as Fats Waller, Cab Calloway and His Cotton Club Orchestra, Katherine Dunham and Her Troupe, and the Nicholas Brothers as themselves. Also featured in the film are Emmett Wallace as Chick Bailey and various other Black performers. The cast was a who’s who of Black talent for the era. Despite such an achievement on screen, the film still operated within the power structure of the Hollywood studio system, and almost all crew personnel were white men: director, writers, cinematographers, editor, set decorators, and art director. And as a feel-good musical, the film exhibits virtually no awareness of the realities of racism, segregation, and discrimination that Black people faced during this time.

Explore: Group discussion

- Why did the US government encourage Hollywood to help with boosting public morale? What types of messages do you think the

government wanted to send to the public?

- What would such a public relations campaign look like today?

SYNOPSIS

The story of *Stormy Weather* is loosely based on the experiences of Bill Robinson coming up as an entertainer. The film starts with Robinson’s character Bill Williamson reminiscing with neighborhood children about his World War I experience and how it led to a career in show business. As Williamson’s tale progresses, the audience is introduced to his love interest Selina Rogers (Horne) and his crafty pal Gabe Tucker (Wilson). Through Gabe, Williamson is introduced to Selina’s manager Chick Bailey (Wallace). The rest of the film follows the characters’ journey to show business success. The 78-minute film showcases twenty musical performances.

BIOGRAPHIES OF KEY PERFORMERS

Born in the Bedford–Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, Lena Horne (1917–2010) was at the beginning of her illustrious career during the making of *Stormy Weather*. In the early 1930s, she worked in Harlem’s world-famous Cotton Club. Throughout the decade, she sang, recorded, and toured with various big bands. Horne was brought to Los Angeles by Felix Young, who had run the Trocadero nightclub on the Sunset Strip, to perform at the Little Troc in 1942. That same year, she was signed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) and began to appear in films. During the World War II era, the NAACP encouraged the film industry to offer more contracts to Black entertainers, and Horne was the first Black musical star to be placed under contract at the studio. She starred in MGM’s *Cabin in the Sky*. Impressed with that film’s success, Twentieth Century Fox developed a vehicle, *Stormy Weather*, to showcase their famous Black entertainer, Bill Robinson. MGM lent Horne out to Twentieth Century Fox (a common practice among studios) for the co-starring role. Horne’s contract represented new possibilities for Black entertainers of her generation. She was a lifelong member of the NAACP, signed up when she was just two years old by her grandmother, and remained a passionate advocate for racial justice throughout her life.

Bill “Bojangles” Robinson (1878–1949), born in post-Civil War Richmond, Virginia, was a veteran entertainer by 1943. He served in the Spanish-American War, then

worked his way up the show business ladder starting in MINSTREL SHOWS and becoming a favorite in VAUDEVILLE, Broadway theater, movies, radio, and television. All the while, he faced the indignities to which Black traveling performers were subjected under JIM CROW LAWS, such as segregated audiences, hotels, and restaurants. After moving to Harlem in the 1920s, Robinson found success on Broadway, becoming the highest paid Black entertainer in the world at the time. Hollywood producers and directors took notice and hired him. His most successful films were made by Twentieth Century Fox starring alongside the popular child actress Shirley Temple. In his roles with Temple, Robinson played servants and butlers to comply with the MOTION PICTURE PRODUCTION CODE. The Code forbade certain images and storylines on screen; for instance, interracial romance (“miscegenation”) was taboo. But Fox believed that the Robinson-Temple dance duets avoided controversy by presenting an older Black male servant with a little white girl as innocent entertainment. Robinson worked steadily and resisted stereotypical roles as much as possible. His last film was *Stormy Weather*, and he died a few years later.

In 1942, Arthur “Dooley” Wilson (1886–1953) appeared as Sam in the classic film *Casablanca* performing the iconic theme song “As Time Goes By.” In 1943, the film won the Academy Award for Best Picture, Best Director (Michael Curtiz), and Best Screenplay (Julius Epstein, Philip Epstein, and Howard Koch). When *Stormy Weather* came out, Wilson was already a known performer-actor, drummer, and singer who had worked his way up in the Black theater scene. Born in 1886 in Tyler, Texas, he started earning money as a performer when he was eight years old. He worked in Black theater companies in Chicago and New York. He later joined James Europe’s ragtime band (Europe is portrayed by Ernest Whitman in *Stormy Weather*). Then Wilson formed his own band and toured overseas in Europe during the 1920s. In the 1930s, he was part of the Federal Theatre Project, a New Deal program established during the Great Depression to employ artists, writers, directors, and theater workers. The program established specific chapters, including one dedicated to Black artists called the Negro Theatre Unit. Wilson performed in the Broadway production of *Cabin in the Sky*, a breakthrough role that earned him a contract with Paramount Pictures. The film adaptation was produced by MGM, and Wilson was not invited to reprise his role.

Throughout his career, he was often cast as a servant.

Jazz musician and prolific composer Fats Waller (1904–1943) was at the peak of his fame when the film *Stormy Weather* was released. Born Thomas Wright Waller in New York City in 1904, he started playing piano at the age of six. He was a student of famed pianist James P. Johnson (credited as the pioneer of stride piano and influence on jazz greats Count Basie, Duke Ellington, and Art Tatum). Waller started recording for the company that eventually became RCA Victor in 1926 and toured the United States and Europe. He composed the hit Broadway musical *Early to Bed* in 1943 (the first Black person to do so) and copyrighted some 400 songs, including “Honeysuckle Rose,” “I’m Gonna Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter,” “Two Sleepy People,” “Your Feet’s Too Big,” “The Sheik of Araby,” and “Ain’t Misbehavin’.” *Stormy Weather* would be his last film appearance. Sadly, Waller passed away from pneumonia in December 1943 at the age of thirty-nine.

Cab Calloway (1907–1994) was a known entertainer and movie-screen presence in 1943. He was born Cabell Calloway III in Rochester, New York, in 1907. Calloway had been featured in several short films by Paramount Studios through the early 1930s. In 1930, his orchestra filled in for the touring Duke Ellington at Harlem’s Cotton Club. That led to a permanent gig at the club, performing twice a week on radio broadcasts on NBC. Calloway was the first Black performer with a nationally syndicated radio show. In 1931, he recorded “Minnie the Moocher,” his most famous song. In 1935, Lena Horne made her film debut in Paramount’s *Cab Calloway’s Jitterbug Party* as a dancer. Calloway wrote his autobiography *Of Minnie the Moocher & Me* in 1976 and performed the eponymous song in the film *The Blues Brothers*, released in 1980.

Katherine Dunham (1909–2006) was born in Chicago in 1909. She graduated from the University of Chicago in 1936, earning a bachelor’s degree in anthropology. She was offered a grant to continue her studies after graduation but chose to pursue a career in dance. Like Dooley Wilson, Dunham worked with the Federal Theatre Project as the dance director of the Chicago Negro Theatre Unit throughout the 1930s. In 1940, after many successful performances in various stage shows, she and her dance company were brought on to perform in the Broadway production of *Cabin*

in the Sky. The show did a national tour, after which the Dunham dance company settled in Los Angeles. They began to appear in Hollywood films such as the Warner Bros. short *Carnival of Rhythm* in 1941 and the Paramount musical *Star Spangled Rhythm* in 1942.

The Nicholas Brothers—Fayard (1914–2006), born in Mobile, Alabama, and Harold (1921–2000), born in Winston-Salem, North Carolina—grew up in Philadelphia in a show business family. The duo began performing as children, with Fayard teaching himself and his siblings how to sing and dance. In 1932, the Nicholas Brothers landed in Harlem at the Cotton Club, where they were spotted by movie producer Samuel Goldwyn, who invited them to appear in *Kid Millions* (1934), their first Hollywood film. After appearing in various Broadway shows, the Nicholas Brothers moved to Los Angeles, working regularly in films and television, on Broadway and worldwide tours. Today, family members of the Nicholas Brothers operate a dance studio for all ages in the Leimert Park neighborhood of Los Angeles.

Explore: Group discussion

- When you read through the abbreviated biographies, what are some things you can deduce about what life was like for Black performers at this time?
- Many of these performers had experienced some form of success before joining the production of *Stormy Weather*. What do you imagine the experience to be among such a variety of performers? How would the experience of Lena Horne compare to the experience of Bill Robinson, for example.

Activity: Write your future biography

Imagine and write a biography of your life. Describe who you are now, and then imagine your future achievements and accomplishments. The biography should be around 5–7 sentences.

THEME AND QUESTIONS

One of the essential questions of the exhibition *Regeneration* is “What is Black cinema?” While there is no definitive answer to this question, *Stormy Weather* suggests one possibility. A theme of the

film is the showcasing of Black talent before a larger audience indicated by the OVER-THE-SHOULDER, CLOSE-UP shot of the dedication (1 minute 26 seconds into the film): “Celebrating the magnificent contribution of the colored race to the entertainment of the world during the past twenty-five years.”

Explore: Group discussion

- Why was this the right historical moment for this film to be released?
- Reflect on the idea of Black joy, a term used to highlight acts, experiences, and expressions of joy for Black people. How can Black joy be an act of resistance against the control of predominantly white societies? Find moments in the film that demonstrate this for you.

REPRESENTATION

While *Stormy Weather* is celebratory in nature, it’s still seen through the lens of white people recognizing Black people mainly as entertainment. All the creators of the film were white, so images were controlled to satisfy the sensibilities of white audiences. For example, we see Black performers using exaggerated emotions and cartoonish facial expressions. Stereotypes from minstrel shows pop up in the movie, such as the dancers performing a CAKEWALK in *Little Black Sambo* headdresses (14 minutes 27 seconds into the film).

The cakewalk scene in *Stormy Weather*, 1943

The cakewalk was developed by enslaved people in the mid-1800s to mock the ceremonies of their white owners. The dance was introduced to a wider audience during the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial celebration in a plantation setting. Performers in minstrel shows added the cakewalk to their roster of acts, and it became popular on that circuit. This is an example of an appropriation of a cultural expression. The original purpose of the dance was to give Black people joy in the mocking of their white slave owners. Then white people took the dance and used it to stereotype Black people.

Reflect

- Reflecting on the use of cultural appropriation

both as a way to cope with the pain of bigotry and as a way oppressors further perpetuate harm, what are some examples in media where you see this occurring today?

- Where is the line between appreciating culture and appropriating culture?

The Black Sambo caricature seen on the back of the sunflower hats derives from the 1899 children’s book *The Story of Little Black Sambo* written by Helen Bannerman. Initially, the story was heralded for positively portraying Black characters. In 1932, the Black writer and social activist Langston Hughes criticized the book for its images, drawn in the “pickaninny” style. The characters’ names (Black Sambo, Black Jumbo, and Black Mumbo) have been used as racial slurs for dark-skinned people since the mid-nineteenth century.

Explore: Group discussion

Rewatch the cakewalk dance sequence and then:

- Think about the Sambo image presented in the joyful dance routine. After learning more about where this image came from, what reactions and feelings does it bring up for you?
- Notice the music being played during the performance, particularly the banjo solo line. Does that sound evoke any associations? How



Film still of Flourney Miller (left) and Johnny Lee in *Stormy Weather* ©1943 Twentieth Century Fox. Courtesy of the Academy Film Archive, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

is it paired with the images on screen?

- Describe your reactions to the specific images of the cakewalk and Black Sambo sunflower headdress.

Two Black performers apply blackface makeup for their act (43 minutes 51 seconds into the film).

This routine is played by comedians Flourney Miller and Johnny Lee. They portray “the Coon” character, a cinematic stereotype defined by historian Donald Bogle: “Ineffectual and lazy, the Coon stereotype was a foolish, jive-talking simpleton who would do anything to avoid work.” This scene appears in the movie with no set-up, and the characters are nameless. This is an example where the only context for their presence is for entertainment purposes only.

Activity: Individual writing reflection

- This routine was considered funny in 1943. How did you or did you not relate to the humor in it? What stands out to you about this particular performance?
- Consider contemporary movies or episodic shows. Can you think of any that feature characters using similar self-deprecating humor?
- Think of some movies or shows with characters whose function is strictly comic relief. Do these characters propel the story forward or not? What role do you think this type of character plays in media?
- As you reflect on contemporary fictional characters and unique traits currently appearing in movies or shows, do you see the potential for new stereotypes?
- How can we avoid harmful stereotypes from developing as we see characters evolve.

GENRE: MUSICALS

The musical is a film and theater genre that utilizes song and often dance to communicate plot points and move the narrative forward. The enjoyment of musicals often requires what is called in filmic terms a “suspension of disbelief” on the audience’s part, the willing abandonment

of all critical sense of reality allowing viewers to immerse themselves in a staged world.

The advent of sound recording technology in movies opened the way for musical performers to expand their visibility to wider audiences. While *Stormy Weather* is more of a musical revue, that is, a series of performances on stage sets rather than song and dance that emerge directly from the action on screen, we still see relationships between characters evolve through the performances. At a time when it was difficult for Black actors and performers to land leading roles, the musical performances in this film allowed an all-Black cast to take center stage. In one notable scene, Selina, played by Lena Horne, sings the film’s namesake song, “*Stormy Weather*,” bringing the audience closer to her feelings of heartbreak after making the choice to forgo domestic life with her love interest Bill, played by Bill Robinson. Let’s look closely at a few performances in *Stormy Weather*.

Song

Lena Horne’s rendition of “*Stormy Weather*” draws us into the emotional experience of her character. Every aspect of the performance—the song’s tempo, the set design, the costumes, and the richness of Horne’s voice—establishes a mood.

In this scene, we can see how movies can create a sense of escape for both the characters on screen and the audience in the theater.

Explore: Group Discussion

- Describe some of the ways the filmmakers use what some call “the magic of movies,” or rather specialized techniques only possible through PRODUCTION DESIGN and the mechanics of cameras and editing, to bring this performance to life.
- Why is this particular performance so significant to the movie’s plot? How does it build the story?

Dance

Among the twenty-plus performances in this film, there are two standout dance sequences near the end. One is Katherine Dunham’s choreography during

the musical interlude of Lena Horne singing “*Stormy Weather*,” and the other is the jaw-droppingly energetic tap routine by the Nicholas Brothers performed to Cab Calloway’s “Jumpin’ Jive.”

Activity: Visual description exercise

Look closely at both performances and write a detailed visual description of each. Visual description is a practice used to offer people who are blind or have a visual disability a full experience of visual mediums. Do not include personal reflections: try to write an objective description of what you see. Be sure to include as many details as possible. Pair up and share your descriptions. Did your partner see things you didn’t and vice versa? Rewrite the description together with details from each of your visual descriptions. For an example, you can reference the activity sheets on artworks included in our curriculum on pages 12-18.

Explore: Group discussion

- After writing the visual descriptions, what more did you notice about the dance sequences?
- What are some words you used to describe each sequence?
- What does this tell us about the performance and its function in the movie as a whole?

At the time, the dance style of the Nicholas Brothers was seen as revolutionary because of the athleticism involved. Fred Astaire, a star of classic Hollywood and considered one of the greatest dancers in film history, had a different take on what made the dance sequence so spectacular:

When Astaire pronounced their “Jumpin’ Jive” number in the movie *Stormy Weather* (1943)—unrehearsed and achieved on the first take—to be the greatest dancing he had ever seen on film, he was not commending the acrobatics alone but rather the way the brothers erupted organically out of their tap steps, like a series of overlapping geysers that, simply to look at, project an observer into a stratosphere of elation.

—Mindy Aloff, “Don’t Try This at Home,”
New York Times, March 26, 2000

Explore: Group discussion

- Reading the quote above stating that the Nicholas Brothers completed the dance in one take (meaning they nailed it without having to do it again), how does that inform your feelings about the sequence?
- Are there any dance routines from our current culture that can be related to this routine?

Activity: Nicholas Brothers “Jumpin’ Jive” TikTok Challenge

1. In groups of three or four students, choose a 3–4 second segment from the Nicholas Brothers routine.
2. Each group re-creates the tap-dancing movements, the scene, and the wardrobe choices to the best of their ability using imagination and creativity to adapt their selected segment. Please be very careful in trying to re-create any of the dance segments. Avoid the jumping or leaping parts of the routine.
3. Create a shot list to break down the segment showing movement, timing, framing, and camera angles.
4. Film and edit the chosen segment using available equipment and software.

5. Share and discuss each creation with the class.
6. Share your projects with the Academy Museum education team at museumeducation@oscars.org.

3. Two Films by Madeline Anderson

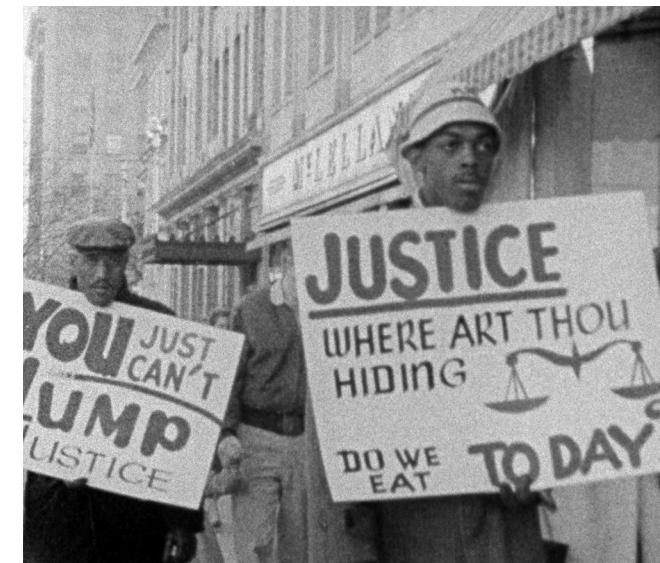
Integration Report 1, 1960

24 minutes, sound, black and white

Director: Madeline Anderson

Screenplay: Lofton Mitchell

Photography: Alfonso Burney, Richard Cressy, John Fletcher, Richard Leacock, Albert Maysles, Robert Puello



Film still from *Integration Report 1*, 1960

Editing: Zina Voynow

Cast: Robert Graham Brown (narration), Martin Luther King Jr., Bayard Rustin, Andrew Young

Producer: Madeline Anderson

I Am Somebody, 1970

30 minutes, sound, color

Director: Madeline Anderson

Screenplay: Madeline Anderson

Photography: Don Hunstein, Roland Mitchell

Editing: Madeline Anderson

Cast: Coretta Scott King, Ralph Abernathy, Leon Davis, Andrew Young

Producer: Madeline Anderson

Production: American Foundation of Non-Violence

Keywords: documentary, nonfiction, struggle for equality,

historical record, political documentary, direct cinema, genre, sync-sound, civil rights movement, union and union organizing, workers’ rights, labor movement, restoration and preservation, race, class, gender

Explore: Group discussion

- How can DOCUMENTARY film be a tool for social justice?
- What elements can you choose to create your own style in documentary filmmaking?
- What is the value in telling your own story? What is the value in telling other people’s stories?

Biography

Madeline Anderson (b. 1923) is an independent producer and director and is known for being one of the first women to join a union of film editors. She has dedicated her career to making films that honor and celebrate the lives of Black people. Anderson started making films in the 1950s. Her passions grew from a young age, sparked by a desire to fight the injustices that Black people faced in America. She was aware of the harmful media STEREOTYPING of Black people and wanted to create work that countered those images. She regularly speaks about simultaneously being a filmmaker, a wife, and a mother. In the same way, her films engage audiences in the dynamic aspects of lived events and experiences.

Included here is an interview conducted in 2016 between Madeline Anderson and scholar and *Regeneration* co-curator Rhea L. Combs. We invite you to read the full interview and reflect on the questions below.

<https://metafilm.ovid.tv/2020/10/29/filmmaker-mother-activist-madeline-anderson-in-her-own-words/>

Reflect

Pick two or three topics from the interview to reflect on Madeline Anderson’s experiences. Write your answers down on paper.

- What were a few of Madeline Anderson’s childhood experiences that were unique to her?
- What were some of the images that she saw as a young person that inspired her to make movies?

- What were some of the challenges that she faced as a Black woman making films?
- What were some of the experiences that led to her first film? What were some of the lessons she learned?
- What are some of the themes that she focused on in her films?
- What are some of the values she maintains as a filmmaker? How would you define her working style?
- These two films, produced ten years apart, show the struggle and agency of Black people during the height of the civil rights era. How is Madeline Anderson adding to the HISTORICAL RECORD by making these films?

Activity: Short documentary about community

Prepare, plan, and shoot a short, 5–10 minute documentary film highlighting something happening in your community. The subject can be an issue, an event, a video portrait of a community member or business, or a portrait of a place central to your community. It can be a story about something impacting young people or a celebration. There are no limits to the topic you choose.

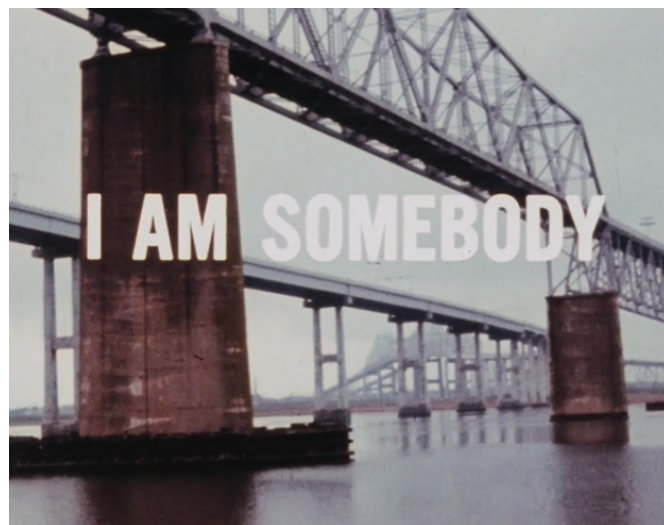
Break into groups of three or four and work collaboratively to do the following:

1. **Write a treatment.** Think of a topic and come up with a big question. What are the important elements to telling your story? Who are the important people? What are the significant locations? Can you shoot everything in one day? If not, how long will it take you? What tools will you need? Will there be sound? Will someone narrate? Do you need to write a script? Think of all the practical things you will need to accomplish to make this project happen.
2. **Create a shot list.** List the essential elements for each shot. Who will be behind the camera? Will someone be recording sound separately? Is there an interviewer? What camera angles will you use? What do you imagine will be the duration of each shot? To prepare for the shoot, visualize your project on paper.
3. **Cast/interviews:** Choose who will be behind

and in front of the camera. Do you need permission to film people or locations? Keep your crew informed of all decisions.

4. **Editing/finalizing:** Refer to your big question and shot list and arrange your film in a way that tells the story. Did you find new things while you were shooting? Did the plan change? Is there a new story to tell? These are all valuable questions when you begin editing. Once you decide what you have and what story you can tell, put it in order. Think about the length of each shot. Is there a connection from one shot to the next? Is it important to you to show disjunction? Editing is another place where you can insert your unique point of view.
5. **Presentation:** Set up a time to look at your films together. As you watch your classmates' videos, be an active viewer. What questions are coming up for you? What is your impression of the experience or story? Are the filmmakers able to express a style of their own? Were the filmmakers able to use filmmaking as a tool for justice, or anything else?
6. **Discussion:** Have an open discussion exploring each documentary and the

Still from *I Am Somebody*, 1970. Courtesy of © Icarus films



lessons learned from the experience.

7. **Share your documentaries with us by emailing them to museumeducation@oscars.org.**

D. Topical Essay with Activities

The Way They Look at Us: Stereotypes and Tropes in Black Cinema

Keywords: stereotype, Jim Crow, blackface, minstrel show, minstrelsy, racism, lived experience, World War II, civil rights movement, trope, visual literacy (or aesthetics), critical media literacy

Words set in SMALL CAPS are defined in the Glossary of Key Terms and Concepts (section F of this guide).

Context

STEREOTYPES are beliefs and opinions people hold about the characteristics, traits, and behaviors of a certain group of people or objects. People are often stereotyped based on sex, gender identity, race and ethnicity, nationality, age, socioeconomic status, language, and more. Stereotypes are deeply embedded within social institutions and cultures.

While stereotyping is ubiquitous throughout all societies and cultures, reducing and minimizing people's human qualities and life experiences can cause both ideological and literal harm. Many types of stereotyping are destructive, and racialized stereotyping in America is one type we experience all too often through the news, social media, and from within our communities. We are witness to how the police often profile, or stereotype, young people of color, seeing them as criminals often without material evidence and in certain cases causing actual harm.*

Psychologist and co-founder of the Center for Policing Equity (<https://policingequity.org>), Phillip Atiba Goff, is dedicated to looking closely at how the functions of the mind lead to stereotypes and bias which then in turn lead directly to racial inequity in policing. Goff together with his colleagues conducted studies demonstrating that police who showed the capacity for the “unconscious dehumanization” of BLACK people were also more likely

to identify Black boys as significantly older than they are and more prone to use force upon Black youth.† In the Op-Ed Goff wrote for the *Chicago Tribune*‡ in 2020 after the killing of George Floyd, he states, “The problem begins with how humans see and remember. We navigate the complexity of everyday life by filtering information through scenarios our brains have rehearsed—the cognitive basis for stereotypes. Most of the time, these stories serve us well. Balloons connote a party; a snake's hiss means danger.” He goes on to say, “...Because they are so often accurate, these mental shortcuts can literally substitute what we assume comes next for what we actually witness.” Goff gives the example of police violence that occurred in 1999, where after shooting Amadou Diallo 19 times, the police officers swore they saw a gun when later it was proven that he was holding his up his wallet. Goff points out that while, “Bypassing these shortcuts to witness the real version of events is mentally exhausting,” by slowing down and “bearing witness longer...we can resist the lure of our minds' habits — and learn to seek a vision of justice, instead.

Stereotypes serve to divide people and uphold DOMINANT NARRATIVES. What we lose through stereotypes is our autonomy and the complexity of being individual human beings. Throughout this guide, we will: begin to look at some of the ways Black people have been stereotyped through entertainment and media; introduce questions and activities to help to unpack and identify the visual aesthetics of Black stereotypes; and provide ideas for how to facilitate difficult conversations around this complex subject matter while considering new ways to celebrate, honor, and embrace individual perspectives and experiences.

* Deepa Shivaram. “Black Children Are Hospitalized From Police Violence At A Higher Rate : NPR.” NPR.org, September 9, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/09/09/1035452389/black-children-police-injuries-hospitalized-california-study>.

† Phillip Atiba Goff, Matthew Christian Jackson, Brooke Allison Lewis Di Leone, Carmen Marie Culotta, and Natalie Ann DiTomasso. “The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 106, no. 4 (2014): 526–45. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035663>.

*Words set in ALL CAPS are defined in the Glossary of Key Terms and Concepts (section F of this guide).

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Still from *The Jazz Singer*, 1927. Courtesy of Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences

‡ Chicago Tribune. “Commentary: Our Brains Are Conditioned to Blame Black People and Block Change — but We Can Change That – Chicago Tribune.” Accessed October 4, 2022. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/commentary/ct-opinion-racism-stereotypes-psychology-20200727-bzezd5gxmrq3bvfyfefdargou-story.html>.

History

Stereotypes of Black people in the United States emerged well before motion pictures. But they became more pervasive as they took hold in the entertainment industries by the mid-1800s. One of the earliest characters to personify a Black stereotype is Jim Crow. The character was developed by Thomas D. Rice (1808–1860), a white American playwright and traveling actor. In 1832, he made the Jim Crow character his signature act. Jim Crow was based on a folk trickster that was popular among enslaved Black people. Rice also appropriated a traditional slave song called “Jump Jim Crow.” He performed his Jim Crow act in BLACKFACE throughout

the United States and England. The popularity of this act grew into what is known as the MINSTREL SHOW.

Minstrelsy is a form of American entertainment developed around racist stereotyping of Black people. White performers would put on blackface using materials like shoe polish, greasepaint, or burnt cork, to play the roles of Black people in exaggerated and stereotypical ways. The performers often mocked Black people by portraying them as lazy, dimwitted, stupid, and frivolous.

Blackface became a popular addition to entertainment for white audiences, who were not always willing to be entertained by Black performers but still enjoyed the song and dance inspired by Black culture and the depictions of racial inferiority.

Here are some examples of early cinema stereotypes as defined by film historian Donald Bogle:

1. The Coon: Ineffectual and lazy, the Coon stereotype was a foolish, jive-talking simpleton who would do anything to avoid work.
2. The Uncle Tom: A character who was a black house slave who faithfully served his white master.
3. The Mammy: An overweight Black woman who took care of the white master’s children without concern for her own.
4. The Tragic Mulatto: A woman born of a mixed-race marriage or sexual union, often dying at the end of her story, punishment for the “sin” of being of mixed race.
5. The Black Buck: A brutal, animalistic, and hypermasculine African American man who threatened the white establishment because of his alleged sexual prowess.

Reflect

- Identify some stereotypes you are aware of.
- What are some stereotypes of Black culture

- and experience you are familiar with?
- What are some of the images you associate with those stereotypes?
- What kinds of harm can come from stereotypes?

Activity: Recognizing the visual aesthetics of minstrelsy

Take some time to look at the image from *The Jazz Singer* (1927), the first TALKIE film. The main character, Jakie Rabinowitz, is a young Jewish man who aspires to be an entertainer against his parents’ wishes and finds fame in vaudeville performing in blackface. Lithuanian-American actor Al Jolson, like the character he portrays in the film, was a singer, comedian, and vaudevillian known for his charisma and great musical talent.

Reflect

- How would you describe the clothing of this performer?
- What aspects of this person’s appearance are exaggerated?
- What are ways this person looks unrealistic, even nonhuman?
- Using the internet, your library, or other resources, research and collect more images of minstrelsy.
- Looking at the list of descriptive characteristics you’ve made, what consistencies do you find in examples of minstrelsy? List some of the shared imagery.
- How would you describe the shared visual aesthetics?
- Now that you can recognize the visual aesthetics of minstrelsy, think about contemporary media, film, and animation.
- Do you recognize any components that stem from minstrelsy?
- Do we think the creators of these works are aware of the references these originated from?
- What is the value of being able to recognize the origins of these images?

Sometimes the visual aesthetic of a stereotype or misrepresentation can become so commonplace that it is absorbed into depictions beyond its original community reference. Recognizing where and when



Still from *Lime Kiln Club Field Day*, 1913. Courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art, New York

such an aesthetic is perpetuated in present-day media allows us to uncover plural histories.

Explore: Group discussion

Consider some popular imagery of animated characters, both people and animals, where the characters are wearing white gloves and holding their arms outstretched and wide. Some people see a connection between this imagery and the aesthetics of minstrelsy and believe that images like this are rooted in a racist history.

- Now that you know that some people have made this connection, what are some ways you can consider the influence of history on the visual aesthetics in the media you consume?

Complexity of meaning

The use of blackface was complex on multiple levels. Because of the popularity of blackface, some Black entertainers adopted the technique and performed exaggerated characters. This allowed some Black performers to reclaim ownership of their own image and cultural references.

Minstrelsy became an opportunity for Black performers to enter American show business. In his 1974 book

Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America, Robert Toll writes: “This negative aspect of their shows was balanced, perhaps even outweighed, by the fact that Black people had their first chance to become entertainers, which not only gave many Negroes a rare opportunity for mobility but also eventually put Blacks in a position to modify and then correct these stereotypes.”

Explore: Group discussion

- What happens to the power dynamic when one appropriates their own stereotype?
- Is this empowering or does it add to hurt and harm? Why?
- Can you identify examples of people taking back their own stereotypes in popular culture today?
- Context

TROPES are repeated words, images, themes, figures, people, sounds, objects, or plot elements that become a metaphorical reference and may be used as a shortcut in storytelling, similar to a figure of speech. For example, common character tropes are the damsel in distress, the trusty sidekick, and the mad scientist. Tropes can lead to the development of stereotypical representations of people, characters, settings, or scenarios in film, both within a single work and across works by different authors.

Tropes in movies can be problematic when speaking for any marginalized communities on screen, for example women, LGBTQ+, Indigenous people, any person of color, immigrants, people with disabilities, and more. Tropes have the tendency to feed off each other and bleed into story narratives. These tropes serve as avatars for the white audience or dominant culture to continue to assert moral authority or claim progress on acceptance of a marginalized community by society as a whole.

History

In the 1940s, the fight against fascism during World War II brought to the forefront the contradictions between America’s ideals of democracy and its treatment of Black Americans. The country began to reevaluate segregation and racist attitudes in American culture as Black people enlisted in record numbers in the war

effort. African American newspapers and the NAACP launched the Double V campaign, which called for victory over enemies abroad and enemies at home, namely those who were obstructing full equality for Black Americans. From 1942 to 1945, the US Department of War tapped Hollywood talent to create a propaganda film series called *Why We Fight*; the final film in the series is *The Negro Soldier* (1944). Widely distributed with the backing of the government, the film presents positive stories and images of Black people contributing to the achievements of the country, showing them in stable family units, as clergy, soldiers, lawyers, athletes, and other respected members of society. The film was influential in creating opportunities for Black performers to break Hollywood stereotypes of Black people.

After the war, INDEPENDENT FILMMAKERS, and film movements in other parts of the world such as Italy’s neorealist cinema, started to influence American movie narratives. The civil rights movement gained steam with landmark court cases such as the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education*, which ruled that school segregation was unconstitutional. American films began to reflect these sociopolitical changes. But while negative Black stereotypes became less prominent in movies, new constraints arose in how Black people were presented in films. A set of postwar Black movie tropes began to develop that have persisted in Hollywood movies for many decades.

Here are a few examples of Black movie tropes:

- The White Savior: A white central character rescues a Black person or a group of Black people from circumstances caused by or symptomatic of societal racism.
- The Black Friend, often seen as the “buddy” in buddy films: A Black character supports the white protagonist and serves as a moral compass and advisor. The Black Friend character is often one-dimensional, has no backstory, and is only viewed through the lens of the white protagonist.
- The Magical Negro: A Black character comes to the aid of a white protagonist in a story. The Magical Negro possesses some otherworldly power, talent, emotional intelligence, or spiritual clarity that the white protagonist can exploit for their own benefit.
- The Strong Black Woman: A Black female character

models moral integrity, nurturing behavior, and endurance in the face of extreme hardships. The Strong Black Woman often neglects her personal needs in service to the greater good.

- The Jezebel: A sexually voracious and promiscuous Black female character serves as contrast to “good” and “moral” characters in narratives, often seen and defined through a male gaze or perspective.

Explore: Group discussion

- How would you distinguish a stereotype from a trope? What are some examples of each that you see in contemporary media?
- What are some ways we can correct misrepresentations of cultures?
- How do we ally with a community that is being stereotyped or misrepresented when we are not a part of that community?
- How can authentic representation and storytelling uplift communities?

Activity: Revision of the character

Explore a film made within the past five years where you recognize stereotypes and/or tropes of a community that you identify with.

1. Make a list of all the characters derived from stereotypes and/or tropes in this film and write a short description of each, detailing the elements that make them stereotypes or tropes.

Reflect:

- What histories do you think led to the development of these characteristics?
- What are the visual qualities attached to these roles?
- Since we know that stereotypes and tropes tend to be repetitious, find some other movies, books, or media that include similar stereotypes or tropes.
- Are there ways you identify with these characters? What are the ways you do not?
- Are any of the actors TYPECAST in the roles you identified?

2. Reimagine each character you’ve selected by removing the stereotypical qualities to tell a fuller story of their experience. Consider some of the changes you can make:

- Is it in their clothing?
- Is it in the way they talk? Or what they say?
- Is it the way they move?
- Is it their placement in the frame?
- Is it how characters around them behave?
- What else can you find?

Once you identify how they fall into their roles, think of the ways you can change that.

- Can you alter the CHARACTER DESIGN?
- Can you make different CASTING choices?
- Can you add more individualized features or qualities to each character?
- Can you rewrite the dialogue? Or include more details in the SCRIPT?
- Can you position them differently in the frame? Or make different PRODUCTION DESIGN choices?
- What other characters can be added to tell a fuller story?
- What other details can be included?

3. Select one of the characters you have identified and write a short film SYNOPSIS for an original movie placing your character at the center the story. Include as many details as you can to ensure your character is a PRINCIPAL CHARACTER and not a BIT PART.

Explore: Group discussion

- What aspects of your character move them away from the stereotype and/or trope?
- How do you individualize a character in ways that resist lumping people into groups?
- How do you build suspense, humor, or drama without relying on stereotypes or tropes to tell a story?

Further reading

Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin. *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*. 3rd ed. Wiley Blackwell, 2021.

*Words set in ALL CAPS are defined in the Glossary of Key Terms and Concepts (section F of this guide).

Donald Bogle. *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*. Viking Press, 1973.

Russell Sharman. *Moving Pictures: An Introduction to Cinema*. Creative Commons License, 2020.

Jacqueline Najuma Stewart. *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity*. University of California Press, 2005.

Robert C. Toll. *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford University Press, 1974.

E. Thematic Lesson Plan

What Does Black Cinema Mean to You?

The idea of black film is always a question and never an answer.

—Michael Gillespie, *Film Blackness: American Cinema and the Idea of Black Film*, 2016

Words set in SMALL CAPS are defined in the Glossary of Key Terms and Concepts (section F of this guide).

Reflect

- What do you think Professor Michael Gillespie is getting at with this statement?
- From the dawn of cinema, BLACK moviemakers have pushed back against segregation and prejudice. What are ways that we can now resist DOMINANT NARRATIVES to make sure our whole stories are included in history?

Reflect: Reading

1. Doris Berger and Rhea L. Combs. “What Is Black Cinema?” In *Regeneration: Black Cinema 1898–1971* (2022), pp. 29–31.

“Charles Burnett recalls having heated debates about the question of what constitutes a Black film while studying at UCLA in the 1970s: ‘We didn’t come to a conclusion, but it was easier to say what was not

a Black film.’ ... *Regeneration* demonstrates that despite incredible social, cultural, and economic hurdles, there has always been a Black creative class committed to producing work that examines social concerns, offers hope, and dares to dream. Moreover, this exhibition recognizes cinema as an art form and presents historical works by and about African Americans alongside selected works by contemporary Black artists to demonstrate the persistence of certain themes and ideas in different eras and mediums.

“The desire to see oneself in images and stories, aspirational or imagined, is a human impulse that long predates movies. This could be challenging for early Black filmgoers, however, because the dominant images seen in film created and perpetuated stereotypical notions of Black people ... *Regeneration* explores the myriad ways in which Black artists, filmmakers, and critics navigated an often prejudiced and segregated system over seven decades, either finding ways to work within dominant industry structures or choosing to develop their own dynamic creative communities.”

2. Interview with Charles Burnett in *Regeneration: Black Cinema 1898–1971* (2022), pp. 222–29.

Explore: Group discussion

- What are the influences of music and nonverbal communication for Charles Burnett?
- What are some of the similarities between journalism, DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING, and Charles Burnett’s style of INDEPENDENT FILMMAKING? What are the differences?
- What impact can filmmaking have in opening up conversations in your community?

Activity: Photo essay—What Is the Story of Your People?

In the interview cited above, Charles Burnett talks about his admiration for older generations of Black Americans and his desire to tell stories about his community. Keep his comments in mind as you develop your own community project.

1. Think about a community you are a part of. This can be your friend group, a club you’re

1. **in, the neighborhood you live in, the school you go to, your family, or any place else where you have shared experiences and/or interests with other people or places.**
2. **Collect 3–5 images that help define this community visually. You may choose existing images or you can take new pictures, or combine the two. Think about how each image expresses your unique point of view. How does the depiction of people and place communicate something? What does the lighting tell us? How does the framing of the image inform the viewer? Now, think about the order in which you can display these images to describe an experience or tell a story.**
3. **How does a collection of images communicate a fuller and more inclusive story about family and community?**
4. **Title your collection of images. How can a title give more meaning or information about the community you are describing?**

In the classroom, display your collection of images on a blank wall like an art installation.

- **What do you notice? What do these images make you wonder?**
- **What can you learn by looking at one picture at a time? What is communicated differently when you look at the collection?**
- **Do you feel the story you want to convey is told effectively through images alone? If not, what can you add?**

Film viewing

Although Charles Burnett’s 1978 film *Killer of Sheep* falls outside the exhibition timeline, it is in the direct lineage of and evolves from the efforts of Black filmmakers who came before him. *Killer of Sheep* is an independent film, made outside of a movie studio. This means that, budget constraints aside, Burnett was able to realize his aesthetic vision and tell the story on his own terms.

Before watching the movie, consider the following:

- Charles Burnett recalls the issues and types of film that fired his imagination during his student days. Based on his comments, what

- expectations do you have of *Killer of Sheep*?
- What does the title communicate? What expectations do you have based on the title alone?

Information

From the Killer of Sheep website at <https://www.killerofsheep.com/>:

Killer of Sheep examines the black Los Angeles ghetto of Watts in the mid-1970’s through the eyes of Stan, a sensitive dreamer who is growing detached and numb from the psychic toll of working at a slaughterhouse. Frustrated by money problems, he finds respite in moments of simple beauty: the warmth of a coffee cup against his cheek, slow dancing with his wife in the living room, holding his daughter. The film offers no solutions; it merely presents life—sometimes hauntingly bleak, sometimes filled with transcendent joy and gentle humor.

Killer of Sheep was shot on location in Watts in a series of weekends on a budget of less than \$10,000, most of which was grant money. Finished in 1977 and shown sporadically, its reputation grew and grew until it won a prize at the 1981 Berlin International Film Festival. Since then, the Library of Congress has declared it a national treasure as one of the first fifty on the National Film Registry and the National Society of Film Critics selected it as one of the “100 Essential Films” of all time.

Explore: Group discussion

- How do you think Charles Burnett would answer what Black cinema means to him?
- How does *Killer of Sheep* tell a COUNTERNARRATIVE of people living in Los Angeles that defies STEREOTYPES of people and place?
- How can film be used as a learning tool to acknowledge the multiplicity of experiences and resist creating monolithic cultures?
- How can we use movies to help us tell more diverse and inclusive stories?

Further reading

Allyson Field, Jan-Christopher Horak, and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, eds. *L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema*. University of California Press, 2015.

*Words set in ALL CAPS are defined in the Glossary of Key Terms and Concepts (section F of this guide).

Michael Boyce Gillespie. *Film Blackness: American Cinema and the Idea of Black Film*. Duke University Press, 2016. Killer of Sheep website <https://www.killerofsheep.com/>

F. Additional Resources

1. Glossary of Key Terms and Concepts

abolitionist: A person who favors the abolition of any law or practice deemed harmful to society. *Regeneration* describes the work of key abolitionists seeking to abolish slavery in the nineteenth century, including Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth. Today, abolitionists seek to eradicate systemic oppressions, for example, advocating for dismantling the prison-industrial complex, among other social justice movements and issues.

antebellum South (derived from the Latin *ante bellum*, meaning “before the war”): A period in US history spanning the end of the War of 1812 to the start of the Civil War in 1861. During this time, slavery was described in the cultural lexicon of Southern leaders as a positive good, classifying it as a benevolent, paternalistic institution with social and economic benefits, an important bulwark of civilization, and a divine institution superior to wage labor in the North. The South’s economy was largely plantation-based and dependent on exports. Society was stratified, inegalitarian, and perceived by immigrants as lacking in opportunities. Consequently, the South’s manufacturing base lagged behind nonslave states. Wealth inequality grew as larger landholders took the greater share of the profits generated by slaves, which also helped to entrench their power as a political class.

archive: Records created or received by a person, family, or organization and preserved because of their continuing value.

bit part: An acting role where there is direct interaction with the principal actors but typically, in contemporary film, has no more than five speaking lines and is mostly one-dimensional, meaning the character does not grow in any significant way. Bit characters are often the roles where stereotypes and tropes are employed, and little of the character’s point of view is revealed to the audience.

Black: We have elected to capitalize the “b” in Black as a way to recognize the history and culture of Black people as a shared experience. See this New York Times article for more context: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/05/insider/capitalized-black.html?searchResultPosition=2>.

blackface: The practice of applying darkened facial makeup to make the eyes and lips look disproportionately large while performing stereotypical Black characters, commonly used by white actors. Because of its popularity, Black performers have also worked in blackface.

cakewalk: A dance mainly performed by Black people that became a theatrical phenomenon in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This staple of minstrel shows was a counterpoint to formal European stage dances and Broadway entertainment. With roots in the minstrel walkaround, plantation ring shout, and African circle dance, the cakewalk features Black performers taking turns dancing using a variety of high-energy steps, many of them improvised.

casting: A pre-production process that involves choosing actors to fill the roles in a particular TV show, movie, commercial, or play. Directors and producers will hire a casting director to oversee the process, which includes auditions, screen tests, and callbacks.

character design: The full creation of a character’s personality, behavior, and overall visual appearance. Character designers create characters as a vehicle for storytelling.

cinematography: The art and craft of making motion pictures by capturing a story visually with a motion picture camera.

close-up shot: A type of camera shot that tightly frames a person or subject.

conceptual art: Art for which the idea (or concept) behind the work is emphasized more than the object itself or the artist’s creative expression through materials. Conceptual art emerged as a movement in the late 1960s.

counternarrative: A narrative that arises from the

vantage point of the historically marginalized. “Counter” itself implies a space of resistance against traditional domination. A counternarrative goes beyond the notion that those in relative positions of power can just tell the stories of those in the margins. Instead, these must come from the margins, from the perspectives and voices of those individuals. A counternarrative thus goes beyond the telling of stories that take place in the margins. The effect of a counternarrative is to empower and give agency to those communities. By choosing their own words and telling their own stories, members of marginalized communities provide alternative points of view, helping to create complex narratives truly presenting their realities.

counterculture: A culture whose values and norms of behavior differ substantially from those of mainstream society, sometimes diametrically opposed to mainstream cultural mores. A countercultural movement expresses the ethos and aspirations of a specific population during a well-defined era.

dominant narrative: A term referring to the ways history, experience, and events are told through the perspective of a dominant culture. A dominant culture in society typically holds power over other groups. Dominant narratives form because they are the stories that are upheld by the structures of power and are repeated, eventually becoming understood as truth. Dominant narratives often omit or suppress the experiences and perspectives of marginalized groups and do not encompass a holistic point of view.

documentary film: The cinematic observation and representation of reality. Documentary filmmaker John Grierson defined documentary film as the “creative treatment of actuality.” According to film critic Bill Nichols, there are six modes of documentary production: expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, poetic, and performative.

editing: The process of selecting and preparing written, photographic, visual, audible, or cinematic material used by a person or an entity to convey a message or information. The editing process can involve correction, condensation, organization, and many other modifications performed with the intention of producing a correct, consistent,

accurate, and complete piece of work.

historical record: Documented, archived, and preserved information about what happened in the past.

inquiry-based learning: A learning process that engages students by making real-world connections through exploration and high-level questioning. It is an approach to learning that encourages students to engage in problem-solving and experiential learning.

independent film or cinema: Movies made and/or distributed outside the mainstream major movie studio system. These films, sometimes referred to as “indies,” can also be different in their style and content, and by the way in which the personal artistic vision of the filmmaker is realized. Some of this may be due to smaller budgets; however, independent filmmakers are often afforded more freedom to express their ideas and vision more directly.

Jim Crow laws: A variety of discriminatory laws, rules, regulations, and customs aimed at Black people and enforced largely in the South and border states until the late 1960s.

minstrel show: A type of stage entertainment featuring songs, dances, and formulaic comic routines based on stereotyped depictions of Black Americans and typically performed by white actors in blackface. It developed in the US in the early nineteenth century and was widely performed until the mid-twentieth century but is now regarded as highly offensive.

mise en scene: The setting or surroundings of an event or action in a play or movie. The French term translates as “setting the stage.”

Motion Picture Production Code (also known as the Hays Code): Applied to films made in the US from 1934 to 1968, the Code was a set of rules and guidelines enforced by the Production Code Administration (PCA), which regulated and censored what Hollywood films could depict on screen. The idea was to use a set of moral guidelines to make Hollywood pictures “presentable” and “safe” for the public at large, which meant not covering or featuring certain “sinful” or “controversial” topics, themes, or actions. Some of

the things the Code banned were profanity, suggestive nudity, graphic or real violence, depictions of sexual desire, including homosexuality and women’s sexual desire, and rape. It prohibited favorable depictions of criminals, critiques of religion and capitalism, and any suggestion of actual sex between consenting adults (which is why even married adults are seen sleeping in separate beds). To avoid offending white Southerners, storylines involving “miscegenation” or interracial romance and sexual relations were taboo.

narrative film: A film that tells a fictionalized story, event, or narrative through cinematic means.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP): America’s oldest and largest civil rights organization. It was founded in New York in 1909 by Black and white activists partly in response to the violence Black people faced in the United States and as an institutional base for fighting injustice. Early organizers were W. E. B. Du Bois, Thurgood Marshall, and Ida B. Wells. The NAACP has helped to win major legal victories from the civil rights era to the present day.

over-the-shoulder shot: A type of camera angle in which the camera is placed above the back of the shoulder and head of a subject.

principal character: A character in a work of art, typically with a narrative, by which a story is driven forward through their point of view.

production design: The visual elements of a film linked to what filmmakers call the *mise en scene*. Production design sets the scene in a movie and keeps viewers grounded in the world of the film. Production designers make choices about the entire world that characters inhabit, including the interiors and exteriors of structures, furniture, plants, objects on shelves, dishes in the sink, cars, and much more.

race films: Between 1915 and 1948, more than 150 independent companies produced and distributed Black-cast films, or “race movies,” which offered an array of stories and roles for Black actors and were aimed at segregated Black audiences. Movies in all genres—melodramas, westerns, comedies, adventure films—were made by Black-owned production companies such as

the Lincoln Motion Picture Company and the Micheaux Film Corporation, as well as white-owned production studios like the Norman Film Manufacturing Company. While many of the films are lost, surviving posters offer a glimpse into this tremendously creative world. Unlike Hollywood productions, independent race films offered robust opportunities for Black actors and moviemakers. Despite the social and cultural barriers of racial violence and discrimination, this was a fertile period for Black storytelling, producing movies that were inspired and appreciated by Black communities, and which often dealt with the manifold impacts of segregation.

racial segregation: The practice of enforced separation of different racial groups in a country, community, or establishment. In the US, even after slavery had been abolished, several states upheld Jim Crow laws, which legally allowed public facilities, including schools, housing, hospitals, transportation, and movies, to remain segregated. Segregation is a form of discrimination and can lead to harmful impacts like racialized violence.

recidivism: The tendency of a person convicted of a crime to reoffend.

screenplay: Written text that provides the basis for a film production, usually including not only the dialogue spoken by the characters but also a shot-by-shot outline of the film’s action.

script: A document that comprises setting, characters, dialogue, and stage directions for movies, TV shows, and stage plays.

silent films: Films with no audio soundtrack.

stereotype: Beliefs and opinions people hold about the characteristics, traits, and behaviors of a certain group of people or objects. People are often stereotyped based on sex, gender identity, race and ethnicity, nationality, age, socioeconomic status, language, and more. Stereotypes are deeply embedded within social institutions and cultures.

synopsis: A brief summary introducing the genre, themes, characters, setting, and other important details of a story, paper, or work of art.

talkie: A movie made with recorded sound, as opposed to a silent movie. Films may include an audio soundtrack consisting of dialogue, music, and sound effects.

trope: Repeated words, images, themes, figures, people, sounds, objects, or plot elements that become a metaphorical reference and may be used as a shortcut in storytelling, similar to a figure of speech. For example, common character tropes are the damsel in distress, the trusty sidekick, and the mad scientist. Tropes can lead to the development of stereotypical representations of people, characters, settings, or scenarios in film, both within a single work and across works by different authors

typecast: The process in which an actor is repeatedly cast in similar roles based on a quality they possess or represent. Typecasting often leads to the formation of stereotypes and limits both the variety of depictions of people and the opportunities available to those who are typecast. For people of color, being typecast often puts them into a box that prevents them from showcasing the breadth and depth of their authentic lived experience in their roles.

Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1852): An abolitionist novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe focusing on the struggles of an enslaved man, known as Uncle Tom, who has been sold numerous times and has to endure physical brutality by slave drivers and his masters. One of Stowe’s central themes is that Tom endured his suffering by remaining steadfast in his strong Christian beliefs. The novel was extremely popular in the mid-nineteenth century and has been adapted many times for stage and screen. Stowe’s Uncle Tom was originally admired as a deeply pious man who sacrifices his life to protect two enslaved women, but over time the character came to be regarded with contempt, hence the derisive use of “Uncle Tomism” to indicate excessive servility or selling out to white power.

vaudeville: A type of entertainment popular chiefly in the US in the early twentieth century, featuring a mixture of specialty acts such as burlesque comedy and song and dance.

2. California Common Core Curriculum Standards

Arts

Prof.MA:Re8, Acc.MA:Re8, Adv.MA:Re8
Prof.MA:Re9, Acc.MA:Re9, Adv.MA:Re9
Prof.MA:Cn11, Acc.MA:Cn11, Adv.MA:Cn11

English Language Arts

LS: 11-12.1, 11-12.2, 11-12.3, 11-12.4, 11-12.5, 11-12.6
RSIT: 11-12.1, 11-12.2, 11-12.3, 11-12.5, 11-12.7
WS: 11-12.1, 11-12.2, 11-12.3, 11-12.4, 11-12.5, 11-12.6, 11-12.7, 11-12.8, 11-12.9, 11-12.10
WHSST: 11-12.1, 11-12.2, 11-12.3, 11-12.4, 11-12.5, 11-12.6, 11-12.7, 11-12.8, 11-12.9

History/Social Science

US: 11.5, 11.10, 11.11
WH: 10.11

CTE Knowledge and Performance Anchor Standards

Communications: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4,2.5
Technology: 4.1, 4.5
Problem Solving and Critical Thinking: 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4
Ethics and Legal Responsibilities: 8.1, 8.2, 8.4, 8.5, 8.6
Leadership and Teamwork: 9.1, 9.2, 9.3., 9.4, 9.5, 9.6, 9.7
Technical Knowledge and Skills: 10.1, 10.2, 10.3, 10.4

V. Credits

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The Nicholas Brothers, Fayard Nicholas (left) and Harold Nicholas from *Stormy Weather* ©1943 Twentieth Century Fox. Courtesy of Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences



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Cover: Film still from *Cake Walk*, 1897