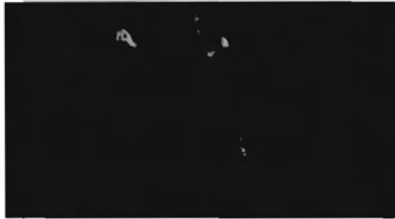


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**B**lack women film and video makers remain under-appreciated. Images put forth by mainstream media consistently present Black women as prostitutes or the cooks and caretakers of whites. This portrayal is largely incommensurate with Black women's lives, as well as with the work produced by Black women, which in Los Angeles has been substantial and multi-faceted.

Black women independent film/videomakers consistently present Black life and culture in the many hues and complexities that mainstream media invariably overlooks. This tradition was perhaps solidified in L.A.



personal stories to comment on broader humanistic concerns. The first, *Ms. Mire's Fire Eyes*, tackles the complicated issue of female genital mutilation from a personal and societal point of view. The other, *Little Black Panther*, is Ms. Freeman's autobiographical account of a young girl's experiences as the child of a Black revolutionary leader.

Other organizations which have included work by Black women since 1988 are the Los Angeles International Gay and Lesbian Film and Video Festival which includes work by Black women every year, and Filmforum, which showcased former Los Angeles resident (and UCLA Film and Television Department graduate) Zeinabu irene Davis' work. Davis' womanistic film/videos examine menses (*Period Piece*);

## Is There a Reason a Black Woman is in the Kitchen? Or, Black Women Re-Claiming Black Women's Images

in the 1970s when Alile Sharon Larkin, Jackie Frazier, Julie Dash, Barbara McCullough, Denise Bean, Pamela Jones, Storme Bright, Carroll Parrot Blue, Myown Hymer, Mildred Richards, Carolyn Goodwin, Melvonna Ballenger, Vel Frances Young, Anita Addison, and I were students in the UCLA Film Department. The phenomenal output during these years prompted Clyde Taylor, Professor of Literature and Film at Tufts University, to dub the movement that grew from these and other Black UCLA filmmakers (including Charles Burnett, Haile Gerima, Larry Clark, Jama Fanaka, Billy Woodberry, John Reir, and Ben Caldwell) "the L.A. Rebellion."

Some of the films by women from this era include Mildred Richards' mythical film, *I've Been Here Before*, which crossed time and space to delve into the relationship of an African-American couple trying to unite in the South in the 1600s and on the streets of Los Angeles in the 1970s. Denise Bean's work is another example, and includes a video documentary on the women in the Nation of Islam, as well as *Something Special*, a video portrait of a young mother and her deaf three-year-old son. Alile Sharon Larkin's first dramatic film during this time examined the conflicting feelings associated with Black women straightening their hair. Her later films examine sexism and Afrocentricity (*A Different Image*, *Your Children Come Back to You*). Viewing the films of these women, as well as Vel Frances Young's documentary on jazz musician Patrice Rushin, and the early films of Julie Dash (*Four Women*) and Carroll Parrot Blue (*Vernette's World: A Study of a Young Artist*), makes it clear that it is possible to place Black women on screen without conjuring the stereotypical cooking and cleaning images of Black women perpetuated by mainstream media.

A few L.A. organizations present programs that include films and videos not only about Black women, but also by Black women. For example, the 1998 Pan African Film Festival went farther than most similar festivals to present a broad range of work by Black women independents. The festival opened with the Martinique-born director Euzhan Paley's new feature, *Simeon*. Told from a young girl's point of view, *Simeon* shows the necessity of holding on to and respecting cultural traditions. Two other films by Los Angeles directors, Soraya Mire and Koina Freeman, used

romance, sensuality, and sex (*Powerful Thang*); and personal ritual (*Cycles*). L.A. Freewaves video festival has screened videos by Black women in each of its three festivals. In the last two Freewaves festivals, the experimental videos of former Los Angeles resident Portia Cobb appeared in several cable and venue screenings. Ms. Cobb's video *Who Are You?*, which is based on stories about a Black woman in Oakland who roams the streets wearing white-face powder screened in the 1991 festival; her timely *No Justice, No Peace*, which centers on the daily police harassment confronting Black men, screened in the 1992 festival. Another Los Angeles based media organization, IN VISIBLE COLORS (IVC), has presented work by African-American women at several venues, including some co-sponsored events. IVC co-sponsored a screening at Jefferson High School of Karen Hayes' *South African Women Artists Speak* and *How It Is*. Another co-sponsored program was a screening of Barbara McCullough's documentary, *Horace Tapscott: Musical Griot* at Ben Caldwell's KAOS Network. The UCLA Archive has presented work from Women Make Movies that included work by the aforementioned Zeinabu irene Davis. Visual Communications, the oldest Asian-American media organization in the country, included *Diversity*, my documentary about demonstrations for cultural and educational equality, in its 1989 program at the Japanese-American Cultural and Community Center.

These women are only a few of the many Black women directors who are moving the on-screen image of Black women out of the kitchen. In fact, Julie Dash has perhaps made the greatest contribution with her critically acclaimed feature *Daughters of the Dust*. At the end of the film, Ms. Dash gives us an on-screen first when her black shero rides with her lover into the sunset. Hollywood would be wise to comprehend the significance of this ending.

*O.Funmilayo would like to hear from UCLA filmmakers from the 1970s. This essay is excerpted from a longer version.*