

**BLACK IS . . . BLACK AIN'T**

**PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY  
MARLON T. RIGGS**

**(TRANSCRIPT)**

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1. 00  
BLACK IS ... BLACK AIN'T

TRANSCRIPT

MARLON RIGGS :

Has anybody talked to you at all about what we're doing? You just got dragged here? Okay, we're gonna tell you a little bit. This is a documentary we're doing for public television. It's called "Black Is ... Black Ain't."

We've finally begun production ...  
Two hundred and twenty five ...  
I thought the number would be higher ...  
T-cell count down, weight down too I'm worried but I keep this to myself ...  
My weight and T-cell count are the same. What's happening to my body?

AIDS forces you, because of the likelihood that you could die at this moment, AIDS forces you to deal with that and to look around you and say, "Hey, I'm wasting my time if I'm not devoting every moment to thinking about how can I communicate to black people, so that we start to look at each other, we start to see each other."

TEXT:

MARLON RIGGS CHALLENGED RACISM AND HOMOPHOBIA WITH HIS WORK AND IN HIS LIFE.

DURING THE MAKING OF THIS FILM, HE DIED OF AIDS.

THIS FILM WAS COMPLETED IN TRIBUTE TO HIS VISION AND HUMANITY.

TITLE:

BLACK IS ... BLACK AIN'T

A PERSONAL JOURNEY THROUGH BLACK IDENTITY.

[PERFORMANCE - BLACK IS ... BLACK AIN'T CALL AND RESPONSE]

MARLON T. RIGGS :

*I said, Black is!  
Black ain't!  
Black is!  
Black ain't!*

*Black is blue!  
(So blue! so blue!)  
And Black is red!  
(Bloody red!)  
Black is tan!  
(Light as white!)  
And Black is light!  
(Tell it!)*

YVETTE FLUNDER:           *Black will git you  
(Don't I know it!)  
Black will leave you alone!  
(Preach!)  
Black can get you over  
(Talk that talk)  
Black can set you down (Tell it.)  
Black can let you move forward (Preach it.)  
Black can make you stumble around(That's the truth.)*

DJOLA BERNARD BRANNER:   *Black is so high  
(So high.)  
Black is so low  
(So low.)  
Black can say yes  
(Say it, say it)  
and Black can say no.*

LINDA TILLERY:           *Black can be your best friend!  
(Oh, yes!)  
Be cozy as the night!  
(Tell it!)  
Black can do you in!  
(Talk that talk!)  
Make you fuss and cuss and fight!  
(Uh-huh!)*

MARLON RIGGS:           *Black is Black  
Black is Blue  
Black is Bright  
Black is You*

• • •

MARLON RIGGS:           To tell the truth, there's nothing better in this world than my Big  
Mama's Gumbo. I guess it's because it's got a little bit of everything in  
it.

BIG MAMA:               Well there goes the Gumbo . . .

MARLON RIGGS:           Everything that you can imagine can be put into gumbo. Shrimp,  
crayfish, sausage, alligator sausage, pork sausage, crab . . .

ANGELA DAVIS:           What does black mean? It seems very difficult to define in any absolute  
sense what it means to be black.

MARLON RIGGS:           Seasoned just nicely, you don't want the broth to overpower the roux.  
Cook it and it just has a nice sort of aromatic flavor with the spices. . .

MAULANA KARENGA :       The most definitive identity any black person has is blackness.

MARLON RIGGS:           If it gets too thick, it's like you're tasting that but you can't really get

BARBARA SMITH: to the ingredients that make the gumbo. . .  
There are as many kinds of black people as there are black people to be.  
There are so many variations on the theme.

MARLON RIGGS: It cooks all night and all day. Ooh, it is wonderful. It's just inviting.  
You walk in and it's like "Aaah, mmm.. Come on here to the kitchen."  
(Laughs)

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MARLON RIGGS: When I was a boy, the nation was in turmoil. Though, to be honest,  
much of what was going on was at the periphery of my life. Still I was  
aware enough of the changes to try to convince one of my friends one  
day, that it was time for him to stop using the word "colored."

[PERFORMANCE - MARLON RIGGS] *"Edward Lee," I said, "you ain't colored no more, you black."  
"No, I ain't," he shot back.  
"Yes you is," I said.  
"No, I ain't," he insisted.*

*Now, to be real, Edward Lee was so dark he could have passed as one of  
the original Africans. But back then it was an insult to call somebody  
"African" or "black," so I knew why he was upset, still, I wanted him  
to see the new light.*

*"Edward Lee, you black." "Colored,"  
"Nobody is colored any more. 'colored'  
is the white man's word. You black  
and should be proud."*

*"Take it back," he said, his voice low.  
"No, I'm not."  
"Take it back," he repeated, tense.  
"For what? It's the truth!"  
"Take it back, or I'll beat your black ass."  
"Uh oh."*

Edward Lee was big. I started moving backwards. "Edward Lee, I don't  
know why you so mad. Ain't nothing to get mad about. Black is  
b..b..beautiful. You black, I 'm black, my Mama's black." Now that  
stopped him. Anybody so willing to insult his own mama must be  
serious. That day, I escaped Edward Lee's punches and held my own  
all at the same time. I was proud.

MARLON RIGGS: For the longest, of course, being black wasn't always so beautiful. A  
sixteenth century Oxford dictionary provides a clue to the word's  
meaning before we redefined it.

VARIOUS VOICES: -Black: deeply stained with dirt; soiled, dirty, foul.  
-Having dark or deadly purposes, malignant.  
-Black: pertaining to, or involving death; deadly, baneful, disastrous,  
sinister.  
-Iniquitous, atrocious, horrible, wicked.

- MARLON RIGGS: -Black: indicating disgrace, censure, liability to punishment.  
And remember the children's rhymes?  
"Jump back Jack.  
Your hands too black  
Look like you been . . ."
- CHILDREN'S VOICES : Jump back Jack  
Your hands too black  
Look like you been working on the railroad track  
Clickety clack, clickety clack, clickety clack.
- Jump back Jack  
Your hands too black  
Look like you been working on the railroad track  
Clickety clack, clickety clack, clickety clack.
- If you're red go ahead  
If you're brown stick around  
If you're black get back
- If you're yellow you're mellow  
If you're white you're right  
If you're red go ahead  
If you're brown stick around  
If you're black get back
- TEXT: "I FOUND ALWAYS THE BLACKEST NEGRO BEING MADE THE  
BUTT OF ALL JOKES"  
- Zora Neale Hurston -
- FLORENCE BORDERS: People use all kinds of terms to avoid saying black. You could be dark brown, medium brown, ridiculous things, but definitely there was not the concept of 'black is beautiful' that later evolved.
- ANGELA DAVIS: When I was growing up, as was your experience, you didn't call anybody black unless you were ready to fight. And the very worst thing you could call anybody was a black African. Right(laughs) "You black African."
- ELTING SMALLS: That was a fighting piece. "Don't call me black, I don't like that."  
Why I didn't like it? Because people in my community of a different color made me feel so inferior: "Why your hair so kinky? Why you lips so big? Why your nose so big?"
- CHILDREN'S VOICES: If you're black get back, if you're red, go ahead if you're brown, stick around. . .
- ANGELA DAVIS: In the sixties, we began to say "black is beautiful." That was a slogan that indicated a politics of struggle.

ELTING SMALLS:

But later on in life, I learned that this nose was good and pretty. One guy came along, name was Stokely Carmichael, said "black is beautiful." And then we realized that black is beautiful. This kinky hair could go all kinds of ways, this brown, nice brown chocolate skin looks so nice could be all kinds of color, you know. And then we begin to realize that: I am somebody.

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CHRISTIANE BADGLEY:

How does it feel to be back in the hospital?

MARLON RIGGS:

I'm not happy to be back here, you know. It's hard, its boring, its like one week of it and I'm just bored. Its like how did I endure six months of it last year, you know, from November to May or so? And already here now I want to get out.

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MARLON RIGGS:

When I was a boy, every year we took a trip to Louisiana where most of my cousins lived. It was a journey I always looked forward to.

My family ranged from every shade, every shade you can imagine. Now, in Baton Rouge all of us were a little bit darker. But if you cross the river to New Orleans, all the family was lighter, in fact, some of them so light they could pass as white. But I just, you know, I didn't even think about it.

TEXT:

"WE'RE A THOUSAND AND ONE DIFFERENT COLORS."  
- Malcolm X-

ULYSSES S. RICARD, JR:

I grew up very confused. I really did. You know, I never really talk about this much, but I did grow up confused because I didn't exactly know, you know, where I actually fit in in the world. Because we were never taught to consider ourselves black.

BRITISH VOICE:

When we reach the mulatto group we begin to get two extreme types, which, for convenience, we shall call "dominants" and "recessives," and a third type which we shall call "intermediate."

ULYSSES S. RICARD, JR:

I could not use the word black to describe my father. If I ever called my father black, you know, I would have got a spanking or possibly worse, because he did not consider himself to be black. He did not want to be black and he was Creole.

FLORENCE BORDERS:

When I was growing up, I heard people who were white call themselves Creole. I heard people who were black call themselves Creole. I heard these people speak to each other every day in Creole and I, the people who called themselves Creole ranged the whole color gamut.

VARIOUS VOICES:

- Combien de dollars est-ce que votre okra? ...
- Dix-huit pieces
- How much?
- Dix-huit pieces...
- Dix-huit
- You speak at all sir?
- Yeah,I speak a little Italian and French.
- Are you a Creole?
- Yeah, yeah, my, my, I'm supposed to be
- You're supposed to be, what does that mean?
- Well, that's what my people told me
- That's what they told you. What does it mean?
- What?
- What does it mean?
- That mean a little French, and then ah, you kind of mix up, you know, a little French.
- Really. Does it have anything to do with being light skinned or dark skinned black person.
- No, they got people darker than you as Creole. Yeah, darker than you is Creole...

FLORENCE BORDERS:

And later, as I grew up and started being able to move a little bit beyond my neighborhood, I learned about some people who had concepts of Creole as something other than cultural who had concepts of Creole as maybe being a racial or a biological heritage.

TEXT:

"IF IT WAS SO GLORIOUS TO BE BLACK, WHY WAS IT THE YELLOW-SKINNED PEOPLE HAD SO MUCH PRESTIGE?"

- Zora Neale Hurston-

ULYSSES S. RICARD, JR:

My family used to have picnics out in the country, and they would turn dark-skinned black people away. You know, they would not let them come in. My grandfather had a first cousin who was blind who lived in Baton Rouge and they would sit him at the door . He would take a comb, and if he couldn't pass the comb through your hair you couldn't come in.

BRITISH VOICE:

In this study, six degrees of curvature or types of hair forms are recognized: straight; low waves; deep waves; curly; frizzly and woolly.

ANGELA DAVIS :

My friends used to tease and my hair. One of the things I do remember is going to a Brownie Camp or Girl Scouts Camp, outside of Birmingham, and it started to rain...

TEXT:

"IT'S NEGRO HAIR, BUT IT'S GOT A KIND OF WHITE FLAVOR."

- Zora Neale Hurston-

ANGELA DAVIS:

...all the girls who had probably just had their hair straightened for camp, right, started to run. And I didn't run cause my mother wouldn't let me straighten my hair, as much as I wanted to and I remember the

girls teasing me, "Oh, you just think you got good hair, you don't have to get out of the rain."

FLORENCE BORDERS:

The good hair was the hair that didn't require straightening and the bad hair was the hair that did require the straightening.

ALINE ST. JULIEN:

I just didn't like setting my hair and pampering myself like that, so I decided to go natural. Mama would say, "What you gonna do with you hair?" I'd say "I'm going to leave it like it is, this is my natural hair." One of my aunts said, "You look like an African." So I started making gyrations, you know, start dancing [she mimics dance] "Huh, Huh, Huh."

ELTING SMALLS:

When I came along it was "Negro". Later on it was changed to "black". Later on it changed to "Afro-American." I don't know what we are going to change to next, but we've been changing so fast, I don't think we know what we are ourselves.

ANGELA DAVIS :

I think we have such an obsession with naming ourselves because during most of our history we we've been named by somebody else.

ALINE ST JULIEN :

I am black, female, Catholic, colored, Negro, African,American. So it is all those things together.

MARLON RIGGS:

All of those words, when we took them into our own culture, became, I think, affirmations of who we are. Rather than ways which society at large put us down.

AIDS is central to the catalyst that's pushing me to deal with identity on the global perspective. The connection between AIDS and black folks and black folks' identity is metaphoric. Both of them are a struggle against the odds in the face of adversity, in the face of possible extinction. How do we keep ourselves together as a people in the face of all of our differences? How do we maintain a sense of communal self-hood, if you will?

Who is in the community and who's not? I mean there has been a history of excluding other black folk from community in this country to the detriment I think of our empowerment as an overall people.

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TEACHER (to class):

You may begin.

GIRL STUDENT:

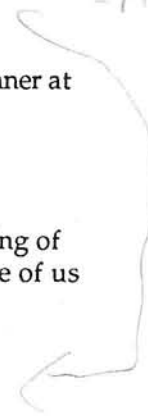
My picture's about when I'm a doctor and I am about to go to dinner at the hospital which they have, in the lunch room.

[Music under "To Be Young, Gifted and Black" by Nina Simone]

MARLON RIGGS:

The song provokes painful memory. Health, innocence, the feeling of possibilities. Weren't we all so eager and capable then, each one of us to uplift the race? Jubilation.

2 Black Pause?  
= Male Pause





[ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE]  
STOKELY CARMICHAEL:  
MARLON RIGGS:

*We want black power, black power,...*  
Contradiction. All the time we were saying it loud and proclaiming the beauty of our blackness, a deep wedge of silence divided me from my father. We didn't talk, literally. Like so many other black boys and their fathers, we confronted each other across a chasm of silence.

[POETRY PERFORMANCE - LARRY DUCKETTE & WAYSON JONES AMERICAN FAMILY, 1984" BY ESSEX HEMPHILL]

*If there were seven blind men  
(one of them unable to speak)  
unable to hear, would be my father.  
(my father)  
He would be the one, promising to deliver  
(promising to deliver)  
what never arrives.*

*He would be the bridge,  
which on one side I stand feeling doomed  
(unable to speak)  
to never forgive him  
(unable to hear)  
for the violence in our pasts  
(forgive him)*

*While on the other side  
he vigorously waves to me to cross over  
(promising to deliver)  
but he doesn't know  
(forgive him)  
the bridge has fallen through.*

*If there were seven blind men,  
the one unable to hear  
(he would be the one)  
would be my father.  
The one unable to speak  
(feeling doomed)  
his son.*

MARLON RIGGS:

At that time to be a black man required this code of silence. You didn't express feelings. You weren't hurt, couldn't acknowledge hurt and pain and rage and anger. And what that engendered was silence. No one talked to each other, because that would have been admitting vulnerability and vulnerability was associated with being feminine. Black masculinity, black manhood. Isn't that ultimately what it became all about? The redemption of an emasculated male identity. 21.47

BELL HOOKS:

When we translate the history of black oppression, sexually especially, through the writings of George Jackson, Eldridge Cleaver, it's all sexualized into emasculation and castration so the reclamation of the black race gets translated into "it's a dick thing." That's why 22.18

I'm fond of saying, "if the black thing is really a dick thing in disguise, we're in serious trouble." Because it is like a kind of worship of the phallus.

ESSEX HEMPHILL :

You can buy into the popular stereotypes and run around holding your dick and thinking you gotta to fuck everything in sight to prove that you are a man, to prove that you have that stamina and that virility, and you're not to be fucked with.

[EXCERPT FROM "RAW"]

EDDIE MURPHY:

*We are men, all men do it. We have to do it, we are men, it is a man thing. Men must find and conquer as much pussy as they can get. Do not think for two seconds that you're the only one your man is fucking. He is a man and all men have to conquer women. . .*

BELL HOOKS :

That's why, for example, Eddie Murphy's "RAW" fascinated me so. I mean when he, when he says in that film that a woman doesn't want to hear that you love her, she wants to know you will fuck her to death and he's doing that, you know, and in the audience when I saw that, black men we're giving black power salutes, and I was thinking damn, this is just so serious, this idea that, you know, we need to reclaim the space of that erect brutalizing phallus as our identity as a people.

CORNEL WEST:

The dominant conception of being a black male today is still one in which the body's highly sexualized, in which one identifies with a certain kind of, ah, sexual prowess, in which one does in fact feel as if one is an object of fear, at times disgust, not just from white America, not a bunch of white Americans, but from black America as well. And hence I think it's very difficult ah, ah, you know, being a black male, getting in contact with one's humanity. Very, very difficult.

ESSEX HEMPHILL:

What about the heart? What about his mind? What about his vision?

BILL T. JONES:

Couldn't be sensitive, couldn't cry, couldn't be afraid because of these notions I had about what it meant to be a black man.

ESSEX HEMPHILL:

I didn't like being pounded into the ground. That wasn't my idea of becoming a man.

MICHAEL FRANTI:

I know that for myself in growing up it was, a lot of times it was just a survival technique to be able to put on that toughness.

ESSEX HEMPHILL:

I'll play some basketball, I'll play some football, I'll get some pussy you know I'll beat up a few people, I'll run in a gang, just be a boy, that's be a boy on his way to being a man.

L.A. MALE YOUTH 1:

I'm a young man. I ain't a man yet. Cause there's still some stuff I'm not responsible for. I don't take responsibility for some of my actions so I guess I ain't a man yet, you know. I'm a young man, that's how I see myself.

MARLON RIGGS:

What about you all?

YOUTH 2:

I'm a young man, too.

- MARLON RIGGS: What does manhood mean to you, though?
- YOUTH 2: I don't know (pause).
- MARLON RIGGS: Black manhood. Black masculinity. Historical sore spots. For centuries, American culture had regarded us as playful eunuchs, laughing, singing Sambos, childlike in our disposition. While black women were seen as strong and often, because of this, unwomanly, our men were considered weak. Is there any wonder then that when black men finally achieved public voice, the top priority was restoring what society had repeatedly stolen from us?
- TEXT: "THE CORNERSTONE UPON WHICH RESTS . . . ALL OF OUR DIFFICULTIES IS YOUR UNWILLINGNESS TO RECOGNIZE THE NEGRO AS A MAN"  
- Roscoe Dunjee -
- VARIOUS MALE VOICES: "The time has come for the black man . . ."  
"What the black man in Babylon needs is organized black power . . ."  
"In World War II, 850,000 black men fought and we were promised freedom and we didn't get it. . ."  
"The only thing that's going to free Huey is gunpowder . . ."  
"We came to this country as black men and as Africans . . ."
- MARLON RIGGS: With so many words about the black man, one had to wonder: Where were all our women? And what of their redemption?
- ANGELA DAVIS: When we said "black is beautiful" in the late sixties, that meant the black man is beautiful." There is this tendency now to want to constantly rehabilitate the black man as patriarch, and I have problems with positing that as the goal of the community. Yes, I struggle with and for my brother. I speak with and for my brother. But I think my brother has an equal responsibility to speak with and for me.
- BARBARA SMITH: I entered graduate school the same year I finished college. That was 1969, one of those apocryphal years, you know. And I really thought that I would never be politically active again, because nationalism was so deep. If there was any time in my life when I felt like a *persona non grata*, just like out in the stratosphere was in those first years of graduate school. I didn't think I was any less capable of making decisions and doing positive work than anyone regardless of gender. I didn't think that because I was female that I was supposed to somehow get stupid.
- ANGELA DAVIS: Twenty-five years ago, there was someone in this organization who argued that the role of women was to wear long African dresses, to organize cocktails parties and to convince rich men to donate money to the organization. Now, this particular person actually came in and dismantled the whole structure that we had because he felt that the

women had too much power.

[EXCERPT FROM "THE DONAHUE SHOW"]

PHIL DONAHUE : *Let me see if I've got the consequences of this, now. In addition to all this, the black, in addition to the myth of the black macho man, we also have the myth of the super black woman.*

MICHELE WALLACE: *Right.*

DONAHUE : *I mean you're strong, you can take anything. Boy, look at her caring for those kids.*

MICHELE WALLACE : *And that is the way we got ripped off, that was , was the way we got ripped off you see, because we had always been strong and we didn't, we didn't suffer, we didn't have pain. We didn't suffer the way that they did, because we had all the jobs, and it was easy for us, and we were just laying up with the slave master. I mean, all sorts of ridiculousness was said and was believed by not just black men, but black women and by America at large.*

MICHELE WALLACE : *I just think that black feminists have not been good at critiquing the black male sexism. Because of the oppression that we suffer as a people, I think that it just becomes the job no one wants to do. You know, everybody knows about it. It's well known. It's well understood by black women and black men... and yet um, nobody is supposed to speak about it publicly. I did so. Um... and I think that, you know, was sort of the significant departure.*

MARLON RIGGS: *And you were punished?*

MICHELE WALLACE : *And I was punished for that, yes. Yes, I was punished, (pause) that's true, still being punished actually, I think.*

BARBARA SMITH: *Black women can be and have been resistant to black feminism because they're concerned about losing approval from black men. This is not an unfounded fear because often, ah, to speak out about difficult issues is to be ostracized, is to be criticized. But I think that there are some black women, including myself, who feel that speaking truth to power is far far far more valuable than bowing and taking it.*

MARLON RIGGS : *There's a cure for what ails us as a people, and that is for us to talk to each other. We have got to start talking about the ways in which we hurt each other and the ways in which we hurt each other is also through silence. Because nobody can unload the pain or the shame or the guilt by not speaking.*

[POETRY PERFORMANCE -ESSEX HEMPHILL "THE FATHER, SON AND UNHOLY GHOST" (POEM #6)  
BY ESSEX HEMPHILL]

*In my loneliest gestures  
learning to live  
with less is less.*

*I never wanted  
to be your son.  
You never made the choice  
to be my father.*

*What we have learned  
from no textbook --  
how to live  
without one another,  
how to evade  
the stainless truth,  
how to store our waste  
in tombs beneath the heart  
knowing at any moment  
it could leak out.*

*Do we expect to survive?  
What are we prepared for?  
Trenched off,  
communications down,  
angry in alien tongues.  
We use extreme weapons  
to ward off one another.*

*Some nights  
our opposing reports  
are heard as we dream.  
Silence is  
our deadliest weapon.  
We both use it.  
Precisely.  
Often.*

• • •

1:30.51

-32:44  
3. Music/History/AF@

[FADE UP BLUES MUSIC]

MALE VOICE #1:

We have basically everything, you know, everything all the other states have, but we have a little blues, you know, we have more blues because Mississippi is the heart, you know, the heart of the blues greats, such as umm B.B. King and Z.Z. Hill.

MALE VOICE #2 :

All blues songs to me have meaning to it. Cause they're talking about where they're coming from, and their nature and things like that.

FEMALE VOICE #1:

I feel like the blues have a lot of meaning to me, like regular songs around, you know, like you can't really find the meaning in some songs, but in blues they have a lot of meaning.

MARLON RIGGS:

You listen to blues?

YOUNG MALE:

No, sir. (laughs)

MARLON RIGGS:

Why not?

YOUNG MALE : It's too moody, blues is too moody for me. I like, I listen to R & B and I listen to Reggae and I listen to rap music.

MARLON RIGGS: Black music.

CHRISTIANE BADGLEY: What's it all about?

MARLON RIGGS: What's it all about? These are the profiles of black musical composers who have maintained higher standards throughout the years.

TEXT: AND NOW A FEW WORDS FROM THE WORLD'S PRE-EMINENT AUTHORITY ON BLACK MUSIC, ESTEEMED SCHOLAR OF AFRO-RHYTHMIC TONAL PERMUTATIONS, AND DISTINGUISHED FELLOW AT THE BOOTSY COLLINS' FOUNDATION FOR MUSICAL KINESTHESIA AND FUNKY BADNESS.

MARLON RIGGS: They have brought us from slavery: (Sings)

TEXT: SPIRITUALS

MARLON RIGGS (singing): "Swing low, sweet chariot..."

TEXT: JAZZ

MARLON RIGGS (singing): "Badoo, ba ba dum dom, dum, dum."

TEXT: FREEDOM SONGS

MARLON RIGGS (singing): "I woke up this morning with my mind standing..."

TEXT: BLUES

MARLON RIGGS (singing): "My baby's gone and don't know what to do, shum . . ."

TEXT: OPERA

MARLON RIGGS (singing): "Aaaaaa....."

TEXT: FUNK

MARLON RIGGS (singing): "Turn this mother out . . ."

TEXT: ?

MARLON RIGGS (singing): "Baun nacon . . . ."

TEXT: THIS PRESENTATION IS NOW COMPLETED

MARLON RIGGS: You know what's black music? The music of this world. And that music has been so influential. In fact, without it you can't even imagine what music might be on this earth. It's been such a crucial part of our

heritage. I mean, beyond the entertainment value, it too is what binds us together as a people. That creation and recreation, from generation to generation.

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MALE TEENAGER #1: I'm just saying I hate history period because I don't like studying things that people did before, you know, it's just all about what's going on now. People gotta do now, they can't keep looking back on stuff that happened a long time ago.

FEMALE TEENAGER #1 : You see, to me history is important because you have to look back. History repeats itself, you know, maybe you can look back on something that happened a long time ago and it could help you now. History repeats itself.

MALE TEENAGER #2: It's alright to know who Martin Luther King and Harriet Tubman, you know, know what they done and, you know, all that. But, like you said, history, ain't no need for that. You know, you better look for the future. Study the future, you know, them computers and technology and all that stuff. You know, chains tied on your ankles and stuff, that ain't gonna help you. You better try learning that IBM computer or something. Only the real, for real, you know.

FEMALE TEENAGER #1: History is more that chains on your ankles and knowing this black leader and knowing that black leader, it's much more to history than that. I mean the thing with black people is, if you want to be black you don't want to know your black history! You want to forget about your black history.

MALE TEENAGER #2 : It's alright to know, you know, know about them people and what they've done. What's Martin Luther King gonna do for you now? What's Harriet Tubman gonna do for you right now?

FEMALE TEENAGER #1: It's not only Harriet. She don't make history, Malcolm don't make history.

MALE TEENAGER #2 : Is he gonna cook you dinner? Is he gonna come buy your kids some shoes next month?

MALE TEENAGER #1 : Is he gonna get you that job on the interview tomorrow?

FEMALE TEENAGER #1: No, that's not it. That's not it.

MALE TEENAGER # 2: I'm thankful for what they done and, you know ...

MALE TEENAGER # 3: It's like you're saying, "Thank you, but to hell with you."

FEMALE TEENAGER # 1: Yeah, thank you but no thank you.

MALE TEENAGER # 2: No I'm saying, I'm saying, I'm thankful for it, but what is it gonna do for you now? What good is it gonna do for you now?

ELTING SMALLS : We seek after knowledge, and if knowledge is kept from you then I

would say you're gonna be dumb, you know. That's why our white brothers didn't tell us about all these heroes and heroines that we have had in our race, because that is knowledge and they don't want you to become too knowledgeable.

- FLORENCE BORDERS: Africans were represented as people from the dark continent and they were always represented as superstitious, savage.
- BARBERSHOP MAN: Remember we have an identity crisis brother. At one time you call a brother an African, he wanna get mad with you, you call a brother black he wanna fight you. Now, we coming to the focal point that we're black and we're African. And now we are of African descent. We are black people and so now we're starting to adopt the true identity of who we really are.
- FLORENCE BORDERS: When the Ethiopian and Italian war of the thirties occurred, there were people who then developed a feeling of affinity to Africa. I imagine they knew all along they were Africans but that war kind of brought it out because some blacks actually went over to help the Ethiopians. They identified with the Ethiopians.
- YOUNG BOY : When I hear the word Africa and what it means to me is it brings me back and it makes my mind go back to my ancestors.
- YOUNG GIRL: I have a vision of Africa as a very nice place where I would like to go. I like that my ancestors came from that place and I don't like that my ancestors were taken away from that place.
- YOUNG BOY: When I hear about my ancestors it gives me strength to know that they did very good, and they survived, most of them survived slavery. So that gives me courage to go on.
- AFRICAN VILLAGE CHIEF : If you don't have a knowledge of who your ancestors are then of course you're lost. Who are your ancestors, what is your true root?
- AFRICAN VILLAGE KING: I'm His Royal Highness Oba Osejeman Adefunmi the First. Oba King of Oyotunji, the only African Village in America, or at least the first.
- AFRICAN VILLAGE QUEEN: I am Her Royal Grace Iya Orite Olasowo of the Oyotunji African Village, located in Beaufort County, South Carolina.
- AFRICAN VILLAGE KING: We realized that we could not really develop African civilization and culture to its fullest degree in an American city, so it became necessary then to leave the urban areas and found our own community.
- AFRICAN VILLAGE CHIEF: This village means first of all a re-affirmation of self, my personal self identity. This village also means to me a restoration and a preservation of some of the very, very ancient customs and traditions of our ancestors. I would say to those, those Afro-Americans who have somewhat lost their identity, because if they've changed to another lifestyle, or they've patterned themselves after another race and picked up the values and the customs of another race, then I would say



to them that they're not really living within the confines of their true identity.

ANGELA DAVIS:

I love kente cloth. I have kente cloth in my house and I wear kente cloth but I don't confuse that with my identity. Because I can wear kente cloth, but I can also put on a pair of jeans and I feel just as black as I did when I had the kente cloth on.

ESSEX HEMPHILL :

Putting on our kentes and whatever cloths and importing from West Africa, all of that's really wonderful, I say all of that's really wonderful, whatever makes you know, your spirit rise, then by all means nurture it in that way, if that's what it takes for you, if that's the affirmation that it takes. But that doesn't then give you the privilege to beat someone else down just because they don't wanna change their name or wear African cloths or stay in the inner city .

MAULANA KARENGA:

The African proverb says, "no matter how well the house is built and no matter how high it stands, it must stand on something" and that something is our tradition. So that that appreciation for tradition evolves into the modern conversation called Afrocentricity, which means centeredness in Africa.

MAN #1 IN BARBERSHOP:

Most young brothers all they know is that they come from slavery, but if they knew about the antiquities of old, the Egyptian civilization, how we were ruled 10,000 years before the Greeks came in and conquered. If we was to know that we were descendants of kings and queens

MAN #2 IN BARBERSHOP:

We're not taught about Imhoptep. Imhoptep who was a chief physician, a Grand Vizier, a poet, musician and a pyramid builder for the Djoser. So we got to study the in depth, the, like my brother said, the antiquity. Learn about we have great people of that stature. Then we will build a pride and an enrichment of ourself. Then we're like "Hey, I am somebody," as Jesse Jackson would say. Then you know you're real.

BELL HOOKS :

There is no decolonization process that doesn't require us to reclaim our past. So there is, to me, something very positive in having black people who used to despise the word "Africa" find a way to lay claim to that diasporic connection and experience, when it comes into the kind of fundamentalism that wants to make that Africa superior. You know, those black folks who tell me, "We don't have to deal with sexism because, don't you think that in ancient Africa we were kings and queens, we were equal?" I mean that is some bullshit, like let's get real.

BARBARA SMITH :

One of the things that we do here is to mythologize our African past, since it was snatched away from us. And to make assertions about that past that are not necessarily true. We don't know for a fact that there was not lesbian and gay existence in Africa, in fact, anthropological research indicates that indeed there was. So, like, to be condemned on the basis of myths, that's really very difficult for me.

1:42.39

4. Sexism/Patriarchy

• • •

MARLON RIGGS :

Six months ago I weighed 140 pounds, 145. I weighed 110 when I went into the hospital. My T-cell count, I know it was around 125,135 which is low, but still it was enough to make me feel I had a little meat to my, my cells. I've dropped to 10 T-cells and then I just stopped counting because it became irrelevant. More important was, how do I feel?

• • •

BELL HOOKS :

My father used to come home from work hummin' a tune, and I mean that tune was like a terroristic threat.

AFRICAN VILLAGE CHIEF:

In every society the male and the female have a specific designated role. All of us have our roles to play.

BELL HOOKS :

When we heard that tune hittin' those steps, we knew that we had to get ourselves in order, right.

AFRICAN VILLAGE CHIEF :

And always, you will find that the males were put in a more authoritative position.

BELL HOOKS :

My dad didn't have to speak honey, he had to hum his tune.

AFRICAN VILLAGE CHIEF:

This is the way the Gods had ordered things.

BELL HOOK :

He didn't have to come in and say, "Do this, do that, I'm the ruler here." It was all taking place.

SOUTHERN PREACHER :

The Bible teaches us that the head of Christ is God and the head of man is Christ, and the head of woman is man. Now who am I to change that?

BELL HOOKS :

Once, you know, I think that my father heard that my mother was having an affair with somebody or you know, and he came home from work, and he got his gun...

SOUTHERN PREACHER :

There is no way. I say there is, is just no way that the woman can be the first partaker of the fruit.

BELL HOOKS :

And I remember my father screaming, "I will kill you!" That very night he said, you know, "This is my house, I will not have this!" And she had to pack her bags.

[EXCERPT FROM "FALLEN CHAMP: THE UNTOLD STORY OF MIKE TYSON"]

MINISTER LOUIS FARRAKHAN:

*You're bringing a hawk into the chicken yard, and wondering why the chicken got eaten up? (clapping)*

BELL HOOKS :

It's like when you're a kid and you think your parents are equal, but when I saw my mother weeping and packing her bags and throwing her shit into suitcases and I thought, "he has the power to do this."

MINISTER LOUIS FARRAKHAN :

*You bring Mike to a beauty contest, and all these fine, foxes just parading in front of Mike. And Mike's eyes begin to dance like a hungry*

*man looking at a Wendy's beef burger or something.*

BELL HOOKS : When my uncles came to get her, the other patriarchs came to get her, I expected there would be some discussion, that they would try to convince my father that you can't do this, you can't um throw her out of what is her house as well. But it was like one patriarch has spoken and the other patriarchs had nodded their head, if the woman has done wrong, you gotta punish her.

MINISTER LOUIS FARRAKHAN : *She says, "No, Mike, no." I mean how many times, sisters, have you said "no" and you mean "yes" all the time? Wait, wait, wait. I'm talking to women now. We gonna talk now. I mean, the day of the B.S. is all over. You not dealing with a man that don't know you. And the damned deceitful games that you play.*

BELL HOOKS: This man is saying he's going to kill our Mamma, who takes care of us every day and we're just going to go up and go to bed and go to sleep? And I, I never forgave my sisters and brothers for a long time for the fact that they actually went up and went to bed and went to sleep. Where I was like no, I can't go upstairs and go to sleep, I've got to witness this, witness this, witness this, witness this.

MARLON RIGGS: It's not so much for me manhood that we're trying to reach, that we're emulating. It's, rather, human and all the complexities of being human. Which includes being feminine so that when men can be feminine as well as manly -- whatever those terms mean to you -- but when you can be both comfortably, then you've achieved what it is, I think it is, to be a man, which is to be human.

When you think of yourself, is there a woman within you?

BILL T. JONES: Oh, yeah, yeah, many, many.

MARLON RIGGS: Describe the women within.

BILL T. JONES: Um they're black, uhh She is black, she is, uhh, she's got stature. She swaggers and sways when she walks, she is strong, great sense of humor. Spiritual. She sings beautifully. She loves the man in me -- who is black, sensitive, strapping, he's a good parent, good brother. He dances, he leaps, he's wild when he moves, when he leaps. He and she walk together, and they run together like two animals running. And they roll around together. And they become one. And that's Bill.

• • •

MARLON RIGGS: When you see the scenes of me naked, running through the woods, which I will hope you will use an abundance of, those things had a powerful image for me in terms of searching through clutter in my life, searching through the clutter of the project uhh, searching through uhh the attempts by society at large to cover you and into confine you in some space in which you're not seen for the naked truth of who you are.

Those scenes are critical in their metaphoric importance. Well, I mean its easy for me to make the parallels of being confined and lost in woods and a community confined by it's own limited notions of identity. You see? That's not a great leap for me. And I can say that or write it actually as text, cause I don't know if I want to record more narration.

CHRISTIANE BADGLEY:

Well, we've been recording this, we can, you know, we can work with it.

MARLON RIGGS:

Just the woods, the rivers, you know the steamboats, all of that. My own living memory. The moss trees and old shacks and . . .

• • •

BARBARA SMITH :

Many people would say that I am not a member of the black community. In fact, many of the people who are viewing this would say , "She says she's a lesbian, oh no, that doesn't cut it." But the thing is I know I'm a part of the black community in every single way that is important.

TEXT:

"HOMOSEXUALITY IS A DEVIATION FROM AFROCENTRIC THOUGHT."

- Molefi Asante -

MARLON RIGGS:

It's obvious, because of our sexuality, we've been treated as outcasts, to be gay or to be lesbian is not to be black. To be black is to be heterosexual.

ESSEX HEMPHILL :

This idea that, um, somehow my blackness is diminished because I love a, a man, is purely out of that sense that black men have been chattled, black men have been lynched, black men have been shot, beaten, brutalized by the police, the government, every which way, etc. So that some people view black homosexuality as the final break in masculinity. And don't see the love, don't see the empowerment, don't see the caring the sharing, don't see the contributions.

MARLON RIGGS:

A gay man organized the 1963 March on Washington, Bayard Rustin. Could he come out at that time? No. What happened to him after that singular event? He was drummed out of the Civil Rights movement by black preachers who didn't want to be associated with anybody homosexual. And yet, what brought them to that March wouldn't have happened without him.

TEXT:

"TRUE NIGGERS AIN'T FAGGOTS"

- Ice Cube -

MARLON RIGGS:

Jason, dear Jason, ...

[EXCERPT FROM "PORTRAIT OF JASON"]

JASON :

*Some of them looking like girls but they ain't girls. I mean, they got some drag queens in Harlem, that are together. I mean, they coming and out and they got fur coats and collars and wigs for days. And I mean they don't slouch down the Avenue like no East Side maid, these*

*broads tip, like you know.*

MARLON RIGGS:

Dear Jason, when the people sang the freedom songs...

JASON :

*Mom said, you know, that's Mamma children up there, you all a little funny ,but you can't help it. You know, somebody got to give you a break.*

MARLON RIGGS :

When the people sang the freedom songs, do you think they also sang them for you?

JASON :

*Yeah, it gets next to you that you're living some bullshit that really shouldn't exist but you're saying: "I guess this is my life," you know,"And I'm gonna swing with it."*

MARLON RIGGS :

How long, Jason? How long have they sung about the freedom and the righteousness and the beauty of the black man and ignored you? How long? Oh, dear fathers, tell me what to do. I search for ancestral affirmation to find only this: pathos, or worse: historic erasure. How much longer can I walk this winding road?

[POETRY PERFORMANCE -WAYNE CORBITT "I CANNOT GO HOME AS WHO I AM" BY WAYNE CORBITT] :

*I cannot go home as who I am  
It seems  
Unredeemed by what blood  
Lost ?  
Unsaved by what grace?  
And unnatural by whose standard?  
They say  
That this is not true  
Manifold wonder  
They say  
Hold tight  
And oh yes, My, my, my lord have mercy  
And cry  
Try, I try, I try  
I cannot go home as who I am  
Past are the notions  
past what was past  
remembrance past  
Honey chile!  
Say what to laughing  
me oh my, oh my, oh my, oh my,  
And I cannot go home as who I am*

MARLON RIGGS:

As a child, the church did offer a sense of belonging, you know, I mean a sense of community. And that's important, I think, for anyone who wants to be nurtured in an environment, and environment of support and love, uh, in coming together.

MISSISSIPPI FEMALE TEENAGER :

I am very religious because I go to church every Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. And I believe that religion should play a very important part in everyone's life.

- MISSISSIPPI MALE TEENAGER : Here in Mississippi, uhh, religion it is often exaggerated to the point where the child is uhh the child is enclosed, you know, you can't even, some people I know, some females I know, they can't even, you know, hardly come outside or watch videos or anything like that. And for punishment, you know, they either get beat with a Bible, or they have to stand in the corner with a Bible in their arms. And that kind of makes me, uhh, that kind of makes me turn my head, you know, to some religions.
- MARLON RIGGS: There's no way that one can look at the progress of black people in this county, from slavery on, without acknowledging the wonderful role that the church has played. I mean the church was the beacon towards freedom, but it remains, unfortunately, structured in this way in which people are denied freedom and the opportunity to explain their greater humanity.
- SOUTHERN PREACHER: God loves the individual, but God does not love the homosexual part. You see what I'm saying, the sin that is involved, God does not love. As a person, God loves the individual.
- BARBARA SMITH: I think that, uh, recent homophobic initiatives being led by the Black church, that's not about community. That's the opposite.
- ELTING SMALLS: Religion is to bring mankind together, not to disperse mankind, so when you find something that we call religion that's dividing and separating mankind, it's not religion. It's better not to have it.
- MISSISSIPPI WOMAN : If you love then you will do love, regardless to what's happening. You don't, you don't show resentment because love don't show hostility. Love don't give you the mind to get back at a person who has mistreated you, because you're so busy looking forward and waiting for the guidance of the Lord in your life, that love will just guide you.
- REVEREND CARL BEAN: No more chitlins and ribs and oop- no more bacon fried, Sunday morning on the way to church. Look out, no more pork chops, no more pork chops, well, the black church just closed down.
- UNITY CHURCH WOMAN #1 : I chose this church, uhh, primarily because it's a gay and lesbian church, um, over the years growing up in the South and being a product of the southern Baptist church, uh, it was very restrictive to me, as far as being a black woman. And, here at Unity, I can bring all of me whenever I come on Sunday.
- UNITY CHURCH WOMAN #2 : It was okay. And such a small word that meant so much, "okay." I was okay. And after an hour of service I was home. This is the place that I belong. I felt natural, I felt myself, I felt love.
- REV. CARL BEAN : There is a place where we can rejoice, where I can rejoice. I try as best I can to always get my parishioners to look at how we are all really alike. And once you do that, we can then give and receive healing one from the other.

1:00.50

...

CHRISTIANE BADGLEY:

How are you feeling Marlon?

MARLON RIGGS:

I feel a little sort of under today, my stomach is queazy but its getting better.

CHRISTIANE BADGLEY:

Cause I think it might, people need to know why I'm interviewing you and you're lying down in your bed.

MARLON RIGGS:

Yeah, it's like when I eat, if I eat too fast my stomach gets bloated and I stop digesting my food. And I have this sort of bloated queazy feeling. So I'm here with the hot pad on my stomach, that's helping cause it's starting to growl and digest.

...

1:01-32

— 6 Family

MARLON RIGGS:

How many children did you have?

FISHING WOMAN:

Fifteen.

MARLON RIGGS:

Fifteen?

FISHING LADY:

Yeah, I run out.

MARLON RIGGS:

Are you serious, fifteen children?

FISHING LADY:

Uh huh, 15, mother of 15.

MARLON RIGGS:

How did you raise that many children?

FISHING LADY:

Oh, they wasn't nothing to raise cause people was planting and raising corn and sweet potatoes, white potatoes and cane and everything they wanted then they was raising it, all but the flour. Raise hogs, cows, chickens, geese, duck, guineas.

MARLON RIGGS:

What was that, uh oh, you got him that time. About time you grabbed him. Are you gonna keep him?

FISHING WOMAN:

Yeah, he'll make a great steak...

JOHNSON FAMILY "AUNT":

When you asked about family, you know what, ask these kids here, "Who am I?" I'm their cousin, I'm his cousin, his father is my uncle but he raised me so they call me their sister. Their children call me their Auntie, which I'm not. But this is how close we are. He calls me Auntie, I'm not his aunt. His father is my first cousin but we come up as loving each other and it brings a, we're all different generations here.

ALINE ST. JULIEN :

We're coming to celebrate Daddy's, the tenth anniversary of his death. And because Mtumishi is the oldest of the family, Mtumishi is going to give us the Cepha, the libation.

- MTUMISHI ST. JULIEN: It is the tradition of our ancestors to always give praise to those who have gone before us. So let us start. May we always remember Harold St. Julien and all those who have gone before us.
- BILL T. JONES: My father was a good man, a sense of humor, a great story teller..
- BELL HOOKS: The person who loved me the most as a kid, I felt, was my grandfather.
- MARLON RIGGS: Big Mama Vi is dead. But I remember her so well. Oh, she was so, she was shorter than me.
- BELL HOOKS: His smells fill my nostrils with the scent of happiness.
- MTUMISHI ST. JULIEN : May our children and our children's children carry forth with pride the nobility of our history and tradition. Let's eat.
- VARIOUS VOICES: "Family is love . . ."  
" We all trust each other and love each other . . ."  
"Family to me is just love and support . . ."
- MALE YOUTH: It's just love. Just someone that's just there for you, it don't have to be a mother or a father, it could be your next door neighbor's grandmomma (laughs) but really it could.
- ELTING SMALLS : Back then we had a family: the whole community; we looked out for each other. If someone butchered a pig, the close people around them, they would send them a piece of meat. If their cow's giving milk, or their cow quit giving milk, they would call over and say, " Send that boy ahead to get a quart of milk,"or some eggs or some peas or some potatoes. Now that is family, that's another family.
- ANGELA DAVIS: My father grew up in Maringo county , Alabama, on the border of Mississippi, and as a child I spent summers with my uncles and aunts who still lived on that land. I just had so much fun, you know, never had to put on a shoe, we could run for acres and miles and still be on land that was, was ours, that was my uncle's. And my uncle grew cotton, he grew watermelons, he grew all kinds of greens.
- FARMER: Handed down from generation to generation. My great-grandfather owned this land from slavery, got this land at 40 acres and a mule, this is part of his 40 acres. It's in your blood, it's in your blood, you love it, every minute of it. If you didn't, you didn't like it you wouldn't, you wouldn't be bothered with this. It's not just the money because farmer, farming is one of the lowest paying jobs around, you're doing it because you like it, love it not like it, love it.
- ANGELA DAVIS: I think that rural life symbolizes for many of us backwardness. Perhaps there is a tendency to want to distance ourselves from our rural, agrarian ways of living, because of its association, for African Americans, with slavery. But there's also something else there. They're memories there, there's joy there, umm, there's umm, a willingness to remember.



MARLON RIGGS:

• • •  
The project in part deals with my struggle with AIDS.

And I am struggling in a deep way now.

• • •

107.20

7. Acting white

MARLON RIGGS:

Once when I was visiting my cousins in Baton Rouge, a friend of theirs abraded me for trying to talk "proper," "He don't talk proper," my cousin defended, "he just from Texas."

ELTING SMALLS:

When I was a kid, they spoke a language which we are now trying to preserve, and they call it Gullah. It's a part of the English language, and then again it is different.

GULLAH MAN :

If I take you to Land's End right now, some people say, "Pork it, pit that bat sho, sho the boy yea." In Land's End, "Sho the boy yea, sho the boy."

GULLAH WOMAN :

No one can take that from you, that Gullah language, that is with the people who speaks Gullah. I enjoy speaking to a young man that was from Africa. He was here, we sat and drank coffee, we chatted, and I like the way he spoke because he speak like I do -- not like I'm doing now, I mean in, in the accent of how our people speak and myself before.

MARLON RIGGS :

When I listen to the voices of people in my family, I hear the evolution of rhythms and cadences from generation to generation. Big Mama still sounds "country" ..

BIG MAMA:

Oh, Lordy, ain't that a shame. How come you don't get some of those ...

MARLON RIGGS:

Mama sounds black but not country:

MAMA:

I never cooked as a kid right, never got in the kitchen or anything...

MARLON RIGGS :

My sister could easily pass for white:

SASCHA RIGGS:

My boss's daughter is having a baby, and her daughter's birthday is the 27th and the baby's expected on the 27th . . .

MARLON RIGGS :

At Harvard, people often marked me for the difference in my voice. I didn't sound country, I didn't sound white, but just as much I didn't sound black, in the way that so called "black English" was spoken at Harvard or elsewhere.

VARIOUS VOICES:

- What's happenin'?
- What it is?
- What it be like?
- It's all you my brother

- Give me five  
- Blood  
-Where you stayin' at?  
- Wanna come to my crib?  
-Ain't it the truth?  
-Word!  
- Pitiful  
-Bring you're tired black ass over here  
-Ain't nobody talkin to you miss thang  
-my man my ma-n  
-Soul brother  
-gimme some skin  
-you better chill  
-that's bad  
-righteous  
- Right on, Right on  
-Peace out  
-Stay cool  
-chilly  
-yo yo yo  
-Whasup whasup whasup!  
-work that booty  
-nigger, please  
-I ain't fooling with you  
-Get down get down!  
-you no count muthafucka  
-Its a black thang-can't you understand?Girl I heard that  
-- Can't you understand?

BARBARA SMITH :

I was very committed to the Civil Rights Movement, but I was constantly getting the message that I was not black enough. You know how they did that back in those days, they probably still do. I was not black enough because I was at an elite school, I was not black enough because, unnn I spoke, you know, fairly standard English.

MICHELE WALLACE :

You're acting white, or you're imitating, you're mindlessly imitating whites, is the critique. You know, you're doing an Amos 'n Andy, you're doing a Step 'n Fetchit

ANGELA DAVIS:

There was a time when I felt ashamed almost of the fact that I had studied in France and studied in Germany, right, because we were supposed to be talking about Africa, not Europe.

MICHELE WALLACE :

It's something you can always pull out. Yeah, I mean, "Why are you wearing shorts?White people wear shorts." I mean you can always use that.

ANGELA DAVIS :

I mean, I know the way I act and the way I talk and the way I think, reflects all the places that I've been and I've been a lot of places.

MICHELE WALLACE :

I mean there's sense in which everything we've ever done as Afro-Americans can be interpreted in that vein, and so it gets to a point where that critique just doesn't make any sense. I mean after all, we

are speaking the King's English right now.

KENNETH FERDINAND :

When I start speaking you know, "Comment ca va, monsieur?" you gonna say to me, well you're not really African. And then when I go down the block and talk to my man Umbake, who's from Senegal and we both speaking French, and he is African, he was born in Africa and, and you with your African self can't speak it, then who's African, who's African American, who's legit and who ain't?

ESSEX HEMPHILL:

I've heard questions of blackness raised when blacks moved into the suburbs, okay. Umm, as we've moved up in the economic system in this country, some of us. There have been charges, well, you know, "That person's no longer black, they don't come through the hood, they don't even live here, they live out, you know, 50 miles outside of the city, they commute in every day, their kids are going to school with white kids, listen to how their kids talk."

BARON HARVEY :

There are those who would feel that some members of the middle, African American middle class, no longer identify with being umm black. But I think when you define what being black has to do with it, it has nothing to do with, it's not about economics. It is not about economics, it's really about values.

EDITH HARVEY:

We know where we've been. We know what we've, we've come from. We know what we have to contribute . It's a matter of constantly saying how can you in your small way, whatever you do , it may not be as significant as a Malcolm X or a Martin Luther King , but what have you done to give back to the black community?

ESSEX HEMPHILL:

Perhaps the standard, frightening as it may be, is the inner city for defining what blackness is. That you've got to , you know, constantly be up on the changes in the hip language , the hip black language, the hip black fashions, the hip black music . You got, umm to use your ghetto experience as you know, your American Express card.

RADAMESE CABRARA:

Like, I'm a born bred, raised Harlemit. I knew what the hood was probably before most of these kids were born. And the reality is, do you live your life in struggle around trying to prove a point to someone that doesn't really give a damn about your reality, or do you determine what's important to you?

BARON HARVEY :

I will pull out my blackness and you pull out yours. I have no problem in defending mine. And I think I speak for a lot of people in the African American middle class. Umm, you know you can't, you can't live in this society and not be black, you know, the society won't let you forget you're black, but you don't want to forget you're black.

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MARLON RIGGS:

Fatigue, Nausea, Fever, Chills. Strange how we adapt so easily to extraordinary circumstances. I've experienced an array of illness and infections, pneumonia, bleeding, systemic infraction, respiratory failure, . . . ah the list goes on and yet I am alive

[ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE]  
NEWS ANCHORS VOICES:

*"Scores of fires..."*  
*"Six days of rioting..."*  
*"Angry mobs...."*  
*"Looting broke out in many neighborhoods before police..."*  
*"Nearly 3000 were arrested..."*

GANG YOUTH 1:

You got to make a living ,you got to make a living the best way we can. If that means by selling dope I guess we got to sell dope. Ain't nobody rich in the ghett. Nobody rich in the ghetto. If we was rich we wouldn't be here.

GANG YOUTH 2:

I ain't gonna be out here every day, out here gang banging man. After I graduate from high school I'm going somewhere. I ain't gonna be out here everyday, ain't shit our here but pain, fuck this shit.

GANG YOUTH 1:

If I had a chance to start over again, I wouldn't, I wouldn't turn down that wrong path, I'd try to go the right way, get my education. I wouldn't be here today I'd be here today, butin, I'd be in a right mind. I wouldn't be gang banging. I'd be telling ya'll a whole different story about the good life, it would be a whole different story. I'd go to this school right here.

GANG YOUTH 2:

See, cause now I be going to school every day. Right now I do not miss school a day, you know what I'm saying, cause I gotta have that education, man. Cause the white man is not gonna let you do shit, a high school diploma ain't nothing no more. You gotta have a, you gotta master in something. High school diploma ain't nothing no more, man, you can't even work at McDonald's with a high school diploma. That's why, you know, I'm gonna try and be something. And when I get up I'm gonna take them with me, you know what I'm saying. Cause I don't wanna leave none of my friends or family in the ghetto, cause there ain't shit good in the ghetto.

GANG YOUTH 1:

We gotta tell the little generation how to grow. See, nobody told us: "You can't be gang banging, that ain't good for you that ain't good for you." But no, they let us grow up to gang banging, it's too late now. I ain't saying it's too late, yeah, it ain't never too late but we gotta tell the next generation before they grow up and be like us and it ain't even it.

[POETRY PERFORMANCE -WAYSON JONES "HEAVY CORNERS" BY ESSEX HEMPHILL]:

*Don't let it be loneliness  
that kills us  
If we must die  
on the front line  
Let us die,  
loved by both sexes.*

*Don't let it be envy  
that drives us  
to suck our thumbs  
or shoot each other dead  
over snake eyes.*

*Let us not be dancing  
with the wind  
on heavy corners  
tattered by doom.*

*Let us not accept  
partial justice.  
If we believe our lives  
are priceless  
we can't be conquered.*

*If we must die  
on the front line  
don't let loneliness  
kill us.*

- MALE #1: This sets the tone for what we're accomplishing. Bloods and Crips being able to shake hands, go to parks together...
- MALE #2: What you're seeing right here is history in the making, and the tying of the red and blue knot, is a significant indication that these brothers and sisters want an opportunity to see 1993.
- MALE #3: OK, it took the riot, it took all this and the police just beating King and all that, to bring us together, to realize that we just killing ourselves.
- WOMAN : We got to learn to trust to each other. You know, like they say, this truce that's where it's gotta begin. We got to learn to say, OK man, I know what we done. Let's start trusting each other. Let's take a, let's take that wall down. Let me help you my brother, alright.
- BARBER'S CLIENT : But we don't even got unity yet man. I go to church every Sunday and we talk about unity, and it's hard to get Christians to have unity. So, you know, we got to have togetherness man. We got to be black people as one.
- BARBER : We have too many evil allies, I believe myself. That's why we don't, we can't get unity within the black nation.
- MICHELE WALLACE : I always get the sort of feeling that when black people talk about unity and community, you know, that it's kind of like a turf war thing, you know. We're gonna get together and this is gonna be our block, and if you come on our block, you know, we're gonna kick your ass. And I

*P. Multiple  
Identities*

always think I'm gonna be the one whose ass is gonna get kicked.

TEXT: " WE ALL HAVE IN COMMON ONE OF THE GREATEST TIE WE  
COULD HAVE, WE ARE ALL BLACK PEOPLE."

- Malcolm X -

MARLON RIGGS : I think all black people have to reconcile themselves to each other, to  
our differences and we have to get over the notion that you can, that  
you can only be unified as a people as long as everybody agrees. You  
know, we don't achieve freedom by those means.

CORNEL WEST: Well one, we've got to conceive of new forms of community, that we  
have multiple identities and that we're moving out of various  
communities at the same time. There's no one grand black community.

BELL HOOKS: It seems to me that it we would do well as black folks to replace the  
notion of unity with the notion of communion. The root meaning of it  
would suggest that our union is fundamentally based on a notion that we  
must be willing and able to communicate with one of another. Because I  
think that so often when black folks evoke unity, again it's the  
flattening out of differences, the sweeping certain things under the rug,  
so that we can appear to be alike, that we hold one stand, that we  
have one position. I think communion and it's connection to the notion  
of community might give us greater strength and possibility.

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CHRISTIANE BADGLEY: Marlon what kind of dreams have you been having lately?

MARLON RIGGS : Umm, dreams about dialysis. Uhh, sometimes dreams in which they're  
not dreams, it's like MTV, I just watch it sort of flashing, different  
things flashing.

CHRISTIANE BADGLEY: What about this dream that you were having not too long ago, when  
you were dreaming about Harriet Tubman?

MARLON RIGGS: Mm, hm. This is when I was feeling really sick in ER and so forth. Just  
her coming and standing by me, not saying anything so I had to become  
aware of here presence, and then just looking into my eyes and then  
looking at the river in front of us.

CHRISTIANE BADGLEY: Where were you?

MARLON RIGGS: I don't know, some dark foresty place with the river running through it.  
And kind of running pretty fiercely, and she didn't say anything, it  
was with her eyes. She just looked at me and then turned and looked at  
the river and we started walking. Harriet and I walked across the  
river.

CHRISTIANE BADGLEY: And what do you think that dream is about?

MARLON RIGGS: Overcoming the present crisis. I mean, you know, there's gonna be more, I know that. I'm gonna be laid up in the hospital again, but as long as I have Harriet and "Black Is...Black Ain't" to go travelling with, I'm going to cross that river. If I have work, then I'm not going to die, cause work is a living spirit in me -- that which wants to connect with other people and pass on something, something to them which they can use in their own lives and grow from.

I know there'll come a time when I won't be able to get up out of this bed, and all we can do is just take me home and let me lie in my bed, and I can look out the window. And then it may reach a point where I can't even open up my eyes and I just lie there, and I want my mother and I want my grandmother and Jack to be there to hold my hand to rub my head and feet and let me die.

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MARLON RIGGS: If a people is like gumbo, then you might ask, "What is the roux?" That special element that binds and gives everything its distinct flavor.

ANGELA DAVIS : Well, you take some color -- a dash or a big dollop, it don't matter -- and you blend it with an assortment of physical features that reflect every face you might possibly encounter on this great earth. Mix that up with a culture that just loves to improvise, signify, reclaim, renew and read. And you've got it: The recipe for black folk.

LINDA TILLERY: So I wonder, why is there still so much commotion when we add a few salt-looking people to the stew. Black folk been looking like white folk since the first traveller from Europe bred with the first African woman he encountered. You let people of different colors and cultures come together and they're bound to intermix. And since nobody is racially pure around here, what sense does it make for us to split hairs and genes trying to figure out who's got the true black blood?

ERIC GUPTON : Still, some folks wanna go off about this one acting too white or that one not being black enough. But honey let me ask you, what's enough? And who's to judge? Haven't we had enough of folks telling other folks what's proper, how to talk, who to love, how to dress, wear your hair, eat drink, pray, make love, dance?

WAYNE CORBITT: It is time my sisters and brothers, to wake up to a new day. A new day of community, where what unites us are not some obsolete fictions about race, but our common purpose of social struggle. A new day, my beloveds, of good will and communion and hope and always laughter. The time is nigh sisters and brothers!

MARLON RIGGS: The statement I would like to leave as my own personal legacy would be one of faith, to have faith in each other that we will come through adversities whatever they might be. And here, the adversity is really our ability to maintain a sense of communal self. So, my faith is the belief that we will achieve that, that against all odds we'll come through.

TEXT: MARLON TROY RIGGS,  
FEB. 3, 1957- APRIL 5, 1994

[CREDITS ]

[UNDER CREDITS MARLON RIGGS ] You want to know my recipe for gumbo? Well, I cut up my onions and my celery, get out a couple bay leaves and drop them in the broth, put some basil and black pepper in there, too. Then I go to the chicken and begin seasoning it, cut up some hot pepper sausage and ground it along with the chicken, then shell some shrimp. Chicken and sausage go into the broth and I let things simmer. Then I turn to my roux. Now every person has a secret about their roux and I have mine too, so we'll leave it at that. After finishing the roux, I mix it in, hmm with the simmering chicken, stirring all the while until the roux begins to thicken. Then I just go away for a time and let things cook. About an hour or so I put in my shelled shrimp, some oysters, some crabs and any other seafood I might like until its all done. That's gumbo.

TEXT: "IF YOU HAVE NO CLEAR CUT IMPRESSION OF WHAT THE  
NEGRO IN AMERICA IS LIKE, THEN YOU ARE IN THE SAME  
PLACE WITH ME. THERE IS NO THE NEGRO HERE. "

- Zora Neale Hurston-