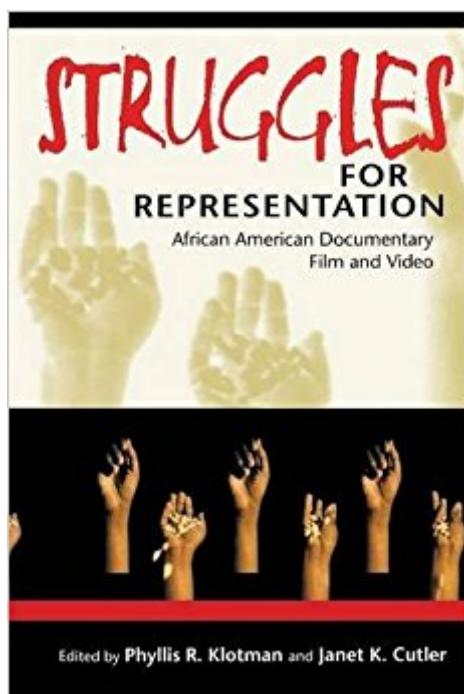


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Struggles For Representation: African American Documentary Film And Video



Synopsis

Struggles for Representation examines over 300 non-fiction films by more than 150 African American film/videomakers and includes an extensive filmography, bibliography, and excerpts from interviews with film/videomakers. In eleven original essays, contributors explore the extraordinary scope of these aesthetic and social documents and chart a previously undiscovered territory: documentaries that examine the aesthetic, economic, historical, political, and social forces that shape the lives of black Americans, as seen from their perspectives. Until now, scholars and critics have concentrated on black fiction film and on mainstream non-fiction films, neglecting the groundbreaking body of black non-fiction productions that offer privileged views of American life. Yet, these rich and varied works in film, video, and new electronic media, convey vast stores of knowledge and experience. Although most documentary cannot hope to match fiction film's mass appeal, it is unrivaled in its ability to portray searing, indelible impressions of black life, including concrete views of significant events and moving portraits of charismatic individuals. Documentary footage brings audiences the moments when civil rights protestors were attacked by state troopers; it provides the sights and sounds of Malcom X delivering an electrifying speech, Betty Carter performing a heart-wrenching song, and Langston Hughes strolling on a beach. Uniting all of this work is the "struggle for representation" that characterizes each film "an urgent desire to convey black life in ways that counter the uninformed and often distorted representations of mass media film and television productions. African American documentaries have long been associated with struggles for social and political empowerment; for many film/videomakers, documentary is a compelling mode with which to present an alternative, more authentic narrative of black experiences and an effective critique of mainstream discourse. Thus, many socially and politically committed film/videomakers view documentary as a tool with which to interrogate and reinvent history; their works fill gaps, correct errors, and expose distortions in order to provide counter-narratives of African American experience. Contributors include Paul Arthur, Houston A. Baker, Jr., Mark F. Baker, Pearl Bowser, Janet K. Cutler Manthia Diawara, Elizabeth Amelia Hadley, Phyllis R. Klotman, Tommy Lee Lott, Erika Muhammad, Valerie Smith, and Clyde Taylor.

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Customer Reviews

Klotman (Afro-American studies and founder of the Black Film Center/Archive, Indiana Univ.) and Cutler (English and film studies, Montclair State Univ.) have an extensive background in black film, which bears fruit in this excellent collection of 11 essays covering over 300 nonfiction films by more than 150 African American filmmakers, terrain rarely visited in other books on documentary or black film. Readers should especially note Manthia Diawara's examination of black diaspora documentary, Klotman's study of documenting the African American military experience, and Pearl Bowser's fascinating essay on the pioneers of this genre. An extensive filmography and interview excerpts crown this collection, which perfectly complements Diawara's *Black American Cinema* (Routledge, 1993) and *Between the Sheets, in the Streets* (LJ 4/1/97), edited by Chris Holmlund and Cynthia Fuchs. Highly recommended for all film and black studies collections.-Anthony J. Adam, Prairie View A&M Univ. Lib., TX Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Phyllis R. Klotman is Professor of Afro-American Studies and Founder/Director of the Black Film Center/Archive at Indiana University. Her publications include *Screenplays of the African American Experience*, *Frame by Frame: A Black Filmography*, and with Gloria J. Gibson, *Frame by Frame II: A Filmography of the African American Image*, and over 30 articles/essays on African American film and literature. Janet K. Cutler is Professor of English and Coordinator of the interdisciplinary film program at Montclair State University, where she has taught film studies for twenty years. Her published work on film and video has appeared in such journals as *Black Film Review*, *Cineaste*, *Film Quarterly*, and *Persistence of Vision*.

A good overview on Black Documentary films, mostly from PBS and its early history with the TV series at WNET, *BLACK JOURNAL*, and the legacy of Henry Hampton with his *Blackside* in Boston (*Eyes on the Prize*). The book also covers the early little known history of the documentary film and

its pioneer, William Alexander.

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