

The

(W)rap SHEET

Black Film Center/Archive
Indiana University

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1

JANUARY 2012

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Michael Martin, Clyde Taylor,
Monona Wali, & Jaqueline Stewart.
Photo by Todd Cheney/UCLA
Photography



Focusing a Phenomenon:

The L.A. Rebellion Symposium

BFC/A director Michael T. Martin participated in the L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema – Symposium, a landmark forum comprising filmmakers, scholars, and the public that sought to recognize the legacy and importance of the L.A. Rebellion, hosted by the UCLA Film and Television Archive and the School of Theater, Film, and Television on November 12th. The L.A. Rebellion, referencing the cohorts of filmmakers at UCLA from the late 1960s through the early 1980s who created films that, in a variety of manners and strategies, plotted a new course for black film-

making beyond the limitations of conventional filmmaking. The experience was one that lent weight and clarity to the L.A. Rebellion while also playing host to a sense of camaraderie and memory of the era.

“The filmmakers showed, in one way or another, a desire to subvert the images and codes of Hol-

“[They] tried to free images from cultural imprisonment with style”

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lywood,” said Martin. The symposium, along with the screenings of nearly 50 films from October to December of 2011, helped to clarify that commonality and cohesion of the phenomenon that had been understood (fellow symposium participant Clyde Taylor coined the term ‘L.A. Rebellion’ in the 1980s) yet remained vague to outsiders. “The experience [of the L.A. Rebellion] had not crystallized into an understanding of the school itself, until the symposium,” commented Martin.”

The symposium consisted of a keynote address by Clyde Taylor (pro-*LA Rebellion continued on page 2*

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fessor emeritus at NYU), two panel discussions on different aspects of the L.A. Rebellion, and a roundtable discussion. Taylor's keynote compared the L.A. Rebellion to the Renaissance of European humanism, noting that both movements "tried to free images from cultural imprisonment with style."

The symposium was organized by Jan Christopher Horak (UCLA), Allyson Nadia Field (UCLA), and Jaqueline Stewart (Northwestern). Horak and Field chaired the two panel discussions – 'Black Film and Social Change: Representing Black Culture, Politics, and Labor Before and During the L.A. Rebellion,' and 'Creating Black Film Style: Black Arts, Music, and L.A. Rebellion Aesthetics,' respectively, while Stewart chaired the roundtable discussion. 'The L.A. Rebellion: Then & Now' was the topic for the roundtable discussion, which Martin participated in.

In the evening, four films by members of the L.A. Rebellion were screened: *Illusions* (Julie Dash, 1982), *Fragrance* (Gay Abel-Bey, 1991), *As Above, So Below* (Larry Clark, 1973) and *Rain* (Melvonna Ballenger, 1978).

"Now, we can critically examine this particular moment through a new lens which has been opened up by this symposium," said Martin "and I believe that 'the L.A. Rebellion' – as an entity in itself – will have much more of a presence in the future."

Still, one of the dynamics of the symposium was to mark the commonality among the filmmakers of the L.A. Rebellion while noting the various divergences as well. "We should not have expected that with the shade of obscurantism [the L.A. Rebellion] would fit with one size fits all," said Taylor in his keynote speech.

Martin underscored the idea: "The name 'L.A. Rebellion' should not

imply homogeneity; the filmmakers were responding to common themes but in very different ways."

In addition to the 13 critics, scholars, and filmmakers who spoke at the symposium and the interested public, the symposium brought many Rebellion alumni and participants together. This convergence

““If something holds the L.A. Rebellion together, perhaps it was the belief that What they were doing *mattered*, in cultural and political terms”

gave the symposium a particular poignancy for Martin. "It was an experience for me unlike any other I've had in recent times," he said. "It was, in a way, reliving a particular moment with my generation, and I was very connected in very real terms to this moment."

"If something holds the L.A. Rebellion together, perhaps it's the belief – one that's been lost to a large extent – that what they were doing mattered. Mattered, that is, in cultural and political terms."

It's that feeling that Martin hopes will be the legacy of the symposium and the renewed presence of the L.A. Rebellion. "If the symposium inspires others to think differently about film; if it galvanizes young artists and filmmakers to engage in humanistic projects that critique and challenge injustices; if the understanding remains that form must defer to content of artistic practice - then we've done something very special," said Martin.



Spring 2012 Programs & Activities at the BFC/A

Instruction: Classes taught at the BFC/A by IU faculty

- Introduction to Media [5 discussion sections taught by CMCL graduate students]
- African American Literature [Prof. DeWitt Kilgore - English]
- Black Paris [Prof. Eileen Julien - FRIT]
- International Studies Capstone [Prof. Paulette Lloyd – International Studies]
- Postcolonial Metropolitan Cinemas [Prof. Michael T. Martin - CMCL]

Publications

- Black Camera, An International Film Journal, Volume 3, Number 2 (Spring) 2012

Screenings/events held at and/or co-sponsored by the BFC/A

- As part of the Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration, the BFC/A hosted screenings of films for three student organizations - January 13: *Do the Right Thing* (1989) (Black Graduate Student Association); January 19: *Selma, Lord, Selma* (1999) (Hudson Holland Scholars) ; *Higher Learning* (1995) (Black Graduate Student Association and Omega Psi Phi Fraternity)

Forthcoming:

- Co-sponsor the 6th Native Film Series at the IU Cinema, January 2012.
- Co-sponsor, with the Bloomington Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc, a four part film series held at the Monroe County Public Library during February for Black History Month.
- Co-sponsor a screening of the film *Hearing Radmilla* (2003) at the IU Cinema, March 3, 2012.
- Collaborate with Graduate Students in African Studies (GSAS) to host screenings on March 8 and March 22 focusing on experiences of first generation African-Americans.
- Co-sponsor the New Latin@ Film Festival, April 2012.
- Host screenings of film by African American women during the month of April.

BFC/A Happenings

Jonathan Jenner, an economics graduate, will replace Leslie Houin as editor of (W)rap Sheet, the BFC/A blog, and will maintain website for Black Camera.

Jordache Ellapen, an American Studies doctoral student who focuses on the shifting representations of Indian identity in post-Apartheid South Africa, will work with Martin and Bruce Paddington (University of the West Indies - Trinidad) to produce a reference of Caribbean cinema for the IU press.

Leslie Houin, graduate assistant, graduated with a Masters of Arts in Arts Administration

from the School of Public and Environmental Affairs.

In November, **Mary Huelsbeck** attended the annual conference of the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) in Austin, Texas. Moving image archivists from around the world come every year to discuss issues relating to the preservation of moving images. Sessions encompass digitizing material, copyright issues, finding and projecting film prints, and preserving, for example, LGBT films. During the conference, Huelsbeck chaired a session on authenticating movie memorabilia, specifically movie posters. The panel was made up of two poster dealers and a paper conservator.

Nzingha Kendall has collaborated with the Native American Graduate Students Association, the Graduate Students in African Studies, and CUBAmistad, for the Native Film Festival, an African Film Festival, and Hispanic Heritage Month, respectively.

The journal of the BFC/A, *Black Camera*, will add a 'Close-Up' to each publication. Each Close-up will be devoted to the study of particular films or filmmakers, "revisiting and renewing attention to seminal texts and personages in black cinema. The first installment of Close-Up will focus on *Nothing But a Man* (1964) by Michael Roemer and Robert M. Young,

Manthia Diawara:

Phyllis Klotman and the Early Days of the BFC/A

Manthia Diawara, filmmaker and Director of the Institute of Afro-American Affairs at NYU, came to Indiana University in October for the 50th anniversary of African Studies. The IU Cinema screened his 1994 film with Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Sembene: the Making of African Cinema*, before Diawara's keynote address. Nzingha Kendall and Leslie Houin of the BFC/A sat down with him to talk about the early years of the BFC/A, which was in its infancy when Diawara was a student here.

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Nzingha Kendall: Since it is the 30th anniversary [of the BFC/A] we'd like to find out about your involvement with the Black Film Center and with Phyllis Klotman when you were at IU.

Manthia Diawara: You're being very generous because at that time the Archive was at its very beginning, so what role did it play in my life? Well, we had Phyllis Klotman herself, who was teaching films which were not being taught in the film program and who was also bringing in scholarship which was not part of the general curriculum of film studies. So as a black film student our interests converged. Our interests converged to the point that I became her teaching assistant. As a grad student you understand how important that is because

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for you. There's tutoring, but beyond tutoring there is also a guarantee of a stipend, and Phyllis was able to make that available to me. And then I became good friends with her because we began to collaborate. Actually, I've never co-written an article in my whole life, but I did one with Phyllis Klotman. That tells you how close we had become.

What was happening during this period was that cinema studies was developing around the country. And we were almost pioneers in the way we developed black film studies alongside cinema studies, because some people accepted African films before they accepted African American films. So the ways in which the center literally worked to develop the field of black cinema studies was invaluable. Just imagine: Ossie Davis came, Bill Gunn came, and people like Larry Clark came. As a film student, before going to California, I was able to meet, basically, all the members of the L.A. Rebellion and all of the major actors because they were all coming here through this program. And they wouldn't be here otherwise. Indiana University is famous for inviting famous writers of the African American literary tradition, but film just was not a well developed area. I think the Center was pioneering in that sense. It was virtually unique. I still don't know of many places like it in the country, though maybe there are. And it became exciting also when Phyllis

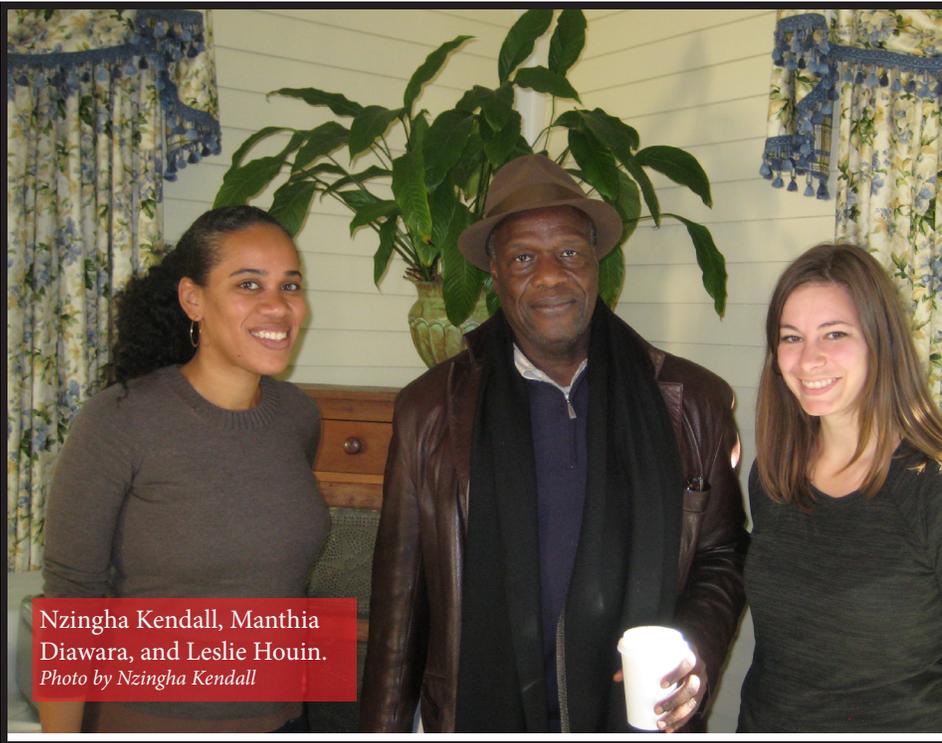
and other people began to discover movies. This idea of...I think it was Southern Methodist University-

NK: - who has the whole trove in the [Tyler, Texas Black Film Collection] -

MD: - Because, I'll tell you what is good about Phyllis, and this was a time when all the IU students were running after the latest theories - deconstruction, post structuralism, narratology. Phyllis was doing something different that actually became very important today. I studied under two archivists: Jean Rouch and Phyllis Klotman. And I think the unique thing about Phyllis was that the films she sought - what we

“You are going after hidden monuments, you are going after images that were buried, you're going after history - an untold history.”

now call orphan films - that when you go after those films you are also going after hidden monuments, you are going after images that were buried, you're going after history - an untold history. She was doing that when everyone was saying 'I just want to learn the latest theory.' And now, most of the film schools are interested in studio work, silent cinema, and archives. They're interested in the history of films that are not finished, or are lost. I was on a panel with Martin Scorsese during the last



Nzingha Kendall, Manthia Diawara, and Leslie Houin.
Photo by Nzingha Kendall

Tribeca Film Festival and his biggest mission was to save lost films. In this light, the significance of Phyllis Klotman becomes even larger. I realized she was doing this type of work because she was not doing theory, and in those days in our student arrogance we only respected people who did theory.

She was a pioneer, and I'm proud to say she made us into pioneers at IU. During my time at IU, I naively stumbled on so many films because of Phyllis; I was interested in Sembène Ousman's *Black Girl* but I did not know all of the American race movies. And she brought all the film historians here, such as Donald Bogle. I was at the beginning and I did not know the significance of the BFC/A. But it has grown into something really big nationwide and I'm really proud of that without having played any significant role, to tell you the truth. I was there and I was working with Phyllis Klotman as my professor and she was doing this wonderful work. And then came Gloria Gibson, and then Audrey

McCluskey. This is a history that is interesting in and of itself because without Phyllis I don't think those women would have had their jobs; I don't think [Michael] Martin would have been there. Phyllis actually opened a field.

NK: For this idea of representation in cinema...

“She was a pioneer - she made us into pioneers at I.U.”

MD: Phyllis opened a field not only in terms of curriculum but in terms of blacks in film studies. She opened that door by legitimizing a field that aside from a few writers, like Thomas Cripps at Morgan State, and Donald Bogle in Philadelphia and New York...

NK: ...who were doing that kind of archival work, but were mainly cataloging.

MD: They were cataloging. They

were even doing something sexier than Phyllis, because they were talking about toms and coons and mammies. They were talking about race. Phyllis was cataloging directors and actors and studios. She was doing incredible work that was very important to graduate students and students of film, but that otherwise only libraries would find useful in many ways. So she was a pioneer.

NK: She collected a lot of films from studios. To kick off the 30th anniversary of the BFC/A, we showed an original version of *Shaft* (1971) that was one of her acquisitions. It wasn't in the best shape, but it's one of the existing prints.

MD: So you have the 35mm copy of that? That's great. I'm sure Phyllis was in a situation where black studies was in a field that considered more the history of sociology, the history of history itself, literature, theater and everything, but cinema was not considered a field. To have a field called 'Black Cinema' you know? [laughs]. I saw some of my favorite films here – *Scar of Shame* (1927) by the Philadelphia Players – I saw that here. I would say many of the Oscar Micheaux films from *Body and Soul* (1947) to *Lying Lips* (1939). I saw all of them here. Also, these whole race films; from *Birth of a Race* (1918) to othersilent films from roughly 1950 that dealt with black people. I saw them here. Some of them were very poor quality, but I still saw them here for the first time.

And then Phyllis was still bring-ing more new films until I got tired basically. [laughs] She would say 'Oh I discovered this! So and so is giving me these films! And I had to say "Come on Phyllis!" [laughs]. She was pretty cool.

Contributions to Mapp Collection Continue

The BFC/A acquired more items on black film from collector Edward Mapp in Fall 2011. Mapp, a collector of vintage black cast film posters and other materials associated with black cinema, has been a



regular contributor to the BFC/A for many years.

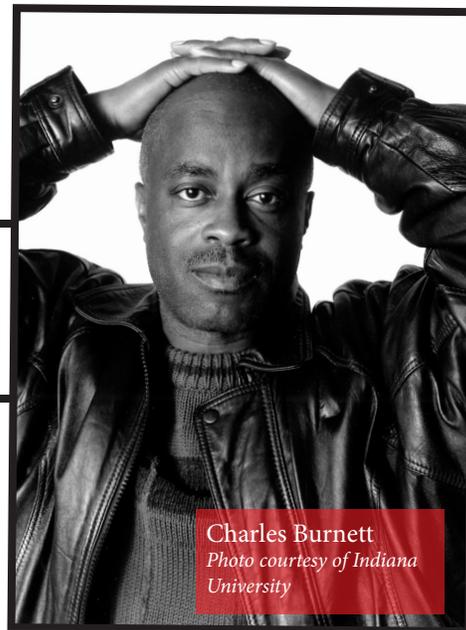
The donation includes 12 lobby card posters – including *Ebony Parade* (1947), *This Is the Life* (1944), and *Son of Ingagi* (1940) (pictured at right, more on back page); 4 DVDs – such as *Gone Are the Days* (1963); and assorted advertising and other materials, *The Bronze Buckaroo* (1939) and *Stormy Weather* (1943).

Mapp, a retired professor of Speech and Communication at the City University of New York, began collecting in the 1960s and has accumulated an impressive array of memorabilia throughout

the years. A two-year tour of part of Mapp's collection was co-sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences and is now housed at the Academy. For Mapp's work in this area he was inducted into the Black Collectors Hall of Fame in 1992.

The Mapp Collection consists of four series: Film Publicity, 1930-2002; Photographs, 1937-1999; Videocassettes; and Miscellaneous.

The BFC/A has cataloged and archived items from Mapp since 2000, and welcomes the new additions to the collection.



Charles Burnett
Photo courtesy of Indiana University

Charles Burnett visits IU for Film Retrospective

Charles Burnett visited IU and the BFC/A in November, for a 5 film retrospective hosted by the IU Cinema. In addition to the film series, the acclaimed filmmaker attended the 30th anniversary reception for the BFC/A (photos on page 7) and was interviewed by Martin at a public event at the IU Cinema.

As part of the "Arriving at Truth" film series, the IU

Cinema screened *Killer of Sheep* (1979), *My Brother's Wedding* (1983), *To Sleep with Anger* (1990), *The Glass Shield* (1994), and *Namibia: The Struggle for Liberation* (2007).

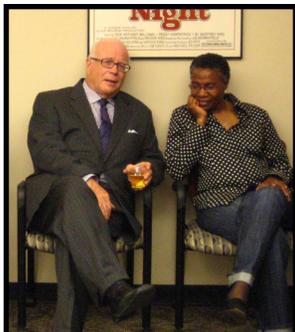
Prior to Burnett's visit, James Naremore, Professor Emeritus, stated: "One of the standard things about Burnett is he's the best movie director you've never heard of – I think what makes him so interesting is the

great integrity of his work. "

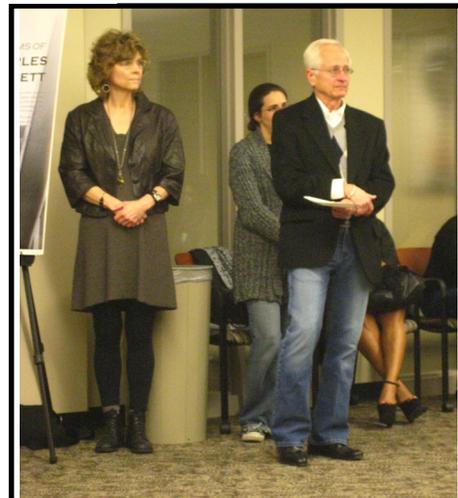
Burnett's interview with Martin, to be published in a forthcoming issue of *Black Camera*, engages his time at UCLA and thoughts on the 'L.A. Rebellion,' his working principles of storytelling, his negotiation of Hollywood, and of future projects and developments.

30th Anniversary

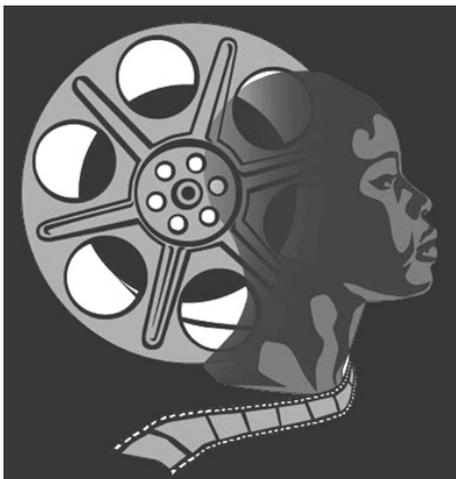
Celebration



Clockwise from top left: Prof. Portia K. Maulsby; Dean Steve Watt and Prof. Valerie Grim; Prof. Karen Bowdre; the BFC/A lobby; Prof. Barbara Klinger and Prof. James Naremore; Jon Vickers and Mary Huelsbeck; Charles Burnett and Professor Eileen Julien, Jordache Ellapen and Marsha Horsley; Leslie Houin and Stefan Horowitz, Professor Audrey McCluskey and Charles Burnett; Sarah Mayersohn, Stacey Doyle, and Sarah MacAfoose; Professor LaMonda Stallings, Professor Michael T. Martin, Charles Burnett, and Professor Eileen Julien.



Photos by Nzingha Kendall and Leslie Houin



The Black Film Center/Archive

The BFC/A was founded in 1981 and was the first repository in the United States for the collection and preservation of films and related materials by and about African Americans. Since that time, its collections have grown and its scope has broadened to include films from other geographical sites in the African Diaspora. Our collections, which feature many independent filmmakers, highlights the work of black writers, actors, producers, directors, and musicians in all aspects of film production.

Objectives

- To promote scholarship on black film and serve as a resource for scholars, researchers, students, and the general public.
- To preserve and expand the collection of historically and culturally significant films by and about black people.
- To encourage film activity by independent black filmmakers.
- To undertake and encourage research on the history, impact, theory and aesthetics of black film traditions.

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Blog: blackfilmcenterarchive.wordpress.com/

A few of the lobby cards recently added to the Mapp Collection (page 6), clockwise from top: *Cowboy Canteen* (1944), *Ebony Parade* (1947), *Let's Rock* (1958).

Correction

The 2.3 (W)rap-Sheet's article about the history of the BFC/A detailed its leadership, but did not address its connection to the Department of African American and African Diaspora Studies. The BFC/A regrets this mistake. An extended version of the article will be published in the Spring 2012 edition of *Black Camera*.

