



NOTES FROM HOME

Series Booklet for
***Home Is Where the Heart Is: Black Cinema's
Exploration of Home***

Programmed by Maya Cade,
creator and curator, Black Film Archive
Indiana University Cinema Fall 2022 Programmer in Residence

Indiana University Cinema
September 1, 2022 – October 1, 2022
Bloomington, IN





Indiana University Cinema was thrilled to host Maya Cade as Fall 2022's guest programmer-in-residence. Maya is the creator and curator of Black Film Archive and a scholar-in-residence at the Library of Congress. The Black Film Archive—a register of Black films from 1915 to 1979 that are available to stream online—is a living,

breathing, publicly accessible archive of Black film history, craft, and storytelling.

Cade curated five programs—each comprised of a special introduction, short film, and feature presentation—that helped to inaugurate the next phrase of her archive project, focused on films made in 1979 and after. Cade curated a thoughtful and expansive collection of work that provides an intimate look into the many mutations of the idea of “home” across the spheres of family, ancestry, queerness, body, and transition.

Cade's film programming was augmented by a display of archival holdings from IU's Black Film Center & Archive and a Jorgensen Guest Filmmaker conversation with Isabel Sandoval, award-winning filmmaker (*Señorita*, *Aparisyon*, and *Lingua Franca*) and past IU Cinema Jorgensen guest.

This series booklet documents Cade's film programming and reproduces the insightful introductions she offered to audiences before all the films, as well as the conversation between Cade and Sandoval. In sum, these program notes document. We intend it to serve as an archive of its own, inspiring future curators, researchers, and film lovers of all kinds to deeply explore the rich past, present, and future of Black cinema.

– Dr. Alicia Kozma
Director, Indiana University Cinema



MAYA CADE
IU CINEMA PROGRAMMER-IN-RESIDENCE
FALL 2022

Maya S. Cade is the creator and curator of Black Film Archive—a first-of-its-kind digital archive likened to be the definitive history of Black cinema by Slate.com. She is the inaugural Connecting Digital Communities Initiative scholar-in-residence at the Library of Congress, as well as the only person in history to win multiple esteemed special critic awards in the same season, receiving special distinctions by the New York Film Critics Circle, the National Society of Film Critics, and the Alliance of Women Film Journalists.

In the year since Black Film Archive's 2021 launch, Cade's achievement has been featured in countless publications, including *the New York Times*, *the Los Angeles Times*, *the Hollywood Reporter*, NPR, *the Paris Review*, and *Sight & Sound*. In February 2023, she will present her guest film curation at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, the largest film museum in the world.

Cade has served on the jury for several film festivals across the country, presented on the future of Black cinema worldwide, and was named a Culture Shifter by the *Huffington Post*. Additionally, she was the Fall 2021 research fellow at Indiana University's Black Film Center & Archive.

Originally hailing from New Orleans, Cade is based in Brooklyn.



HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS: BLACK CINEMA'S EXPLORATION OF HOME

Over the past two years, our homes have become the office, the gathering spot, and most importantly, a place of refuge from the world as we face the unrelenting unknown of our current condition. This moment is in lockstep with what Black cinema has expressed about home across time. Through visions of family, ancestry, queerness, body, and transition, my program *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Black Cinema's Exploration of Home* is a survey of home as a place to experience the range of what life offers and a place to be sheltered from it. I am honored to be sharing this program with the rich film community at the Indiana University Cinema.

Home Is Where the Heart Is takes its name from Gil Scott-Heron's "Home Is Where the Hatred Is," a song that discusses at length the hopeless feeling of living in the ghetto and its toll on the narrator.

With this program, I wanted to use home as a showcase of the full range of the Black experience in America. Home is a shelter from the rest of the world, a place where you can cry and feel love and warmth and also take pride in the fullness of yourself regardless of what the world brings.

– Maya Cade, 2022



FAMILY AS HOME

Featuring *Your Children Come Back to You* and *Claudine*
September 1, 2022

Aille Sharon Larkin's *Your Children Come Back to You* (1979) and *Claudine* (1974) are illustrations of the range of social inequalities Black people face and how family is essential to seeing us through and carrying us home.

In Larkin's short masterwork *Your Children Come Back to You*, a young girl presents her perspective on how social inequities and dreaming for her homeland haunt her. In the balance are two varied adult perspectives on Black identity and the future of the child's home life as she knows it. *Your Children Come Back to You* is a look at how assimilation and class tension eats away at a Black family.

Claudine (Diahann Carroll in an Oscar-nominated role) has her back against the wall with raising her six children in a small Harlem apartment while "the man" threatens to cut the welfare payments she uses to survive. This film, directed by John Berry, offers an irresistible look at how love and family are tools of survival in a world that forces Black people to make impossible choices. With a booming soundtrack performed by Gladys Knight and the Pips and written by Curtis Mayfield, James Earl Jones also stars in this tender portrait of familial love.

Together, these two films remind us that home is where the heart is, whether our heart is longing for other familial pastures or a home that is tied together with love in the wake of continued destruction.

– Maya Cade



Your Children Come Back to You

(1979) Dir. Alile Sharon Larkin

USA | Not rated | DCP | 27 mins | Drama | English

Your Children Come Back to You is a contemporary allegory about values and assimilation. The film literalizes the meaning of a “mother country” by means of the story of a young girl, Tovi, torn between two surrogate mothers: one comfortably bourgeois, the other nationalist. Cinematography by Charles Burnett and co-starring Angela Burnett.

Claudine

(1974) Dir. John Berry

USA | PG | DCP | 92 mins | Drama, Comedy, Romance | English

A unique film on the emotional truths of living under the big, omnipresent force of the welfare office, *Claudine* follows the titular character—played by the dynamic Diahann Carroll—as she raises her children by working as a domestic maid for rich, white families. Her life is changed when Roop (James Earl Jones), a charming garbage man, catches her fancy. The lives of both begin to feel richer and more worth living, but also more complicated.





THE BODY AS HOME

Featuring *A Different Image* and *Alma's Rainbow*
September 8, 2022

Ailie Sharon Larkin's 1982 *A Different Image* centers the story of Alana, a young art student who, after a break-up with a long-term partner, dedicates her life to her art. In the process of creation, she reclaims her body image in a gaze removed from patriarchal beauty standards. Using Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* as a framing device, the film comments on the ways the Black woman's full being is not seen and assumed irrelevant beyond our sexual functions. *A Different Image* asks who deserves to be seen, and if you see us... do you really?

Similarly, the newly restored *Alma's Rainbow* by Ayoka Chinzera centers a young girl and her mother and aunt orbiting around her as they all negotiate with beauty, body image, and womanhood. This matriarchal story is one of expression, freedom, joy, truth, and love as all begin to step into a world where agency over your body is the only rhythm worth grooving to.

These films, both helmed by Black women, celebrate the agency of Black women's bodies and allow the women to feel at home in them, despite the world demanding otherwise.

– Maya Cade



A Different Image

(1982) Dir. Alile Sharon Larkin
USA | Not rated | DCP | 52 mins
Drama | English

A highly acclaimed film, *A Different Image* is an extraordinary poetic portrait of a beautiful young African American woman attempting to escape becoming a sex object and to discover her

true heritage. Through a sensitive and humorous story about her relationship with a man, the film makes provocative connections between racism and sexual stereotyping. The screenplay of *A Different Image* was published in *Screenplays of the African American Experience*, edited by Dr. Phyllis R. Klotman, founding director of the Black Film Center & Archive at Indiana University.

Alma's Rainbow

(1994) Dir. Ayoka Chenzira
USA | Not rated | New 4K Restoration | 85 mins | Comedy, Drama | English

A coming-of-age comedy-drama about three African American women living in Brooklyn, *Alma's Rainbow* explores the life of teenager Rainbow Gold (Victoria Gabrielle Platt) as she enters womanhood and navigates standards of beauty, self-image, and the rights women have over their bodies. Rainbow attends a strict parochial school, studies dance, and lives with her strait-laced mother Alma (Kim Weston-Moran), who runs a hair salon in the parlor of their home and disapproves of her daughter's newfound interest in boys. When Alma's free-spirited sister Ruby (Mizan Kirby) returns from Paris after a ten-year absence, the sisters clash over what constitutes the "proper" direction for Rainbow's life. *Alma's Rainbow* highlights a multi-layered Black women's world where the characters live, love, and wrestle with what it means to exert and exercise their agency.





ANCESTRY AS HOME

Featuring *Dreaming Rivers* and *Black Mother*
September 22, 2022

For many Black people, our relationship to ancestry is equally a quest to find our roots as much as a guide to understanding what the past, present, and future are telling us. Ancestry is a way to understand Black history and the possibility of Black futures. These films are two transfixing global odes to ancestry.

Our first film, 1988's *Dreaming Rivers*, is an allegorical short from Sankofa Film and Video artist Martina Attille. "What's left is like her memoirs, history, her autobiography... do you understand?" one of the children of a dying mother says as her family comes to terms with her passing by her bedside. In an assemblage of memories, we're guided through the mother's history and the ways colonialism's grip alters our ancestry, dreams, and being across generations. As the film says, "Sometimes our dreams depend on what's available."

The feature, *Black Mother* (2018), is a boundary-shifting, spiritual documentary from Khalik Allah that explores ancestry as place through a lyrical tribute to the people that call Jamaica home. Through candid accounts, *Black Mother* explores Jamaican lineage by reckoning with its past and the urgency of what's to come.

These two films represent a global glimpse into how ancestry has shifted home, heritage, and futures for Black people across the diaspora.

– Maya Cade

Dreaming Rivers

(1988) Dir. Martina Attille
United Kingdom | Not rated
16mm | 31 mins | Drama
English

Dreaming Rivers is a film written and directed by Martina Attille for Sankofa Film & Video. In this allegorical work, actor Corinne Skinner Carter performs the role of Ms. T, a Black Caribbean woman in transition. Her children, Daughter (Angela Wynter), Sister (Nimmy March), and Sonny (Roderick Hart), sit at her bedside and attend to the unspoken intimacies of history and transnational belonging.



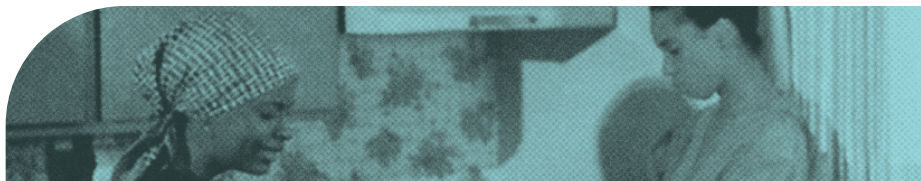
Black Mother

(2018) Dir. Khalik Allah
Jamaica, USA | PG-13 | DCP
77 mins | Documentary | English

Part film, part baptism, in *Black Mother* director Khalik Allah brings us on a spiritual journey through Jamaica. Soaking up its bustling metropolises and tranquil countryside, Allah introduces us to a succession of vividly rendered souls who call this island home. Their candid testimonies create a polyphonic symphony, set against a visual prayer of indelible portraiture.

Thoroughly immersed between

the sacred and profane, *Black Mother* channels rebellion and reverence into a deeply personal ode informed by Jamaica's turbulent history but existing in the urgent present.



TRANSITION AS HOME

Featuring *African Woman* and *My Brother's Wedding*

September 30, 2022

"It might not be such a bad idea if I never ever ever go home again," the Gil Scott-Heron song says in a suggestion that not everyone can go home again. The two films part of the "Transition as Home" series are an ode to those that have to find home where they can.

In our first film, 1980's *African Woman, U.S.A.*, a woman migrates to America from Africa with her young daughter and is settling in their new home as she tries to find work to support the family. As she faces pushback from those who doubt her belonging in varied capacities and the increasingly predatory behavior of men, the film offers searing commentary on the dangers of those who ascribe to white patriarchal thinking—regardless of their race—on a family's vision of home and connection.

Similarly, the feature, Charles Burnett's timeless and heartbreaking *My Brother's Wedding* (1983), is a window into the ways Black people can find themselves at odds with home. Here, the protagonist, Pierce, finds himself in flux with his brother, who is preparing to marry a person who is the portrait of Black integrationist upper middle-class as he clings to the joy of the humble upbringing he knew. In this transition, there is a soul-reaffirming portrait of the varied scope of Black being.

These two films represent two looks at Black people in transition. In these portraits of the heartache of Black being that forces many to the margins, there is a quiet spirit that resonates and drives the characters to keep on keeping on. That spirit can be a home.

– Maya Cade



African Woman, U.S.A

(1980) Dir. Ijeoma Iloputaife
USA | Not rated | DCP | 20 mins
Drama | English

African Woman, U.S.A. is the story of a Nigerian woman studying dance abroad in America while supporting her daughter and two others back home. With a

score interweaving jazz and traditional African music, the short film depicts the joys, pains, and dangers of the African immigrant experience in the U.S. Nigerian artist Omah Diegu (aka Ijeoma Iloputaife) is recognized as the first African woman to study television and film production at UCLA and is a member of the L.A. Rebellion film movement of the 1960s to 1980s. Digital preservation from 3/4" U-matic tape by UCLA Film & Television Archive, Digital Lab.

My Brother's Wedding

(1983) Dir. Charles Burnett
USA | Not rated | DCP | 81 mins
Drama | English

Pierce Mundy works at his parents' South Central dry cleaners with no prospects for the future and his childhood buddies in prison or dead. With his best friend just getting out of jail and his brother busy planning a wedding to a snooty upper-middle-class Black woman, Pierce navigates his conflicting obligations while trying to figure out what he really wants in life. In 1983, after many long months of shooting, Charles Burnett sent his rough-cut of *My Brother's Wedding* to his producers. Ignoring his request to finish the editing of the film, the producers rushed it to a New York festival screening, where it received a mixed review from *the New York Times*. With distributors scared off, *My Brother's Wedding* was tragically never released. Now, following a restoration by the Pacific Film Archive (at the University of California, Berkeley) and a beautifully accomplished digital re-edit by the director, *My Brother's Wedding* is an eye-opening revelation—wise, funny, heartbreaking, and timeless. This director's cut is significantly shorter than the original version released by producers (115 min.).





QUEERNESS AS HOME

Featuring *Behind Every Good Man* and *Pariah*

October 1, 2022

I'm honored to share with you two works centering queer Black stories. First is a beautiful 1967 short, *Behind Every Good Man*, a UCLA student film that is a loving portrait of a Black trans woman that allows her to narrate her own life, desires, and ambitions.

For the feature, we have 2011's *Pariah*. This poetic coming-of-age drama chronicles a 17-year-old lesbian discovering the depth of her identity, opening her heart to love and the possibilities it offers, and figuring out how she wants her story to be told while navigating, with searing honesty, resistance from homophobic adults and heartache. These two pictures offer loving views of queerness as home.

– Maya Cade



Behind Every Good Man

(1967) Dir. Nikolai Ursin
USA | Not rated | DCP | 8 mins
Documentary | English

Produced several years before the historic Stonewall uprising for LGBTQ rights in 1969, director Nikolai Ursin's gently activist short *Behind Every Good Man* provides an illuminating glimpse into the life of an African American trans woman. In strong contrast to the stereotypically

negative and hostile depictions of transgender persons as seen through the lens of Hollywood at the time, the subject of Ursin's independent film is rendered as stable, hopeful, and well-adjusted. The resulting intimate portrait serves as a rare cultural artifact of transgender life and African American life in the U.S. at the mid-century. Preserved by UCLA Film & Television Archive as part of the Outfest UCLA Legacy Project, with funding provided by the National Film Preservation Foundation.

Pariah

(2011) Dir. Dee Rees
USA | R | DCP | 126 mins | Drama
English

Alike is a 17-year-old African American woman who lives with her family in Brooklyn's Fort Greene neighborhood. She has a flair for poetry and is a good high-school student. Alike is quietly but firmly embracing her identity as a lesbian. With the support of



Laura—her sometimes-boisterous best friend and out-lesbian—Alike is especially eager to find a girlfriend. At home, her parents' marriage is strained, and there is further tension around Alike's sexuality. Unsure as to how much she can confide in her family, she strives to get through adolescence with grace, humor, and tenacity.



MAYA CADE JORGENSEN CONVERSATION

The below transcript is from the September 30, 2022 Jorgensen Conversation event between Maya Cade and filmmaker Isabel Sandoval. It has been edited for length and clarity.

Isabel Sandoval: Good evening, everyone. Thank you so much for being here. I'm so thrilled to be on stage talking to Maya. We actually just met for the first time in person yesterday, although we've been following each other and championing each other on social media since the pandemic.

Maya Cade: We have a game that we play of hyping each other up online and we're happy to do it in real life. That's good fun.

IS: Maya has just been one of the most luminous and inspiring presences on Twitter, and of course your groundbreaking and stellar work on the Black Film Archive. My first question for you, Maya, is what was the very first film that you fell in love with? Do you remember exactly when and where you saw it and what particular moment or scene that you said, "I love this movie?"

MC: I have two answers. The very, very, very first was *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* [1971]. I remember as a child repeating to my family, to the point that it became an inside joke, “You lose, you get nothing!” [laughs] I talked about that a lot. It was my personality. I would say that the other was *The Wiz* [1978]. I really, really loved *The Wiz*. Actually in the pandemic, I watched it every day. I was obsessed with *The Wiz* and I think in the pandemic, I was trying to figure out—or I was thinking through what home meant in this moment that everything around me was changing.

I could turn on *The Wiz* and see Dorothy’s journey on the way home, and has she worked out that the journey is as important as the destination? I was trying to comfort myself in the same way to say, “Okay, this crisis that we’re going through now, perhaps this is something I’m meant to go through,” though I would not wish suffering on anyone of course, but I was trying to comfort myself in that way.

IS: It was after one of those pandemic viewings of *The Wiz* that you felt the calling?

MC: [chuckles] You’re correct. After the 900th viewing of *The Wiz* and the George Floyd protests, I was really just thinking about the fact that there isn’t anything like Black Film Archive. What I remember about the George Floyd protests really was everyone talking about how limited Black film is. People were saying, “Oh, my God, all Black films are traumatic. They’re this, they’re that,” “this” being the worst film you’ve ever seen and “that” being the most dramatic film you’ve ever seen. There were just nothing in the middle and nothing else that Black film had to offer.

I was seeing *The Wiz* and *For Love of Ivy* [1968] and all these films that I own because I’m a film collector, and I’m like, “Huh, we’re not—” I don’t ever blame people for not knowing something, I think that’s a very vicious way to look at the world, and I’m quite earnest and optimistic. I was just like, “Mm, there’s not anything that people can go to.” Of course these conversations are happening. If you’re not thinking of books as reference points anymore, and the internet has moved us to the point that really isn’t true. We think about Wikipedia as a reference. I felt like there was an avenue in which something could come and be that reference point. Black Film Archive was born [chuckles].

IS: I'm curious, what do you think makes a movie great? What makes a movie transcend simply being entertainment and actually be a work of art?

MC: That's something I've been thinking about a lot lately, and honestly my answer—it's maybe a funny one. I think that art can transcend when it knows it's rooted in reality. When it has some basis of truth of life, and it can be a fantasy that takes that stream of life and brings you to a different world. It can be a romantic drama that knows that the only way to believe in love is to really see it unfold. I think that to be rooted in some idea of reality allows the audience to connect with what you're saying and allows the film to transcend.

IS: What do you think are the best examples of that definition of a great film that you just gave us?

MC: Oh, okay. [laughs]

IS: Yes, I'm putting you on the spot.

MC: You are putting me on the spot. Let's see. I'm going to name a non-Black film [laughs]. I do like all cinema. I think *A Matter of Life and Death* [1946], Powell and Pressburger. It is my favorite film of all time, and it's a film that navigates heaven and hell—not hell, heaven and Earth. It does it beautifully by using love as a guide, and it



transcends what's been done on film up to that point, in my opinion, and truly a lot of what's been done after. Yes, it's really one of the most beautiful films of all time.

IS: I'm curious as a fellow student and lover of film... I'm curious about your own journey as a cinephile, how your earliest encounters and experiences of the movies and how your taste has evolved over the years.

MC: That's really fascinating. Honestly, I really fell in love with what I considered old movies. When I started realizing that a lot of the remakes that were happening when I was a child, like *Freaky Friday* [2003] and *Parent Trap* [1998], they were remakes of films. I was using that early jumping-off point to be like, "Oh, wait, there's this *Parent Trap* movie from the ['60s], I should watch that."

I would go to the video store and I would rent it and get the earlier *Parent Trap*. I'd watch it and I was like, "Wait a minute, why would they remake this? They got it right the first time." I love *Parent Trap* to be clear, the newer one. That was my earliest inkling of like, "Wow, there's more than what's in front of me," this idea that things were being remade and revived and reimagined. I think after that point, when I was getting into high school—

IS: This was in Baton Rouge?

MC: Yes. I started living in Baton Rouge in middle school. ... When I was in high school, I really realized—and I also was watching TCM [Turner Classic Movies], I should say. I am a lifelong TCM person, a lifelong HBO person as well. I was watching things that came on, but I wouldn't say that was sparking my curiosity. I think I was just digesting what came on. ... I saw *Meet Me in St. Louis* [1944]. I saw the age-appropriate classics when I was young, but it never was really like, "Oh, my God, I need to find more films like this." ... It wasn't until I saw Dorothy Dandridge films that I was like, "Oh, my God, wait a minute. Black people, we were classic film stars too."

IS: Where'd you see the Dorothy Dandridge films, on HBO? Was it TV?

MC: TCM. TCM changed my life. Up until the point I saw any Dorothy Dandridge film, I was like, "Okay, these are cool." I was invested. It was my personality, it definitely was. I watched TCM, that was my personality. When I saw her onscreen, I was like, "Wait, I should find more films like this."

When you're a child, representation is everything. It allows you to believe that more is possible. ... I sought out *Porgy and Bess* [1959], which famously is hard to find. I saw this in high school and it was the first time I was like, "Wait, there's a world of film that people don't want you to see." That's not always the case—well, that is true with [*Porgy and Bess*],—but I was like, "Oh, I should follow that impulse."

I think me feeling like I was a cinephile, to answer your question, was really me searching for myself in film. I think I became a cinephile because film chose me. Everywhere I look in my life and every moment of weakness, of joy, I think about, "Oh, what film am I going to watch to celebrate?" And I've always been that way.

I've always thought, "Okay, I'm having a bad day. I should probably watch *The Goodbye Girl* [1977]." "I'm having a good day, I should probably watch some rare, obscure movie I've never seen before." That has just really been the way I navigate in life. A lot of people have TV shows that they use as companions to not think about their isolation. I have films that I'm playing in the background, and I really have always been that way.

IS: At this moment, at this point in your life, what are those movies that you have playing in the background, that are your companions in life?

MC: Oh, my companion right now... That's a rich question. I think I have many. Streaming is a very interesting thing, because in many ways streaming makes you feel like all of the films in the world are at your fingertips. Then when you get into streaming, you realize 10% of the films that have ever been made are streaming and the same films are hopping from streamer to streamer. In those films that hop around, I have found myself trying to rewatch *Minority Report* [2002] a lot lately. I think there's something about thinking through the state of the world, and I'm always trying to find a film that channels that.

When the pandemic began, I started biking and I started watching *Vanilla Sky* [2001]. *Vanilla Sky* opens in a very empty New York. That's important, because I was biking and I biked through Times Square one day. There was no one there. I want to say this was May 2020.

IS: No Tom Cruise?



MC: [laughter] There was no one in Times Square, and I immediately went through my film Rolodex in my head. I was like, “Oh, yes, I should watch *Vanilla Sky*.” Any film that allows me to think through this moment—because the pandemic is ongoing—that’s what I’m gravitating towards. That’s what I’m using as a companion. I’m also thinking about *When Harry Met Sally* [1989], of course. I’m thinking about all the films [laughs]. I have TCM playing no matter what I’m doing.

IS: Let’s talk about the Black Film Archive. The moment after watching *The Wiz*, you had decided to work on it. What were the first thoughts that crossed your mind? What were the first things that you felt you needed to do to make it happen?

MC: You know what’s funny? I feel like I blacked out and worked on this nonstop. I journal, so I had to go back through my journal in preparation for this. A lot of my earliest thoughts were, “Will this be worthy of the audience I’m trying to serve? Will this show them the amount of care that I have for them? Will this be something that can grow that I have the time to invest in?” I was really thinking about design very early on. I was thinking about, “How can I show people how much I care?”

I’ve always worn my heart on my sleeve, and I wanted to do that with my work too. I really wanted to do right by these films. I think of the

actors and the films in Black Film Archive as an extension of my family. If you're archiving your family's work, you just treat it with such care and concern and consideration.

I thought, "Okay, how can I do that for them?" A lot of the filmmakers, a lot of the actors had never had their moment. I didn't think about how it would be received beyond the points of care that I had. At the very least it was, "Okay, let me just give accurate—let me make sure that this actor's name is spelled correctly..." I knew it'd be indexed by Google. I knew it'd at least do that. I was like, "Okay, so that's true then, I need to make sure that this is accurate and good and fair." I think I knew early on that I wasn't just going to take descriptions from other sites, that I was going to write the descriptions myself. I knew early on that for the very first phase, I knew I was going to stop in 1979.

IS: You did this while working a full-time job at the Criterion Collection?

MC: Yes. I started Black Film Archive in June 2020 as a [Twitter] thread. I was talking about the work that I was going to do to make it a website. I started at Criterion in October 2020, but I knew before I started at Criterion that I was going to work on a website. Yes, the real root of the work was while I was working full-time at Criterion.

IS: It's very fascinating how your definition of Black film, as you say on the website, has expanded and broadened. Can you tell us more about that and how it's become more inclusive?

MC: The definition on Black Film Archive is any film that has something significant to say about the Black experience. I think the site itself has expanded because it now includes the '80s. What happened in the '80s—it's interesting because ideas of Blackness are shifting, and I can see that happening.

There's this film from 1989 called *Work Experience*. It's a short that won an Oscar. I also had never heard of it until I was doing my—it's insane, but I make this long list of all the films that I know of and then I find the gaps. Then I keep a running list of all the films, even if they're not streaming. I have a really good list of Black films from 1898 to 1989. I found *Work Experience* and ... the '80s' ideas of representation onscreen shift. Not every Black film is about Blackness. Artists are able to express themselves in new ways, because also the Black independent-film movement happened again. You have films like *Losing Ground* [1982] that is one of the earliest films about the interior

life of a Black woman, but it isn't just about that. It's about a marriage unraveling. It's about two brilliant people at odds with how they think life should be. Suddenly, Black people are able to define themselves in more expansive ways and it's just so cool to see unfold.

....

IS: You mentioned [the archive] spans 1898 to 1989. Tell me about the Black film from 1898, I'm so curious.

MC: *Something Good – Negro Kiss*, that was just recently found by [an archivist from the University of Southern California].

IS: It's a full-length feature?

MC: No, it's really a snippet. It's a six-second—no, it's longer than six seconds, but it's really, really, really short. I think it's quite special and it's just affection between two Black actors. It's very lovely.

IS: I'm just curious, where is it streaming or accessible?

MC: Oh, it's just on YouTube or Vimeo. It's on one of them. I think for the longest time when I first started the site, I was thinking of streaming. The reason I didn't include it to begin with is I was thinking of streaming as, "Oh, it's on Criterion Channel, it's on Mubi..." I've walked back on that a little bit.

IS: I think when you expanded the definition of Black film on the website, I also remember reading that you mentioned that it covers white reactions or perspective on the Black experience.

MC: I think that's a really natural thing because white people are in charge of Hollywood. White impressions of Blackness run throughout Black film history. I think what's special about Black actors is they take that little bit of space that they're given, and they use cultural nods and such consideration for Black people. Especially when you're thinking early, early Black actors, they know that they're upholding the race. Though that is a burden and very much was, they also use it as a space of opportunity and I'm deeply fascinated by that and they do it so well.

IS: What are those examples of the white reactions or perspective on Black experience?

MC: *Gone with the Wind* [1939]. This idea that Black lives aren't multifaceted... I think a lot of early Black films, or early films with Black people, I should say really, have this idea that Black lives are only this, they're only that. I think the films of Black Film Archive show an expanded range of what Black lives are and were, because films have such an important place in getting people to understand cultural attitudes, cultural considerations.

For many people, especially if you're thinking [people in their] 20s, 30s, et cetera, this is how they're learning about Black people. They might not have a Black person in their community, segregation, et cetera. You also have Black directors doing the early Black independent film movement, talking about how expansive Black lives are. It's just interesting to see the dichotomy between those two, which I really enjoy.

IS: Is there any particular period or wave or movement or school in Black film that you consider the most creatively and artistically exciting?

MC: Oh, yes. L.A. Rebellion, I think, is very cool. It excites me greatly.

IS: Is this Melvin Van Peebles?

MC: No. L.A. Rebellion is Charles Burnett...

IS: Oh, yes.

MC: Yes, yes, yes. It's a group of filmmakers who were at UCLA from the late '60s to—they extended to early '80s.

IS: Is Haile Gerima part of this?

MC: That's right, exactly. Julie Dash, Haile Gerima, Alile Sharon Larkin, the film we're going to see tonight [Charles Burnett's *My Brother's Wedding* (1983)].

IS: What do you like most about that movement, L.A. Rebellion?

MC: Young Black people were able to express themselves... Just the creativity, the innovation, the ideas of Blackness are varied. They didn't feel like they had to follow one script of what identity was. It also awakened a new Black film movement, I would say. Could we have Spike Lee without the L.A. Rebellion? I don't think so. They charted a course that has direct implications for the rest of Black film history, even if people





weren't aware of it at the time. Charles Burnett making his student film *Several Friends* [1969], just a slice-of-life poetry of the everyday between this group of friends in LA... You really are open to that point. I hadn't seen anything like that on film. It's really beautiful and a lot of the research that's gone into that has been earth-shifting for me as well.

IS: This morning, I had the good fortune of visiting the Black Film Center & Archive. It's just remarkable to me how the list of films and materials that are available and that we still have access to is dwarfed, I think, by the films that are now lost, forgotten, lost memory. Are there any particular films that are not yet in the Black Film Archive that you would hope to find and make available and accessible to audiences now?

MC: Yes. I really would love to make [accessible] one of the earliest films directed by a Black woman, *A Woman's Error* [1922] by Tressie Souders...

I think there's a lot of gaps in Black Film Archive because it relies on curators to 1) know a film, 2) feel like it fits within what they're curating for their streaming service or if the streaming service has curators; not all of them do. I think there are naturally gaps because of that. In the case of *A Woman's Error* and films that are missing, it requires people to have enough care and curiosity to seek out Black films. Of course, places like IU's Black Film Center & Archive are doing essential work in ensuring that that happens, [and] the Library of Congress. There are people who are invested or becoming invested in that but I think it can't just be the Black Film Center & Archive. It can't just be the Library of Congress or UCLA. I think it requires everyone who is a film practitioner to some degree to be invested in film's past, film's history, recognizing orphan films, giving them a second life. If there's a film can in their basement, bringing it to someone so we can identify it. There's a Black film archive that's very small in Texas [the Tyler, Texas, Black Film Collection], or it's a part of another archive, I believe, that they found canisters of Black films in the '80s and—

IS: These are Black films that were made when?

MC: Oh, they were made pre-1940, I believe. Them discovering these films...sparked a new era of curiosity in Black cinema's past. Ossie Davis was a champion of that happening. I was watching a screener at the Library of Congress recently, and he would come on at the beginning and he would just say in his very important voice, "The film

you're watching is the gift of someone discovering Black films in this basement and we all have to do our part." I'm just taking after Ossie Davis and telling you that we all have to do our part. Black film's future requires us all to care.

IS: Since you launched the Black Film Archive, what are some of the more surprising and unexpected responses, pleasant or otherwise [chuckles] that you've had?

MC: I was at the opening of the Academy Museum's "Regeneration," which is their exhibit on Black Cinema from 1898 to 1971. Someone came up to me, recognized me, and started crying [chuckles]. I was not expecting that at all. They were just like, "You don't know what you've done for my life." I'm like, "What?" [laughs] I don't. I've been floored by that sense. For the longest time, I wasn't thinking about how it'd be received, because I didn't feel like that was mine to carry. I was just going to do the work, get the work done, and show the work when it was done.

What happened from that, it was the community's to own. Who I did it for, it reached them and that was my intention. Honestly, every reaction has surprised me. I mean that quite honestly. I think that other things that have surprised me are people younger than me really having a newfound interest in film, because this is being delivered to them. The way that their relationship with film, which is streaming—they're streaming-first people, which is quite fascinating—that surprises me as well. I'm genuinely surprised by almost everything. [laughs]

IS: I know we talked about it briefly yesterday: what do you think is the best streamer? Is there one specific streamer where you think a lot of Black films can be found?

MC: Where Black films can be found... So, I have two different answers. I think that the best streamer generally is most likely HBO Max because it has something for everyone. It has classic film, it has modern film, it has new releases, et cetera. The best streamer for Black films, that is a difficult one. I would say Criterion Channel. It has *Losing Ground* , it has the African American Pioneers set, which is films before 1940, maybe through 1940... It has a lot.

IS: I've noticed that in the last year, the last two years in particular, Criterion Collection has been rectifying an earlier oversight. It's released in the past year films like *Devil in a Blue Dress* [1995],

Shaft [1971], Gordon Parks's *Learning Tree* [1969], the Melvin Van Peebles box set... *Malcolm X* [1992] as well.

If I were to ask you if there are five films that you feel represent the breadth and the scope and the diversity of Black film that are included in your archive, what would those five films be and why? Or more.

MC: There's a film, and the more I talk about it, the more I'll remember the name of it because I see so many films a week... [*laughs*]

IS: If I can actually bring up a title, just because I was struck by seeing it there, and I know that it just got released in [Criterion's] new World Cinema Project box set: *Sambizanga* [1972].

MC: Oh, my God, what a film. ... I think that film is really special because it centers a woman in liberation, or in the fight for liberation. I think women often are seen as caring for the home, and men are the ones fighting for liberation. This film subverts that idea, so it really is quite special.

Oscar Micheaux films, of course, show diversity, *Body and Soul* [1925] is essential, yes. Paul Robeson at his best, and the only film, I think, Paul Robeson really was able to show his range in that wasn't deeply racist. I think that there's an early Haile Gerima short that is really great, and it is called *Hour Glass* [1972].

IS: May I recommend *Ganja & Hess* [1973]?

MC: Of course, but I'm trying to dig a little deeper. *Ganja & Hess* is—it's a great film.

IS: I just love it, that's why I wanted to bring it up.

MC: It's a perfect film, no notes. Yes, it's fantastic. *A Dream Is What You Wake Up From* [1978]...

IS: Who directed it?

MC: It was co-directed by a woman [Carolyn Johnson]. It's a feature documentary. I cannot remember the woman's name at this moment, but that film shifted my life. ... It talks about poverty and it tells it through the story of three couples. It uses innovative techniques to tell its story, the documentary. It really illustrates the suffering of Black people without relishing in it, but it really hones in on that.

Madeline Anderson's work, I would also say, shows the—she's a documentarian who made films for PBS. Fantastic, fantastic films like *Integration Report One* [1960]. That's what I have for you. [laughs]

IS: I want to ask your thoughts on a recent mainstream release that's groundbreaking in its own way... *The Woman King* [2022]. It is the first Hollywood production—

MC: Yes, it's the first Hollywood film of its kind, yes. I think *The Woman King* is special. I think that it also illustrates a point that Black Film Archive does, which is that Black people are given the responsibility of representing the whole race, unlike other people or other artists. They're often put in a damned-if-you-do-damned-if-you-don't situation. *The Woman King* also specifically illustrates that Hollywood ideas of slavery need a savior regardless of what it's about, and the Hollywood ideal of the slave trade and all of that needs a morality throughline to tell its tale. I don't think that true radical filmmaking can exist in Hollywood, but I do think that Gina [Prince-Bythewood] did the best with what she was able to do, for better or for worse.

IS: Who do you think are the most exciting Black filmmakers working today?

MC: I think Jessica Beshir is changing the game. *Faya Dayi* [2021] is one of the most euphoric films I've ever seen, and it was just on PBS, and it is genuinely earth-shifting.

IS: It is also in the Criterion Collection.

MC: Yes. That is true. I think that Barry Jenkins, his ability to combine love and pain in a film and still let you walk away with this feeling of triumph after you see one of his films, is quite special. I think that Gina Prince-Bythewood has one of the most prolific careers that any Black woman director has ever had. Julie Dash is still working. I deeply implore everyone to check out Julie Dash's short films; most of them are streaming on Criterion or Kanopy, and they are genuinely great. She has such a range and I deeply respect her and all that she does.

IS: I am about to ask you a very serious question. Who do you think are the hottest actors in the Black Film Archive?

MC: Okay, I'd be remiss to not say Pam Grier, because she is the best anyone's ever looked onscreen.

IS: Any particular movie?

MC: *Coffy* [1973]? It's really hard. Pam Grier looks good in everything. She looked good in *Bless This Mess* [2019–20], which is a TV show... She's just that girl. She is the one. She's the chosen one for a reason, and she is good at what she does. *Jackie Brown* [1997], of course, she was also wonderful in. I'll also say Bill Gunn.

Audience Member: Yes!

MC: Come on. Exactly. Bill Gunn is really also the best.

IS: *Personal Problems* [1980]?

MC: *Personal Problems*, *Losing Ground*. That's a man. He looked good onscreen, and he was brilliant. You couldn't lose with Bill Gunn. He was a screenwriter, an actor, director, he did it all. He was wonderful.

IS: Before we have the audience ask you questions, I'm going to give you just words, concepts, and give me the first movie that comes to mind. "Coming-of-age."

IS: There's a film with Johnny Nash and Ruby Dee from 1959 [*Take a Giant Step*] and it's one of the earliest Black coming-of-age, true coming-of-age films, so I'm going to say that.

IS: "Romance."

MC: *Cane River*.

IS: Best Spike Lee film—or two.

MC: Best? *Malcolm X*. Second best, that's really tough. I've seen most of them. I like *School Daze* [1988]. Obviously, the answer is *Do the Right Thing* [1989] being second best. I was like, "Maybe there's something—" No, it's *Do the Right Thing*.

IS: "Enchantment."

MC: "Enchantment." What a word... I don't know. I'm enchanted by so much.

IS: Okay, we'll do one last one. "Family."

MC: There's a million films... *Crooklyn* [1994].

IS: That concludes our conversation this evening. Thank you so much for graciously and eloquently answering our questions and thank you all for being here. Thank you to IU Cinema, to Dr. Alicia Kozma, and to Brittany Friesner for having us here this evening.

MC: Thank you all. It's been wonderful. Thank you.

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