

Reel To Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies

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In *Reel To Real*, bell hooks talks back to films as a way to engage the pedagogy of cinema--the way film teaches its audience.

bell hooks comes to film as a cultural critic, fascinated by the issues movies raise--the ways cinema depicts race, sex, and class. *Reel To Real* collects hooks' classic essays on films such as *Paris Is Burning* or the infamous "Whose Pussy Is It" essay about Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It*, as well as newer work on *Pulp Fiction*, *Crooklyn* and *Waiting To Exhale*. hooks also examines the world of independent cinema. Conversations with filmmakers Charles Burnett, Julie Dash, and Arthur Jaffa are linked with critical essays, including a piece on Larry Clark's *Kids*, to show that cinema can function subversively as well as maintain the status quo.

bell hooks (b. 1951) is mainly known as a feminist thinker, although her writings cover a broad range of topics on gender, race, education and the media. She is Distinguished Professor of English at City College in New York. Hooks's essays on film are not film criticism: they are criticism of culture as viewed through the prism of film. This mix of theory, reality, popular art and popular criticism (reviews and public reaction play a large part in her discussions) is effective in forcing a rethinking of the films in question. A reading of reviews of *Exotica* shows that only the strip-joint portions of the movie were considered worthy of commentary. Quentin Tarantino? a filmmaker "not afraid to publicly pimp his wares"? is taken to task for ingesting superficial aspects of black culture and spitting out the rest. The "mock feminism" of *Waiting to Exhale* ("an utterly boring show") is exposed as hooks examines differences between the book and the movie. The essays that do not focus on a single film are equally successful: a discussion of the black female gaze recalls that slaves could be punished for looking, and another on representations of black masculinity notes that in movies with two male leads, one black and one white, such as *Rising Sun*, the white man plays the "father" role. The essays could have benefited from more thoughtful organization. Hooks refers to her first-ever film-related essay, on Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It*, in her introduction and elsewhere, but the essay does not appear until the final pages of the book. A piece on the accountability of filmmakers that involves Wayne Wang would have matched up nicely with a dialogue with Wang, which instead is sandwiched in a group of interviews with Arthur Jaffa, Camille Billups and the like.

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Other Books

Lesbians and White Privilege. There are three overarching themes that connect the chapters: interdisciplinarity, intersectionality, and identity. This interdisciplinary compilation includes contributions from scholars in cultural studies, social work, English, psychology, anthropology, and education. Essays include empirical research, making use of both quantitative and qualitative methods as well as personal reflections and interpretation. Each chapter makes central the critical significance of intersectionality, locating privilege and oppression within larger social systems and institutional structures, as an 'interlocking matrix of relationships.' These chapters challenge, recognize, and question whiteness, with the intention that they encourage us to do the same, in our own lives, practices, behaviors, and disciplines. By taking whiteness seriously, we might begin to move toward explicit antiracist efforts, dismantling those structures and hierarchies that enable only some to speak as 'just humans.' The chapters in this book were originally published as a special issue of the *Journal of Lesbian Studies*.

Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies. New York: Routledge, 1996. Print. Jackson, Matthew. "The Enthymematic Hegemony of Whiteness: The Enthymeme as Antiracist Rhetorical Strategy." JAC 26 (2006): 601-41. Print."