



VOICE AND VISIBILITY:

**HOW NEW YORK CITY FILMMAKERS
CHANGED THE NARRATIVE OF MARGINALIZED
GROUPS ON AND OFF CAMERA**

**Commissioned by
New York City Mayor's Office of
Media and Entertainment**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For more than 50 years, the New York City Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment has supported and strengthened the film industry by making it possible to capture the iconic landscape of New York City's streets. MOME's mission includes expanding diversity in the cinematic fields, both on and off the camera, and promoting a wider array of neighborhoods as locations for shoots. As part of the yearlong celebration of MOME's 50th anniversary, this report was commissioned to explore the ways in which a cross-section of New York City films has spotlighted the voices and stories of traditionally under-represented people and communities. Looking at a small sample of films based in four diverse, quint-

From the black-cast films made in Harlem in the 1920s to the gender-norm breaking work of the New American Cinema on the Lower East Side in the 1950s, New York has always been a capital of diverse, independent cinema.

essentially New York neighborhoods, this report tells the story of how the city's filmmakers have given voice and visibility to many groups and communities whose stories had not previously been told.

New York's timeless skyline and cityscape has served as both a backdrop and a protagonist for many films

over the past five decades. From the black-cast films made in Harlem in the 1920s to the gender-norm breaking work of the New American Cinema on the Lower East Side in the 1950s, New York has always been a capital of diverse, independent cinema. Harlem, the Lower East Side, South Williamsburg, and Coney Island all boast a tradition of such filmmaking. These neighborhoods are also home to groups that have been marginalized due to race, class, gender, or sexuality. The films produced in each neighborhood generated revolutionary new images that challenged, subverted, or expanded mainstream cinematic representation. These productions

also served as training grounds for members of underrepresented groups, helping them to later access creative and technical roles in the broader entertainment industry.

Harlem's independent cinema boom during the late 1960s and late 1980s was exemplary in both regards, combining economic access with new representations. William Greaves' Emmy award-winning public affairs series *Black Journal* was the first national television news program produced by African Americans. *Black Journal* made the lives of people of color more visible to a national television audience while pioneering an approach to filmmaking that involved African-American filmmakers asserting control over each stage of production. The series portrayed the real interests, desires, and concerns of African Americans while seeking to create a sense of solidarity among viewers.

Ossie Davis, the director of the popular film *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970), provided another influential training program for people of color with his Third World Cinema (TWC) located in Harlem. TWC specialized in relatable, character-driven movies for black and Latino audiences that provided an alternative to the popular "Blaxploitation" films (for example, *Shaft* and *Super Fly*) that represented Harlem, and black urban life in general, as stereotypically crime ridden.

TWC ran a filmmaking apprentice program for several years that successfully placed many of its young African American and Puerto Rican graduates on professional film and television sets. One of Davis's graduates, Jesse Maple, crafted her own nuanced, realistic depictions of neighborhood life and the deep ties between residents in films like *Will* (1981) – the first feature film directed by an African American woman.

The vibrant African American film tradition Greaves, Davis, and Maple nurtured existed

alongside an LGBT community that had roots in Harlem dating to the early 20th century. In *Paris Is Burning* (1989), Jennie Livingston documented the gay and transgender families of choice formed around the drag subculture that originated in Harlem. In doing so, she questioned assumptions about gender, race, and sexuality. Unlike previous films focused on the queer experience, *Paris Is Burning* was a critical success at major film festivals and received wide distribution, winning the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance, and voted best documentary by New York Film Critics Circle Association and GLAAD. The film's success helped to usher in the New Queer Cinema movement, which both made LGBT images more common in independent cinema, and refused to tailor those images to the desires of straight audiences, instead focusing on people and stories as rebellious as those featured in *Paris Is Burning*.

Each of these films contests and subverts the dominant urban crisis image of Harlem by offering authentic stories that emanate from the neighborhood. Each of them also contributed to a renaissance of black independent cinema that made behind-the-scenes roles newly accessible to people of color, inspired and paved the way for directors like Spike Lee, and formed a crucial part of the city's cinematic heritage, as has been recently recognized with major retrospectives at Film Society of Lincoln Center and Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Waves of immigration and a history as an artist's colony generated a long-standing tradition in the Lower East Side of low-budget, do-it-yourself amateur and independent filmmaking. This tradition provides new forms of representation for many traditionally underrepresented groups as well as a creative outlet and lifeline for young people.

In the late 1960s, Puerto Rican, African American and Asian American teenagers from the neighborhood directed their own films with the help of funds raised by local non-profits, such as the Young Filmmaker's Foundation. They turned their lens to the everyday challenges young men

of color faced, as well as the looming threat of Vietnam, winning critical recognition at prestigious venues, including screenings at the New York Film Festival and the Cannes Film Festival. Their larger legacy was demonstrating, for the first time, the potential of alternative film forms, especially experimental techniques, to enable self-expression for at risk children and teenagers.

The neighborhood's independent film tradition continued into the 1980s, finding greater exposure and popular success with Susan Seideman's fiction film *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985)—a film that at its core is about women taking control of their own narrative and image, and therefore, their lives. As Crystal Moselle's documentary *The Wolfpack* (2015) demonstrates, independent film is still integral to the character of the Lower East Side. Moselle's subjects, five first-generation Peruvian-American brothers, escape a stifling childhood through their love of film and find connection and artistic inspiration on their neighborhood's sidewalks. Moselle's film shows how independent filmmaking still plays an important role in helping oppressed groups tell their stories, express their identities and foster connections.

Independent filmmakers in Brooklyn were also using innovative techniques to change how communities were depicted. Diego Echeverria's documentary *Los Sures* (1984) drastically changed how a predominantly Latino area of South Williamsburg was represented. During the 1980s, this area was the poorest neighborhood in New York, and its people and their struggles were largely ignored. Echeverria's documentary not only made the neighborhood's problems visible, its then-unusual voiceover technique allowed residents to speak for themselves for the first time. The film has been cited as an important influence by many New York City filmmakers. Recently, it inspired neighborhood residents to make their own films, sharing their own experiences and points of view.

Coney Island has been the site of such amateur filmmaking, drawing on the experiences of im-

migrants, people of color, and the working class who made the neighborhood both their playgrounds and their homes. Though Coney Island played a prominent role in the leisure activities and imaginations of New Yorkers and Americans during the first part of the 20th century, it entered a period of major decline in the 1960s due to the pressures of suburbanization and urban renewal. Real estate developers and politicians often explicitly or implicitly implicated poor people and people of color in the neighborhood's decline. Sidney Lumet's *The Wiz* (1978) contested this specious claim, using deft references to past performance traditions and local landmarks to assert that rather than being responsible for the downfall of "abandoned" places like Coney Island, African Americans are integral to their cultural history, past success, and hopes for the future.

Today, The Coney Island Film Festival, founded in 2001, draws on these traditions to highlight amateur and archival films like Lou Dembrow's *Sammy's 80th Birthday Party at Ruby's* (2007) and Vagabond Beaumont's *Coney Island Dreaming* (2016). The former recounts how a Puerto Rican immigrant found support and community while working at neighborhood institutions like Ruby's, and the latter imagines a homeless teenager's momentary escape from her troubles on the boardwalk. Films like these preserve communal history, document social problems, and advocate for change.

Such films have had profound impact not only on the history of screen representation, but also on the contemporary film industry. Eighteen interviews with a cross-section of people in the world of independent cinema, including founders of filmmaking education initiatives, directors, heads of distribution collectives, and programmers from cultural institutions confirm this far-reaching influence. The interviews focus on both the history of diverse screen representation of the city, and how diversity impacts interview-

ees' own filmmaking practices and their future endeavors. Responses varied greatly – even on the definition of "diversity" – but several trends emerged:

- New York's independent film history heavily influences current New York directors, producers, and programmers.
- New York's perennial status as a favorite location for major productions is in large part due to its weave of diverse peoples, places, and experiences.
- The precarious nature of independent cinema's economics, which impacts a film from preproduction through potential preservation.

In order to combat such conditions, which keep a wider public from enjoying easy access to these films, the report's final section is a filmography, which lists key production information for each film discussed in the report, as well as descriptions of where and how films may be accessed through archives or on DVD. Where possible, each entry is also accompanied by a link to the film's online stream.

Many of these films are newly accessible through efforts by interview subjects and their colleagues as well as increased visibility in institutions like Lincoln Center and the Museum of Modern Art. This new prominence reinforces what the report has found throughout, that films by and about women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQ community not only add to the visibility of those populations, but lead to new opportunities both in front of and behind the camera. Over the past 50 years, New York City filmmakers have used their cameras to tell the stories that no one else was telling, empowering communities and fostering understanding among their viewership. This legacy is one of the many things that makes New York cinema singular.

INTRODUCTION

By Erica Stein

For the past 50 years, the New York City Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment (MOME) has supported and strengthened the film industry through its commitment to increasing filming in New York City. The timeless skyline and cityscape has served as both a backdrop and a protagonist for many films over the past five decades. MOME is also committed to expanding diversity in the cinematic fields, both on and off the camera, and to promoting a wider array of neighborhoods as locations for shoots. As part of the celebration of MOME's 50th anniversary, this report was commissioned to explore the ways in which New York City films have highlighted the voices and stories of traditionally under-represented people and communities.

One the most diverse cities in the world, New York has always been a pioneer in creating diverse cinema, ranging from the black-cast films made in Harlem in the 1920s to the experimental, anti-authoritarian, and often female- or LGBT-centric work of the New American Cinema on the Lower East Side in the 1950s and early 1960s. Since then, New York City films have continued to give voice and visibility to women, people of color, members of the LGBT community, and the working class through a tradition of independent cinema that uses location shooting to represent the real and varied experiences of the city's many different populations.

This report chronicles that tradition in three sections. The first section studies the production of non-traditional and independent cinema in four New York City neighborhoods: Harlem, the Lower East Side, South Williamsburg, and Coney Island. These neighborhoods are both integral to the city's culture and have long been home to groups who have been marginalized due to race, class, gender, or sexuality. Each of these neighborhoods boasts a rich and complex tradition of independent film production and the films made there generated revolutionary new images that challenged, subverted, or expanded main-

stream cinematic representation of marginalized communities. They also spawned workshops, training programs, and networks that helped members of those communities gain access to positions as directors, editors, producers, and cinematographers. While these groundbreaking films were often made on small budgets, and some have disappeared from public view, their influence and ability to inspire the next generation of filmmakers endures.

The second section demonstrates this ongoing influence through interviews with 18 independent producers, directors, distributors, and exhibitors. Their work has in turn played a crucial role in giving voice and visibility to marginalized groups in the city. The interviews focus on both the history of diverse screen representation of New York, and how diversity impacts the subjects' own filmmaking practices and their future endeavors.

The third and final section provides a filmography that lists key production information for each film discussed in the report, as well as descriptions of where and how films may be accessed through archives or on DVD. Where possible, each entry is also accompanied by a link to the film's online stream. This section offers an opportunity for students, journalists, and members of the New York filmmaking community to explore these films, which have enriched the lives of the neighborhoods that hosted their production, the communities they represent, and the artists whose work they went on to inspire.

This report recognizes the importance of films by and about women, people of color, and members of the LGBT community. They add immeasurably to the visibility of those populations in front of the camera and the powerful positions members of them can hold behind the camera, and to the accurate representation of New Yorkers and of all people on screen.

CHAPTER 1

BREAKING BOUNDARIES IN CINEMATIC HARLEM

By Erica Stein, Joshua Glick, and Noelle Griffis

The films in this chapter mark the return of black independent filmmaking to Harlem during the late 1960s through the late 1980s, a time of grassroots organizing, the Black Arts movement, and collective reflection on the meaning of black identity. This period, sometimes called “the urban crisis,” was characterized by major social changes throughout New York caused by the loss of manufacturing jobs, rising rents, the breakdown of social services, and increasing violent crime. In mainstream Hollywood film and popular culture of the time, Harlem was simultaneously invisible – rarely shown on screen, and never the site of location shooting – and a looming threat to audiences, a space of fear that reinforced negative stereotypes about African Americans.



Black Journal still. Courtesy of William Greaves Productions, Inc.

Harlem has a long tradition of producing its own cinema to counter such images, and has for a century been a center of black independent cinema. The films in this tradition explore a space where black experience and identity are negotiated largely free of immediate white expectations, surveillance, and prejudice, even as white supremacy continues to impact those experiences through institutional structures. However, between the 1940s and the 1960s, the popular

tradition of “race films,” independent movies with all-black casts (and sometimes black directors and producers), succumbed both to the economic pressures felt across the film industry and to audience loss as post-segregation African-American audiences increasingly sought out Hollywood films instead.

This chapter explores the resurgence of black independent cinema in Harlem through William Greaves’ late 1960s-1970s public affairs series *Black Journal*, Ossie Davis’ popular genre film *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970), Jessie Maple’s early-1980s independent realist dramas of domestic life in the neighborhood, and Jennie Livingston’s vital portrait of the neighborhood’s drag balls and LGBT community in *Paris Is Burning* (1989). Each of these films contest and subvert the dominant urban crisis image of Harlem as a center of poverty and criminality by offering their own stories from and about the neighborhood, contributing to Harlem’s status as the nation’s African-American capital and diversifying the screen representation of black identities and experiences. – Erica Stein

Black Journal

“Our challenge was to do something truly new and meaningful. Not just black faces bearing a white message, but black ideals, black achievements – a black world.”¹

– Lou Potter, *Black Journal* producer

In June 1968, the Manhattan-based National Educational Television (NET), precursor to PBS, created the monthly series *Black Journal*. The series was the first nationally broadcast public affairs program about black experiences produced by African Americans. Several pressures gave rise to the show. First, the Johnson administration’s Report of the National Advisory Com-

¹ Lou Potter, “Black Journal: A Dynamic Show,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, January 25, 1969, 25.

mission on Civil Disorders (1968) found that many African Americans were deeply distrustful of, and alienated by, the mainstream media. The Report strongly recommended that more African Americans assume leadership roles in studios and broadcasting institutions and urged for more films and series to cover subjects of interest to minority audiences. Second, ongoing grassroots protests to hold stations accountable to their diverse constituencies were beginning to bear fruit. Third, the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968 intensified the need for a more inclusive approach to programming.

Black Journal addressed issues affecting black viewers in Harlem, across the country, and around the world. Since the 1950s, commercial news consisted of white anchors and technical crews. ABC, NBC, and CBS devoted little airtime to engaging with communities of color. *Black Journal* provided an alternative to network news and empowered black viewers on an individual and collective level. The 60-minute per episode series helped viewers to see themselves as part of a community. The show gave talented African-American producers and writers opportunities for broad exposure while helping to train the next generation of filmmakers of color through the *Black Journal* Workshop.

Black Journal's premiere episode featured segments on Coretta Scott King delivering a highly politicized speech to the Harvard Class of 1968, black students from the North and South debating post-graduation plans, and the Harlem-based black male clothing line, *New Breed*. Critics from mainstream and minority periodicals praised the program for focusing on issues so often obscured by commercial television, and called the series educational for both black and white viewers.²

Still, there was friction within the newsroom during the first three episodes. While *Black Journal* included eleven black and nine white staff members, white executive producer Alvin Perlmutter retained editorial control over the series and often selected white producers to lead each shoot. All but one of the black staff members walked off the show in protest of this divergence from the public assertion that *Black Journal* was created “by, for, and of the black community.”

As the internal opposition gained national attention, NET promoted filmmaker William Greaves – a respected documentarian whose roots in cinematic Harlem went back to the 1940s – to executive producer.

Greaves encouraged the African American staff members to pursue topics of interest to them, advocating for segments to emphasize clear points of view and foster intensive conversations. Greaves argued that “journalistic objectivity is one of the biggest lies in Western culture.”³ He saw *Black Journal* as taking an oppositional stance against the commercial news industry that presented a distorted image of black public life.

Under Greaves' leadership, the series foregrounded different aspects of Harlem's political, economic, and cultural dimensions, and highlighted the neighborhood's long-time role as a center for the black American experience. Programs also addressed national topics, including racial prejudice

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2 See, for example, Donald Kirkley, “Look and Listen,” *Sun*, June 12, 1968, B4; Bob Hunter, “Black Journal’ Sheds Light on White Hate,” *Chicago Defender*, June 15, 1968, 1; George Gent, “Television Called Way to Bridge White-Negro Gap,” *New York Times*, June 21, 1968, 83.

3 “NET ‘Black Journal’ Ends Tokenism But Need Funds to Continue Series,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, September 28, 1968, 14; Deborah Heitner, *Black Power TV* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 83-123.

in healthcare, the role of the church in the Black Power movement, and the damage done to inner-city neighborhoods through urban renewal initiatives. *Black Journal* also oriented its viewers globally, covering the cultural achievements of ancient West African empires and presenting guests like choreographer and teacher Percival Borde, who discussed dance traditions in Africa and America.

Throughout its storied run, *Black Journal* was nominated for and won many awards, including an Emmy, before production was eventually threatened by loss of funding and distribution in the mid-1970s. In 1978, the series was renamed *Tony Brown's Journal* and shifted to syndication for commercial television. The revised 30-minute format featured a faster rhythm and a survey of contemporary topics rather than investigative, long-form reporting.

Despite the show's changes and eventual cancellation, *Black Journal* proved to be a decisive event in African American media history. The series anticipated other black public affairs programs, like the Los Angeles-based *Doin' It at the Storefront* (Booker, 1972), and served as a springboard for many of the filmmakers who crewed on the series. Greaves, along with St. Clair Bourne, Madeline Anderson, and Tony Batten, went on to work in feature documentaries, start production companies, and secure influential roles

in public television.⁴ *Black Journal* made the lives of black people more visible to a national television audience while pioneering an approach to filmmaking that involved African American filmmakers asserting control over each stage of production. The series took seriously the interests, desires, and concerns of African Americans while attempting to create a sense of solidarity among viewers. The ideals and production techniques of *Black Journal* would be taken up and con-

tested in a wide variety of independent media well into the 1970s and beyond.—Joshua Glick

Cotton Comes to Harlem and Ossie Davis

Today, Harlem is a common cinematic setting in mainstream Hollywood cinema, but, when *Cotton Comes to Harlem* was released in 1970, it was white audiences' first introduc-

tion to movies that featured a black urban neighborhood as the primary setting, black actors as the central protagonists, and most radically, a black director at the helm. When Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) approached Ossie Davis to direct the adaptation of Chester Himes's 1964 novel, the actor and activist used the opportunity to inspire a black film movement in Harlem.⁵ At the time, Davis was one of three African American directors ever hired by a Hollywood studio. Facing an economic decline due in large part to competition from television, Hollywood finally realized that African Americans living in urban areas remained a lucrative audience segment. For the first time, the studios began

When "Cotton Comes to Harlem" was released in 1970, it was white audiences' first introduction to movies that featured a black urban neighborhood as the primary setting, black actors as the central protagonists, and most radically, a black director at the helm.

4 Christine Acham, *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 24-53; Tommy Lee Lott, "Documenting Social Issues: Black Journal, 1968 – 1970" in *Struggles for Representation: African American Documentary Film and Video*, Eds. Phyllis R. Klotman and Janet K. Cutler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 91-95.

5 Dianne Thompson, "Davis Sees Harlem as World Film Seat," *New Amsterdam News*, March 29, 1969.

making movies directed to this urban African American audience, and began employing black talent on screen and behind the camera.

Cotton Comes to Harlem tells the story of two detectives, Gravedigger Jones (Godfrey Cambridge) and Coffin Ed Johnson (Raymond St. Jacques), who are charged with taking down a drug ring and a con man under the guise of a prophet, Rev. Deke O'Malley (Calvin Lockhart). The film opens with a slow ride through the streets of Harlem, juxtaposing the well-known images of the Apollo Theater and the bustling 125th Street with the more desolate, run down streets to the north. The film often subordinates its central storyline to imagery of Harlem, utilizing the detective's search as a device for exploring the neighborhood.⁶ The film was a hit during the summer of 1970, popular with black and white audiences alike, convincing Hollywood executives to invest in more black-themed urban action films. Several popular Blaxploitation films that followed, like Gordon Parks' *Shaft* (1971) and Gordon Parks, Jr.'s *Super Fly* (1972), would cement Harlem's status as a prime location for the inner-city crime film of the 1970s.

Despite creating black-themed studio cinema, *Cotton Comes to Harlem* faced criticism from some within the black community who saw the comedic caper as trivial in a moment characterized by the rise of radical politics, the fallout from the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the rising death tolls in Vietnam. Davis, a dedicated civil rights activist, was sensitive to these issues and wanted to use the leverage he gained from the success of *Cotton* to make films that spoke to both the political concerns and everyday interests of black Americans.

Davis had also become aware of the absence of minorities on commercial film crews while shooting *Cotton*, and looked for ways to

make the industry more inclusive at all levels of production. He hired young minority apprentices from Community Film Workshop Council, an initiative funded by the Ford Foundation, to address the racial disparity on his first film set. After completing *Cotton*, Davis was determined to create pathways for young people of color to receive professional training and to make the connections that would allow them to enter the film unions.

To this end, in 1971 Davis founded Third World Cinema (TWC) in Harlem with Ruby Dee, Rita Moreno, Diana Sands, James Earl Jones, producer Hannah Weinstein, and several other high-profile professionals who used their collective power to establish the first minority-led production studio. TWC would specialize in relatable, character-driven movies for black and Latino audiences to provide an alternative to popular Blaxploitation films like *Shaft* and *Super Fly* that associated Harlem, or black urban life more generally, with crime, pimps, prostitutes, and hyper-masculine heroes.

TWC released *Claudine* in 1974, starring Dihannah Carroll as a single mother navigating the challenges of raising teenagers on part-time work and welfare, while also falling in love with a sanitation worker named Rupert (James Earl Jones). TWC also ran a filmmaking apprentice program for several years that successfully placed many of its young African American and Puerto Rican graduates on professional film and television sets. – Noelle Griffis

Jessie Maple: Opening Paths in Cinematography, Directing, and Film-Going

Jessie Maple broke barriers to gain training from, and eventually membership in, gender-exclusive and segregated film and theater guilds in the 1970s. She used that training to become the first African American

6 For an in depth discussion of the film as Harlem travelogue, see Paula Massood, *Black City Cinema* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003).

women to write, produce, and direct a feature film in the 1980s. At the same time, she ensured that her films, and other black independents, reached their audience by opening a screening room in Harlem when the neighborhood had almost no other theaters.

Maple entered the film industry at a time when production companies, unions, and guilds on both coasts were first facing repercussions for their exclusionary hiring practices, which routinely prevented people of color from gaining membership or advancement. The guild Maple sought to enter, the cinematographers union, was also particularly averse to hiring women, who were considered too weak to carry the cumbersome equipment.⁷



Groundbreaking cinematographer Jessie Maple.

Undeterred by these barriers and eager to learn the craft, Maple enrolled in training with both Ossie Davis's Third World Company and *Black Journal's* workshop – which were the only such training programs in New York. Despite her successful entry into the editors' union and her mastery of camera technology, Maple was regularly denied union advancement requests and jobs as a camera assistant. Maple fought the unions and television industries for entry. After a long battle, in 1974 Maple succeeded in becoming the first African-American woman admitted to New York's Cinematographer's Local 644. She used her victory to help other women break into the field by self-publishing *How to Become a Union Camerawoman* and began to produce and direct her own films by founding LJ Film Productions with her husband, LeRoy Patton.

The films Maple made through LJ productions not only secured her a spot in film history as the first African-American woman to write, produce, and direct an independent fiction feature, they also allowed her to capture domestic life in Harlem with a sensitivity to the rituals of black families and communities absent from popular fiction films at the time. Maple's *Will* (1981) and *Twice as Nice* (1989) are about the cross-sections of African-American life in Harlem, and the internal struggles that people of color go through in an effort to create a better life for themselves without neglecting their commitment to family and community. Both films foreground the importance of black social spaces while challenging simplistic notions of a singular black urban experience.

For example, *Will* follows the title character (Obaka Adedunyo), a basketball star working to overcome a heroin addiction, inspired by his girlfriend (Loretta Devine), as well as a local homeless child beginning to fall into the same addiction from which Will struggles to escape. Taking the boy, called Little Brother, into their home turns Will into a mentor with a reason to stay sober, and the child into a member of a loving family. Shot on 16mm with a \$12,000 budget, *Will* sketches a complex portrait of Harlem. While not ignoring the realities of poverty and drug use, Maple also presents Harlem in all its beauty, a place of families, historic churches, impressive parks, and landmark brownstones a vision utterly distinct from both mainstream film and Blaxploitation. Maple was able to depict Harlem from the point of view of its citizens because the neighborhood had given those citizens – including Maple – the training and opportunities to make such images.

Maple repaid that debt by working with her family to turn their brownstone into 20 West, the first screening room in New York dedicated to black independent cinema. In the 1980s and 1990s, 20 West became a place for Maple and Patton to share their own work with the local community, and to showcase the work of others, including

⁷ Jessie Maple, *How to Become a Union Camera Woman*, New York: LJ Productions, 1977.

the early works of Spike Lee. Twenty years after she created exposure for black independent cinema, Maple's own contributions to it have been recognized with restoration of her work by Indiana University's Black Film Center/ Archive at Indiana University, preservation of it by the National Film Preservation Foundation, and screenings of it at BAM, MOMA, and the landmark Lincoln Center program, *Tell it Like it Is: Black Independents in New York, 1966-1986*. These series have introduced Maple's groundbreaking work to new audiences at the city's premiere cultural institutes granting her a long-overdue recognition of her remarkable achievements and her singular cinematic vision of life, family, and community in New York City. – Noelle Griffis

Paris Is Burning

Like the other films and figures in this chapter, *Paris Is Burning* (Livingston, 1990) breaks with traditional cinematic representations of Harlem to sketch instead the deep ties of family and community within the neighborhood. *Paris Is Burning* focuses on Harlem's ballroom scene, where African-American and Latino gay men and transwomen use drag to perform various personas and identities ranging from businessmen to suburban housewives. Ballroom has been important to LGBT communities in many American cities, and has been a fixture in Harlem since the early 1900s. It continues to be a force in Harlem today, even as it evolves to engage with contemporary youth culture, as shown in the current documentary *Kiki* (Jordenö and Garçon, 2016), which has been called a "sequel" to *Paris Is Burning*.⁸

Paris Is Burning is not the first film made about African-American and Latino members of the LGBT community, but it is unlike earlier films such as Marlon Riggs's *Tongues Untied* (1989) or Michelle Parkerson's *Storme: The*

Lady of the Jewel Box (1987), which used experimental techniques that spoke mainly to members of that community or focused only on one person. *Paris Is Burning* instead used highly accessible documentary techniques to help viewers who might not have had prior contact with the community understand its traditions and to value it as a community with traditions. The film is remarkable both for the range of LGBT experiences it represents and for its attention to the ways in which the ballroom scene offers a sense of family and safety to its members.

In the film's opening moments, Pepper LeBeija explains how she feels walking into a ball: "you go in there and you feel 100% right." This sense of "rightness" is one of belonging and community, which *Paris Is Burning* explores through the kinship and mentorship ties that unite African Americans and Latinos, gay men and transwomen, in the Houses that organize the ball scene. A House is headed by a mother and/or a father, an older, accomplished member of the community who mentors younger members who want to walk in balls. These events are competitive, and feature multiple award categories from "Femme Queen Realness," which assesses which gay man or transwoman has rendered their identity undetectable, to "Executive Realness." As Dorian Corey, an African American transwoman, explains, the latter category is about demonstrating not only the seamless imitation of a successful white businessman, but also that the LGBT performer of color

One of Paris is Burning's most powerful arguments is that everyone is always performing their race, gender, or sexuality, that the "real" straight, white businessman is no more innately deserving of success, or more authentically male, than the drag performer who plays him.

⁸ In fact, this has been important to the film's marketing trailers and festival descriptions consistently stress the connection to *Paris Is Burning*, and reviews in major outlets such as *The New York Times* (Glenn Kenny, February 28, 2017), *RogerEbert.com* (Sheila O'Malley, March 1, 2017), and *The Guardian* (Lanre Bakare, January 27, 2017)

could be a successful businessman if given the opportunity.



Pepper LaBeija in *Paris is Burning*, 1990. Miramax.

House members compete on the same team in different categories, and may also live together or hang out together in public places, finding safety in numbers and laying claim to spaces that might otherwise endanger or reject them. One of the film's most powerful and poignant points is that its members do not only perform "realness" on the ballroom runway, but must also perform it on the street to escape the physical violence that members of the LGBT community, especially transwomen, face. At the same time, one of *Paris Is Burning's* most powerful arguments is that everyone is always performing their race, gender, or sexuality, that the "real" straight, white businessman is no more innately deserving of success, or more authentically male, than the drag performer who plays him. This helps the film critique straight white masculinity as anything but the ideal of normality it had been raised to in the midst of the Reagan and Bush administrations' disavowal of the AIDS crisis and attacks on communities of color.

Unlike previous films focused on the trans experience, *Paris Is Burning* was a critical success at major film festivals and received wide distribution, winning the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance, and voted best documentary by New York Film Critics Circle Association and GLAAD. The film's

success helped to usher in the New Queer Cinema movement, which both made LGBT images more common in independent cinema, and refused to tailor those images to the desires of straight audiences, instead focusing on people and stories as rebellious as *Paris Is Burning's*. The film was made at a time when its sympathetic treatment of transwomen discussing their various opinions on gender confirmation surgery and expressing a desire for love, success, and acceptance stood in stark opposition to images of transwomen as deranged murderers in Hollywood films like *Silence of the Lambs* (1991).

Since its release and early success, *Paris Is Burning* has grown in cultural influence and was included on the 2016 National Film Registry. The Registry designates those films that the national archivist considers most important to America's history and culture and ensures that they are preserved in perpetuity by, and are accessible through, the Library of Congress. More important, *Paris Is Burning's* representation of gay and trans lives as ones lived in found families of color, and of identity as a matter of social control and power that can be challenged and changed through communal action, has begun to supplant the images it opposed. – Erica Stein

CHAPTER 2

INDEPENDENT CINEMA OF THE LOWER EAST SIDE

By Noelle Griffis

Since the late 19th century, the Lower East Side has been defined by the successive waves of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, Puerto Rico, and South America who have made it their home. More recently, the downtown Manhattan neighborhood was characterized by the waves of artists drawn to it, sometimes from the Midwest or New Jersey, sometimes from those very immigrant communities. As a result, this neighborhood has generated a tradition of low-budget, do-it-yourself amateur and independent filmmaking that has provided new forms of voice and visibility for many traditionally underrepresented groups.

This chapter traces that tradition over 50 years, beginning with Puerto Rican and African American teenagers who produced complex, yet positive images of their lives in a rapidly changing neighborhood during the late 1960s; a female director whose independent fiction film imagined new gender roles for, and relationships between, women in the 1980s; and first-generation Peruvian-American brothers whose love of New York cinema enabled them to escape a stifling childhood for the liberating possibilities and connections of the Lower East Side's sidewalks in the 2010s. These examples show marginalized groups using different kinds of films to tell their stories, as well as charting the movement of that story from the margins to the mainstream, as their work gained popularity and found ever-larger audiences.

Immigrants and Independents

The Lower East Side has a dynamic and varied history of cinematic representation, including many popular Hollywood films that range from the light-hearted *When Harry Met Sally* (Reiner, 1989) to the paranoid *The French Connection*

(Friedkin, 1971). However, the neighborhood is best known for its incubation of New American Cinema, a 1950's movement of experimental, documentary, and art cinema led by Jonas Mekas – a Lithuanian immigrant, still-active avant-garde filmmaker, and founder of the largest experimental film archive and repertory theater in the United States, Anthology Film Archives. In the mid-1960s, the films of the New American Cinema began to give voice and visibility to LGBT and African American members of the neighborhood's artists colonies. New American Cinema also participated in the political protest films of the period, most notably in Mekas' *The Brig* (1964), an anti-authoritarian piece set in a marine prison, and Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963), a celebration of sexual freedom and LGBT identities.

The predominantly white, experimental filmmakers associated with New American Cinema also took notice of racial and economic inequalities. They made them the subject of films that challenged audiences to confront these issues by defying aesthetic conventions and focusing on structures of oppression rather than portraits of victimization. Less well known, however, are the artistic projects created by the marginalized populations of the Lower East Side, namely, the young Puerto Rican families who had migrated from San Juan or just from El Barrio in Harlem in hopes of starting a better life on the LES, only to be faced with the end of textile and manufacturing jobs in the area. Nevertheless, as Christopher Mele explains in *Selling the Lower East Side*, these families not only “settled and created a vibrant cultural community in the Lower East Side over a two-decade period,” but also “reinforced the area's avant-garde identity and influenced the settlement of subsequent cultural movements.”¹

¹ Christopher Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate, and Resistance in New York City*, University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

One of the most important vehicles of this use of avant-garde film for self-expression by the Puerto Rican (as well as African-American) community were the activities of the LES's Young Filmmaker's Foundation's "Film Club" on Rivington Street, and also the Henry Street Settlement House "Movie Club."² Beginning in the early 1960s, these non-profit organizations raised money for 16mm film equipment and recruited young filmmakers from local community recreation centers to tell their own stories. The filmmakers shot experimental, documentary, and fictional shorts around the neighborhood, presenting an alternative perspective to the exploitation of slum imagery in popular films of the period such as *West Side Story* (Robbins/ Wise, 1961) and *Midnight Cowboy* (Schlesinger, 1969).

Although the filmmakers at Film Club and Movie Club, especially the young men, enjoyed making films of capers, drugs, and crime, their films also responded to their geographically specific and socioeconomic circumstances through humor, fantasy, and the occasional call to action. For example, Alfonso Sanchez's *The End* (1968) features a scene in which an angel and a devil tussle on Delancey Street, portraying the neighborhood as a site of fantasy, reclamation, and play, rather than a downtrodden, sinister location as in *The French Connection*.

Sanchez's aesthetics and themes were typical of the film clubs' output. Their marriage of complex avant-garde techniques, such as rapid cutting and animated montage, with the everyday challenges young men of color faced under the looming threat of Vietnam won the clubs' filmmakers critical recognition at prestigious venues, including screenings at the New York Film Festival and the Cannes Film Festival.

In the early 1970s, YFF alumni and instructors helped found Community Action Newsreel, which served both Spanish- and Chinese-speaking populations, and which worked with Chinatown residents to make films about local issues and community

members. These projects were an important collaboration between two geographically adjacent, but sometimes culturally distant, communities of color. YFF also demonstrated, for the first time, the potential of using alternative film forms, especially experimental techniques, for working with children and teenagers to enable self-expression. Moreover, the programs' focus on teaching important technical skills anticipated future programs – like Ossie Davis's work in Harlem in the 1970s or today's Third World Newsreel, Ghetto Film School, and Brooklyn Young Filmmakers Center – that train students for entry into professional guilds and careers in the industry.

The "Film Club" and "Movie Club" works often call to mind the films of Jack Smith and Jonas Mekas – the political but also funny and outlandish filmmakers of the New American Cinema Group who were the first to make the Lower East Side the place for counter cultural cinema. The films also share a kinship with the next wave of independent filmmakers who came to the Lower East Side in the late 1970s and 1980s, emboldened by the advent of punk, and created the famed "downtown scene" that merged fine art and graffiti, noise rock and art rock, and rough-edged filmmaking with compelling stories, into a super-charged cultural center.

Independent Women of the Independent Scene

If the Young Filmmaker's Foundation and New American Cinema used short, experimental filmmaking techniques to reclaim representation of Latino and African American youth and their LES home from the stereotypical misrepresentation of mainstream cinema, then Susan Seidelman used independent feature filmmaking to redress

The political but also funny and outlandish filmmakers of the New American Cinema Group were the first to make the Lower East Side the place for counter cultural cinema.

² This is the group's preferred spelling and punctuation.

an absence of representation altogether. Seidelman's first film, *Smithereens*, follows a young woman who arrives in the Lower East Side from New Jersey to reinvent herself as the next punk icon. Released in 1982, *Smithereens* earned the then-recent New York University graduate international acclaim, including a spot in competition at the Cannes Film Festival—a first for an American independent film. The critical success of *Smithereens* also gave Seidelman the opportunity to direct her second feature, *Desperately Seeking Susan*

At its core, Desperately Seeking Susan is a film about women taking control of their own image, and therefore, their lives.

(1985), which introduced images of independent women engaged in the downtown art scene of the mid-1980s to a much wider, more mainstream audience.

Desperately Seeking Susan tells the story of two distinctly different women – rebellious Susan (Madonna) and ordinary Roberta (Roseanne Arquette) – who end up helping one another to grow and assert their own identity in a male-dominated world. Unlike other independent films about the downtown scene that feature a loose, difficult-to-follow narrative (e.g. the early works of Jim Jarmusch or Betty Gordon's *Variety*), *Desperately Seeking Susan* follows a conventional comic plot. It is a downtown film for an out-of-town audience of Robertas. Yet its more traditional framework and mainstream appeal allows Seidelman to explore the city from different female perspectives in greater depth, and to visualize both the opportunities and the dangers specific to women navigating the urban environment.

The film paints a dreamlike vision of the city through the eyes of Roberta, a bored housewife living in Fort Lee, NJ, who fantasizes about escaping to Manhattan. She can see the skyline from her balcony, but it seems a world away from her pastel-hued, mild-mannered life. As a means of escape, Roberta reads classified ads from a New York City paper,

obsessively following an ongoing series titled *Desperately Seeking Susan*. A proposed rendezvous in Battery Park between the mysterious Susan and her determined suitor brings Roberta into the city to spy on the encounter.

After spotting Susan at the southernmost tip of Manhattan, Roberta covertly follows her into the East Village, where Susan trades her signature jacket for a pair of rhinestone boots at the iconic vintage shop Love Saves the Day. Roberta purchases the jacket, which she is wearing when mobsters, mistaking her for Susan, knock her unconscious.



Roseanne Arquette in *Desperately Seeking Susan*. Orion Pictures.

An ensuing case of amnesia allows Roberta to briefly become Susan – wearing her clothes, working her old job, and exploring the city by motorbike. For Roberta, Susan, like the city itself, represents the danger and excitement missing from her settled, middle-class existence. By trying on Susan's more adventurous way of life, Roberta begins to come into her own.



Scenes from *Desperately Seeking Susan*. Orion Pictures.

At its core, *Desperately Seeking Susan* is a film about women taking control of their own

image, and therefore, their lives. Significantly, this transformation is supported by female friendship. The story also involves romantic male suitors, but Roberta and Susan are not depicted as mere objects of male sexual fantasy or as damsels in distress. Rather, presenting the story from the two women's perspectives becomes an equalizing force; both male and female characters are able to desire one another and take pleasure in their own desirability. Notably, Susan and Roberta meet only once in the film, but instantly bond, saving each other from an ominous fate (being murdered by the mob and having to go back to New Jersey, respectively). In doing so, they each help to make the city a more hospitable place for women who want to live unconventional lives. Seidelman would return to this theme later in her career, as the director of several iconic episodes from the first season *Sex and the City* (1998-2004).

Personal Freedom Through Cinema

The contemporary Lower East Side seems a world apart from both the artistic fervor and the squalor of the early 1980s downtown punk scene. Yet Crystal Moselle's recent documentary, *The Wolfpack* (2015), shows that at least a trace of the old Lower East Side – both the desperation and the independent spirit – survives. *The Wolfpack* tells the true story

Moselle's film also shows how independent filmmaking can help oppressed groups express their identities and foster connections with others.

of five teenage Peruvian-American brothers, who use their love of movies as a means of escape from their abusive father. Moselle's film also shows how independent filmmaking can help oppressed groups express their identities and foster connections with others.

Documentarian Crystal Moselle first met the Angulo brothers while walking down First Avenue in the East Village. In addition to wearing their hair long as dictated by their Hare Krish-

na-influenced father, the boys were hardcore cinephiles who would often go out dressed in the style of Quentin Tarantino characters – black suits, ties, dark sun glasses.

Struck by their unusual appearance, the filmmaker introduced herself, and Moselle and the Angulos bonded over their shared love of cinema and filmmaking. Moselle envisioned a documentary about these preternaturally cinephilic teenagers making movies. That focus shifted when the boys, ages 14 to 18 at the time, confided that they had grown up with their two sisters locked inside a Lower East Side housing project. Their father, fearful of outsiders and possibly mentally ill, had the only key and almost never allowed his wife and kids to leave.



Scene from *The Wolfpack*, Crystal Moselle's 2015 documentary.

Movies had been the brothers' primary mode of travel, and the movies had inspired their escape. Despite living in Manhattan their entire lives, most of what they knew of the city also came from the movies. Their parents warned them that New York City was riddled with drugs and crime, too dangerous a place for the young men to explore. Their favorite movie, Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas* (1990), reinforced this image of the city. Yet it was one of the darkest urban fantasies, Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008) that convinced 15-year-old Mukunda that it was time for him to summon his courage and leave the apartment.

Mukunda's superhero-inspired breakout eventually inspired the others to disobey their

father, and slowly the city they knew only from the movies and their high-rise windows expanded into their fantastic playground.

If watching movies provided a means of escape, then making them offered a path towards survival. To keep themselves occupied

*The burgeoning of streaming media platforms, film festivals, and appreciation of film culture has allowed **The Wolfpack** to achieve a large audience that usually eludes documentary films.*

and mentally engaged, the brothers not only watched favorite films on repeat, but also created careful reenactments of entire films from their hand transcribed scripts and homemade sets and costumes. Eventually, some of the brothers also began creating original works of personal expression. *The*

Wolfpack's final scene depicts the making of Mukunda's own experimental film *Window Feel*, an allegory in which each member of his family (with the exception of his father) represents a distinct emotional state through costume and performance. The result is moving, and one presumes, therapeutic. Govinda finds work as a Production Assistant in the city, where he is able to connect with his co-workers through a shared love of binge watching. By making films in New York – and participating in Moselle's – the Angulos become more comfortable expressing themselves and exerting their individual identities, slowly removing the masks of their beloved film characters. Unlike Roberta, the real-life Angulo brothers

did not have to escape to the Lower East Side in search of artistic or economic opportunity, they just needed to step outside.

The burgeoning of streaming media platforms, film festivals, and appreciation of film culture has allowed *The Wolfpack* to achieve a large audience that usually eludes documentary films. Despite being produced on a low budget by a first-time filmmaker, *The Wolfpack* has gone on to worldwide distribution and popular success, selling out both art cinemas like Film Forum and huge megaplexes like Loews Lincoln Square, instant accessibility on streaming video platforms, and critical acclaim with a grand jury prize at Sundance. The film's success speaks to the strength of American independent cinema and the passionate creativity of its innovators, which can be traced back to its start in the LES's New American Cinema and the Young Filmmaker's Foundation. It also affirms that DIY filmmaking remains as potent a tool for the positive self-expression, and even freedom, of young people, poor people, women, and people of color today as it was in the 1960s.



Filmmaker Crystal Moselle on location.

CHAPTER 3

DREAMING ON THE EDGE: CINEMA, RACE, AND CONEY ISLAND

By Joshua Glick

Located at the very Southern tip of Brooklyn, Coney Island nevertheless exists at the center of the American imagination. The neighborhood's screen representation is similarly a mixture of the marginal and the central. Although few commercial films are primarily set there, Coney Island makes brief but memorable appearances in many films that take place in New York. The beach and boardwalk form one of the most diverse public spaces in the city, a characteristic that has significantly shaped Coney Island's cinematic depictions. Its cheap rides, free beach and boardwalk, and access to an expansive public transit system have always ensured that Coney Island is a place where a wide cross-section of people can visit. The big three parks – Dreamland, Luna Park, and Steeplechase – helped establish the amusement destination as the “People's Playground” in the early twentieth century. Coney Island is also a residential neighborhood, where, for the past 60 years, an increasing number of Latino and African American families have not only visited but also called home.¹

Coney Island faced severe economic challenges in the 1960s due to City Parks Commissioner Robert Moses's “urban renewal” initiatives, national shifts in amusement culture, and sensationalized stories in the press about youth violence in the area.² Mainstream film and television rarely devoted sustained attention to Coney Island in those years. When major film studios did depict the amusement destination, they tended to take a nostalgic glance back to the early-to-

mid twentieth century, or depict Coney Island in the present as abandoned or crime-ridden. Both kinds of cinema reduce Coney Island to cameo appearances that offer distorted visions of the area's history and contemporary identity.

This chapter will examine how *The Wiz* (Lumet, 1978) and *Crossover Dreams* (Ichaso, 1985) subverted these stereotypes and fashioned a more nuanced and inclusive perspective on Coney Island. These films portrayed Coney Island as an alluring place, even as it faced municipal neglect, an aging commercial infrastructure, and competing entertainments. The chapter will also discuss the Coney Island Film Festival and the significance of how it has featured and nurtured films set entirely in the neighborhood – beyond just the beach and boardwalk. The films shown at the festival portray the intimate, day-to-day experiences of those in the neighborhood and show that Coney Island continues to comprise dynamic and caring communities.

The Wiz

The Wiz was an adaptation of a black-cast Broadway stage version of L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900). The Hollywood studio, Universal, and the black-owned R&B record label, Motown, collaborated on the project, along with a prominent group of African American musicians, actors, and entertainers. The story begins when Dorothy (Diana Ross) is whisked away in a snowstorm from her Harlem

1 With the rising populations of black and Latino Americans in New York City after World War II, along with the concurrent Civil Rights movement, the demographic of Coney Island has become more black and brown. Black and Latino residents rose from 2% of the neighborhood's population in 1950 to 50% by 1990. Sharon Zukin, et. al. “From Coney Island to Las Vegas in the Urban Imaginary: Discursive Practices of Growth and Decline,” *Urban Affairs Review*, 33:5 (May 1998): 627-654.

2 Coney Island was not necessarily free from social tension and prejudice. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, sideshows regularly exploited people of color and the disabled. Social histories and memoirs also describe how changing areas and bathhouses were often segregated. Michael Paul Onorato, *Another Time, Another World: Coney Island Memoirs* (Placentia, Shumway, 1988); David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 91-94. Charles Denson, *Coney Island: Lost and Found* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2002), 104-203; Martin Tolchin, “Coney Island Slump Grows Worse: Decline in Business Since the War Years Has Been Steady,” *New York Times*, July 2, 1964, 33; “4,000 Teen-Agers Brawl at Coney,” *New York Times*, May 31, 1996, 28; “Youths Loot Coney Island Shops and Fight Police,” *New York Times*, April 15, 1968, 23; William Gale, “They Still Come to Coney to Forget,” *New York Times*, July 1, 1973, 246.

apartment and crash-lands in Oz. Her arrival crushes the Wicked Witch of the East, the “Parks Department Commissioner,” a not-so-subtle reference to the real-life Robert

As Dorothy and the Scarecrow venture forth to locate the Wiz, their performance of “Ease on Down the Road” leads them to Coney Island, which appears as a site of both struggle and creative protest.

Moses, whose projects had geographically and economically isolated both Harlem and Coney Island. As Dorothy tries to find the Wiz (Richard Pryor) and make her way home to Harlem, she passes familiar landmarks including the Fifth Avenue Public Library and the World Trade Center. She

also encounters spaces negatively impacted by the City’s “urban renewal” initiatives; she finds the Scarecrow (Michael Jackson) near piles of rubble and an abandoned free-standing tenement, which gives the impression that the surrounding structures had been razed.



Scene from *The Wiz*. Universal Pictures.

As Dorothy and the Scarecrow venture forth to locate the Wiz, their performance of “Ease on Down the Road” leads them to Coney Island, which appears as a site of both struggle and creative protest. They quickly come across the Tinman (Nipsey Russell), who is buried beneath a mechanical heap near the Cyclone. “We were abandoned here when this park went ‘El Foldo,’” the Tinman dependently explains. “Ah, it was a sad day. There’s not much amusement to the closing down of an amusement park.” The morbid ambiance and the Tinman’s speech about the closing of the park refer to the histori-

cal 1964 closing of Steeplechase Pavilion. Real estate tycoon Fred Trump purchased the site from Marie Tilyou and held a highly publicized, distasteful ceremony to knock it down. Trump invited patrons to hurl bricks at the iconic stained-glass Funny Face on the façade. Due to a legal standoff between Trump and city authorities regarding zoning regulations, the site went unused for decades, the ruins of Steeplechase lying on the ground.

The film, however, suggests a happier ending when Dorothy and the Scarecrow free the Tinman and begin to oil him back to life, his performance “Slide Some Oil to Me” transforms the stagnant surroundings into a dynamic setting. The “fastest metal mouth on the midway” infuses a sense of vitality into the amusement zone. “Don’t turn the water on me, just let me burn,” says the Tinman as he shimmies and glides past fun-house mirrors and dances atop a makeshift stage. His performance references traditions of African American music-hall performance at Coney Island venues such as Henderson’s. At the same time, the Tinman’s stylized “popping and locking” draws connections between older forms of tap and jazz dancing and more recent “B-boying,” then beginning to flourish in the Bronx and Brooklyn. His dance demonstrates the endurance and transmission of African American culture across generations. And as his solo performance becomes a group number, it also suggests how this culture can bring together members of the present generation together in a community. The dancing propels the characters forward down the yellow brick road with a renewed sense of optimism.

Critics described the \$24 million production as an extravagant experiment, featuring an innovative synthesis of music and dance, and real New York locales mixed with studio sets. The final product was nominated for four Academy Awards, including Cinematography, Art Direction, Costume Design, and Original Music Score.

Crossover Dreams

Crossover Dreams charts a path from the “El Barrio” neighborhood of Spanish Harlem to Coney Island. Building on their first film *El Super* (1979), the Cuban-American team of Leon Ichaso and Manuel Arce wrote, directed, and produced *Crossover Dreams* on a modest budget of \$600,000. They also incorporated a wide breadth of Latino talent both in front of and behind the camera. Their film enjoyed extensive exposure and praise from critics when it was screened at the New Directors/New Films festival, the prestigious showcase of emerging filmmakers sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art and the Film Society of Lincoln Center.³

The narrative follows the career of Panamanian American Rudy Veloz (Rubén Blades), an aspiring singer who desires to break free of the “Salsa circuit” and achieve “crossover” fame with popular audiences. Eventually, Rudy receives an offer for a record deal from a major label to make Latin-inflected pop. The opportunity seems like his big break. To celebrate, he drives his long-term girlfriend Liz Garcia (Elizabeth Peña) in his newly purchased yellow convertible to Coney Island.



The lovers in *Crossover Dreams*. Miramax.

This scene evokes a long-standing Hollywood representation of Coney Island as a spot for lovers, with the significant difference that in *Crossover Dreams* the couple is Latino. Since the 1920s, Coney Island has served as a backdrop for white couples to enjoy an on-screen ro-

romantic rendezvous. Memorable scenes in films such as *Speedy* (Wilde, 1928), *The Crowd* (Vidor, 1928), *The Gilded Lily* (Ruggles, 1935), *Who is Harry Kellerman and Why is He Saying Those Terrible Things About Me?* (Grosbard, 1971), and *Radio Days* (Allen, 1987) all portray Coney Island as a romantic place. *Crossover Dreams*, however, expands the claim to Coney Island to Latino characters.



Scene from Coney Island cult classic *The Warriors*. Paramount Pictures.

Crossover Dreams predated other indie films by directors of color in depicting Coney Island as an inclusive place. Director Darnell Martin’s debut 1994 film, *I Like It Like That*, culminates in a scene at the Coney Island beach in which the film’s Puerto Rican heroine scripts and styles a music video featuring the Mendez Brothers (the real-life group Barrio Boyzz). And Spike Lee’s *He Got Game* (1998) about a rising local basketball talent named Jesus Shuttlesworth (Ray Allen) captures Coney Island’s Astroland Park, the boardwalk, and the West End projects as home to African Americans.

The Coney Island Film Festival

Since the mid-to-late 1980s, the gradual improvement of both the Coney Island economy and that of New York City as a whole, as well as the establishment of several public-private partnerships, has helped strengthen the local

³ Stephen Holden, “Ruben Blades Turns His Talents to Movies,” *New York Times*, August 18, 1985, H16; Advertisement, *New York Times*, March 8, 1985, C15; Gene Siskel, “Crossover Dreams: An Old Story With A Fresh, New Beat,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 4, 1985; Vincent Canby, “Crossover Dreams’ With Salsa Beat,” *New York Times*, March 29, 1985.

infrastructure. Arts organizations such as Coney Island USA and the Coney Island Hysterical Society began offering cultural programs, ranging from break-dancing competitions for local youth to the revival of the Coney Island Mardi Gras celebration, the Mermaid Parade. The Dreamland Artists Club brought street art to the neighborhood, and KeySpan Park (later renamed MCU Park), was created on the former grounds of Steeplechase as a mixed-use venue for athletics and entertainment.

The Coney Island Film Festival, established in 2001, is the hub of a home-grown film culture that contributes to the growing role of the arts in the neighborhood. The festival hosts special events and celebrates cult classics like *The Warriors* (Hill, 1979). The film follows a multiracial Coney Island gang struggling to get back to their home turf after an inter-gang meeting in the Bronx goes wrong. On its release, *New Yorker* critic Pauline Kael praised *The Warriors*' fresh and insightful portrayal of working class youth attempting to lay claim to a city that has forced them to its margins.⁴ Today, Coney Island celebrates *The Warriors* as a work of vernacular art. The film proudly flaunts the gritty camp aesthetic ingrained in the neighborhood's contemporary street art, signage, rides, amusement stalls, and parades. The screening itself also fosters a sense of community, as viewers come dressed as their favorite characters, and collectively recite lines from the film.

The Festival focuses on films by historians, journalists, artists, activists, residents, and amusement enthusiasts that tell new and varied stories about the area. Such films fall into three categories. First, there are the documentaries that explore social history. Charles Denson, who founded the Coney Island His-

The Coney Island Film Festival, established in 2001, is the hub of a home-grown film culture that contributes to the growing role of the arts in the neighborhood.

tory Project, has created a number of important films. For example, *The Last Immortal* (2011) focuses on Keith Suber, the ex-Coney Island gang member, whose brothers Blue, Molock, and Colonel led the African American and Puerto Rican gang the Seven Immortals in the 1970s. The Seven Immortals was one of the gangs upon which *The Warriors* was based. *The Last Immortal* explores the history of gangs in the area, and critiques stereotypes about crime in Coney Island that the press still perpetuates today. The documentary examines the sociology of local gang culture and the measures community leaders are now taking to stop gun violence.

The second kind of project that the festival encourages is "home movie"-style films that comprise an ever-expanding community photo-album. For example, Lou Dembrow's *Sammy's 80th Birthday Party at Ruby's* (2007) documented the birthday gathering of Sammy Rodriguez. Originally from Puerto Rico, Rodriguez worked as a cook and bartender in Coney Island for over six decades. For much of his career he served drinks at Ruby's Bar & Grill on the boardwalk. Dembrow's depiction of the party brings the viewer into a festive gathering at Ruby's, as everybody is gathered together looking over family photographs, laughing, and drinking.

Finally, the third category of project involves films that serve as an artful form of social advocacy. Vagabond Beaumont's *Coney Island Dreaming* (2016) portrays a young Guatemalan-Italian teenager (Mondriana Villegas) enjoying an evening of entertainment. While walking on the street alone, she finds money, which allows her to play the mechanical fortune-teller Zoltar, ride the Cyclone, buy a candy apple, and relish the fireworks. The

⁴ Pauline Kael, "The Current Cinema: Rumbling," *New Yorker*, March 5, 1979, 108.

wandering, soft strumming of the guitar on the soundtrack infuses the girl's experience with a trancelike quality. As the ambient sounds shift to dissonant guitar feedback, the film concludes with a slow-motion shot of her sleeping in the Stillwell Avenue subway terminal. Text overlaid atop this final shot reads, "There are approximately 42,000 homeless children in New York City" followed by the Irish proverb, "It is in the Shelter of Each Other That People Live." The film foregrounds a tension between the allure of Coney Island – with all its fantastic offerings for thrill, spectacle, and consumption – and the profound economic inequity that exists in the region.

The Coney Island Film Festival includes the

life stories of the area's working-class, racially diverse communities as part of Coney Island's history and current identity. Held each year at the Coney Island USA building, as well as at surrounding businesses, the festival provides a way for the neighborhood to self-reflect, and for broader audiences to learn about the communities. As Coney Island looks to its future, its home-grown cinema addresses social issues, from the challenge of providing job opportunities for residents to efforts to create grassroots arts initiatives to the implications of municipal policy. The Coney Island Film Festival mines the neighborhood's past – not for nostalgia, but to inspire new and inclusive forms of culture.⁵

5 Alessandro Busà, "Rezoning Coney Island: A History of Decline and Revival, of Heroes and Villains at the 'People's Playground,'" eds. Judith N. DeSena and Timothy Shortell, *The World in Brooklyn, Gentrification, Immigration, and Ethnic Politics in a Global City* (Lanham: Lexington Books: 2012), 147-184.

CHAPTER 4

LOS SURES: VOICES OF SOUTH WILLIAMSBURG

By Michael Gillespie

Diego Echeverria's documentary *Los Sures* helped residents of a poor Latino neighborhood in Brooklyn explain their daily struggles in their own words. The film is the first screen representation of what was then the city's poorest neighborhood and balances its discussion of social problems with attention to the efforts and goals of its residents to survive and thrive.

In 1984, South Williamsburg, called Los Sures (meaning south, or southside) by its longtime Puerto Rican and Dominican residents, was the poorest neighborhood in the city, and one of the poorest in the country. Already stretched thin, this community faced compound economic pressures because their jobs in warehouses, on docks, and in manufacturing disappeared at the same time rent prices started to go up. As a result, residents of Los Sures were left to negotiate the pressures of joblessness, faltering communal ties, and the threat of eventual displacement from the neighborhood that, despite its troubles, was still home.



Scene from *Los Sures* by Diego Echeverria. Courtesy UnionDocs.

Documentary film has depicted urban poverty, housing issues, and redevelopment almost from its beginnings in the 1920s, using its storytelling power to make the lives of people in otherwise marginalized and overlooked areas visible to a wider public.¹ However, documentaries on these topics tend to frame the communities on which they focus through the voiceover of a “neutral,” seemingly omniscient, narrator who is never glimpsed onscreen. This technique, known as “voice of god” narration, nearly always male, perpetuates the myth that struggling communities, particularly those inhabited primarily by people of color, cannot speak for themselves.

When Puerto Rican director Diego Echeverria came to Los Sures to make a film about its residents, he used a very different approach. Rather than using one “voice of god” narrator, the filmmaker featured multiple voices and shaped interviews to create “portraits” of community members and their neighborhood in their own words. The film captured the wide variety of stories they lived, while showing how the neighborhood itself created a common experience and mutual bonds among its people. Rather than speaking over or on behalf of Los Sures residents, the film amplified their voices. In doing so,

This technique, known as “voice of god” narration, nearly always male, perpetuates the myth that struggling communities, particularly those inhabited primarily by people of color, cannot speak for themselves.

¹ For a discussion of early documentary's social function and orientation, see John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966. For a more recent study of the evolving aesthetics and politics of documentary with a particularly extensive bibliography, see Betsy McLane's *A New History of Documentary Film* (New York: Continuum, 2012).

as Echeverria said, he captured a part of the city and of the lives lived within it that Hollywood ignored and that even the traditional television documentaries that he himself had made before this project failed to depict.

Los Sures was the first, and for more than 30 years after, the only documentary made about this neighborhood. Unlike other important Brooklyn-set documentaries of its time, like Christine Noschese's *Metropolitan Avenue* (1985), *Los Sures* attempted to represent many facets of the community, and reclaimed the voiceover as an amplification and valorization of the points of view of its subjects. The result was a cinematic portrait of a Latino community in its own words, which did not shy away from the social ills, pain, and economic anxiety of its residents.



South Williamsburg as seen in *Los Sures* by Diego Echeverria.

The different approach is evident in the film's opening shot, which features a flock of pigeons about to take flight from a South Williamsburg roof with the Empire State Building visible in the distance. The rooftop view is not from a tourist vantage. While it shows the distance of Los Sures from Manhattan's economic centers, it also asks viewers to literally shift their point of view – to somewhere inside the neighborhood, not outside of it. The camera pans away from the skyline to focus on the streets and buildings below as an otherwise absent narrator introduces the film, a rare use of the “voice of god” idiom: “Across the East River from Manhattan lies

a small community of some 20,000 Hispanic people, most of them Puerto Rican. It is the poorest section of New York City. This is a portrait of the neighborhood, from the personal experiences of a few people who live here.”

The film maps out the neighborhood with the sights and sounds of salsa, hip-hop, subway trains, 1980s fashion, and the imitable urban scene. A woman's voice is heard over the image of a tenement building, as bags are pulleyed from apartment to apartment: “Los Sures is tough. If you can survive Los Sures you can survive anything. Los Sures is love.” If the first voice attempted to designate this place in the distanced terms of demographics and data, this second disembodied voice describes Los Sures from the inside, speaking from personal experience.

Another sequence portrays Los Sures as a more nuanced neighborhood than one simply defined by its impoverishment: footage of a wedding, an ice cream truck, a bicyclist weaving through the street crowds, gang members, dominoes players; and the hip hop signifiers of breakdancing on cardboard, a boombox, and crew battles. A young male member of the community notes that “Los Sures” is not a name that appears on any official sign. Rather it is the name that residents use to mark their community (“the people on the street”) as “the Spanish section.”

As these two examples suggest, in Echeverria's documentary, the neighborhood is not defined by observational authority of the documentary voice and eye, but by the portraits of individuals who navigate and orga-

In Echeverria's documentary, Los Sures is not defined by observational authority of the documentary voice and eye, but by the portraits of individuals who navigate and organize the public.

nize the public. These unusual tactics give authority to the residents Echeverria interviews, allowing them to define their own experiences and identities, offering images that complicate and contrast the usual view of the “slum” offered by popular Hollywood film and more conventional documentaries.

By organizing the film as a series of portraits, Echeverria shows the individuality of residents, never losing sight of their specific stories, hopes, and dreams. A 20-year-old man named Tito speaks about how the death of his brother has left him devoid of faith. “You can’t trust nobody,” he says. Tito describes the neighborhood as he moves through it, helping the viewer map the area. Tito’s graffiti tag of the street used to memorialize his murdered brother is a significant landmark. Tito supports himself and provides for his family by hustling, stealing cars, stripping them, and then selling the parts. His hustle is a constant one, as driven as the Ms. Pac Man game he is shown playing in an arcade.

After the arcade scene, Tito’s observes that he is playing a game with no future. Yet his ability to tell his own story and to explain his own context, make him a person with whom the audience can identify. His recounting of his family relationships and losses cast his criminal activities, which also likely arise out of a failed economic system and social safety net, in a different light. In *Los Sures*, every action and choice exists within the web of the community and the challenges its members face.

The film also features segments showing how the neighborhood both supports and stifles

residents. For example, Marta is a relatively young single mother of five children living on public assistance and aspiring to be a good mother to her children, whom she hopes will be “productive citizens.” She speaks of how her lack of education has left her incapable of finding employment that might sustain her family and thus public assistance has become her only option. Marta’s interview is given at the Los Sures Cultural Center block

Marta’s interview is given at the Los Sures Cultural Center block party, a place of communal bonding and affection, so while Marta gives voice to the economic precariousness and fear of the future that keep her stuck in Los Sures, she also acknowledges the comforts the neighborhood.

party, a place of communal bonding and affection, so while Marta gives voice to the economic precariousness and fear of the future that keep her stuck in Los Sures, she also acknowledges the comforts the neighborhood offers: “How far can I go?... I know this neighborhood. I know the people. I know I can walk around...I know that to an extent I’m safe here. I can say I’m among friends, you know? I don’t find the

need to leave Williamsburg to move to another area so that I can solve my problems. I’m going to do my problems here.” Still, even this comfort is under threat as neighbors begin to feel the encroachment of gentrification of the neighborhood’s edges.

The film’s final portrait of Evelyn shows how the neighborhood has begun to protect and improve itself. Evelyn works for the National Congress of Neighborhood Women (NCNW), a grassroots organization founded in Williamsburg in 1974, which began as an organization mostly of white, working-class women seeking to uplift their neighborhoods. While NCNW had sometimes been racially exclusionary in early days, by the time of the filming of *Los Sures* in the 1980s, it had expanded beyond its white working class roots to establish partnerships and multicultural community activities.

Once a recipient of public assistance, Evelyn's employment with the group is symbolic of the organization's mission of outreach. Evelyn provides the full context for, and explicit condemnation of, the larger forces that are causing harm to the individual residents seen in earlier interviews. She suggests that the community is in the grips of a drug epidemic, intergenerational dispossession, and a rising wave of violence among a younger generation that is angry and as hopeless as the one before it. Despite her personal story of empowerment, Evelyn paints an uncertain future for the neighborhood, due to much larger trends than the individual actions of residents.



Still from *Tonita's* by Beyza Boyacioglu and Sebastián Díaz. Part of the UnionDocs "Living Los Sures" project.

The neighborhood Los Sures was largely invisible to outsiders at the time the documentary was made. The film itself was not widely available for years, surfacing only on VHS copies, but its significance to neighborhood residents endures. In 2009, UnionDocs, a non-profit center for documentary art in Williamsburg, worked to organize the restoration of the film with the New York Public Library and also began a collaborative film project inviting current Los Sures residents to reflect on their neighborhood today.²

The resulting film projects, *Living Los Sures*, *89 Steps*, and *Shot by Shot* have allowed more than 60 artists and 200 residents to tell their own stories about Los Sures as it continues to undergo social change and assert its local identity, now even in a highly gentrified area. Echeverria's strategy of having residents express themselves through voiceover and portrait has now encompassed hundreds of self-portraits as Los Sures residents document their own lives. *Los Sures* itself, screened at the 30th Annual New York Film Festival, playing to sold-out crowds at art theaters like Metrograph, and inspiring new generations of filmmakers (see interview section), remains a vital, living history of a neighborhood that was once forgotten.

² Christopher Allen, Interview with Cortland Rankin, December 6, 2016

Diverse Cinema's Ripple Effect: Interviews with Prominent Figures in New York's Film Scene

New York has always been a capital of independent and diverse cinema, going back to the black-cast films made in Harlem in the 1920s and the experimental, anti-authoritarian, and often female- or LGBT-centric work of the New American Cinema on the Lower East Side in the 1950s and early 1960s. This chapter presents interviews conducted with 18 members of New York's independent film world, including leaders of educational initiatives, like Ghetto Film School and Queer/Art; filmmakers like Sam Pollard, Crystal Moselle, and Ira Sachs; heads of non-profit collectives that facilitate production and distribution, like Women Make Movies and Third World Newsreel; and representatives of cultural institutions that ensure the films are seen, like Lincoln Center and PBS.

The work of each interview subject has played a crucial role in giving voice and visibility to marginalized groups in the city, and has also added to New York's reputation as a location for realistic, incisive images of the urban experience. Each person was asked how the history of diverse screen representation of the city, and how diversity itself, impacts their practices and future aspirations. Subjects looked back on films that influenced their own work or that marked watershed moments for new representations of New York and its citizens. They also talked about the present, discussing their own work through the lens of diversity, and reflecting on some of the challenges and benefits of making independent cinema in today's New York. Finally, they were invited to speculate about what the future might hold for their work or institutions, and for diverse images of the city in general.

Several common themes emerge from these interviews. First is the extent to which New

York's independent film history influences current New York directors, producers, and programmers. Five interview subjects discuss the influence New American Cinema filmmakers like Jonas Mekas, Jack Smith, and Shirley Clarke had on their own work decades later. Seven interviewees explicitly note the impact Spike Lee's work, especially *Do the Right Thing* (1989), had on their understanding of the city and the potential of film to comment on and transform it. Several people also cite films discussed in this report – most notably *Los Sures* – as inspiring them or influencing their own work.

Second, many interviewees stressed the precarious nature of independent cinema's economics, which might impact both a film's reproduction and its preservation. Independent filmmakers have a difficult time securing funding, or even living, in New York. Lack of funding also hampers distribution or exhibition for diverse films, leading to the disappearance of important images from public view. On the plus side, subjects emphasized that the city's vitality makes shooting on location an endlessly rewarding experience, and that its institutions, like UnionDocs or MoMa, are instrumental for preserving these films and sharing them with a wider audience.

Finally, almost every interview subject connected New York's inherently cinematic nature to the diversity that shapes its identity, explaining that the images that best convey the daily reality and experience of living in the city are those that foreground its diversity. And almost all asserted the continuing importance of making and supporting films that capture the many realities and lives lived in New York City. – Erica Stein

All Interviews Conducted by Cortland Rankin, Ph.D. except where noted.

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CHRISTOPHER ALLEN

Christopher Allen is the Founder and Executive Artistic Director of UnionDocs, a non-profit Center for Documentary Art located in Williamsburg. In addition to public screenings and

events, UnionDocs offers a variety of production programs and seminars for filmmakers.

CR: When programming or producing films about New York and New Yorkers, what issues are most important to you, and why?

CA: The films that I'm attracted to are the films that don't buy into New York's marketing image as a space of luxury lifestyles and as a landscape for fantasy projection. We're more interested in the stories of the 50% of New Yorkers who live at or just above the federal poverty level and bringing attention to the ways people have creative solutions for surviving in the city. We're also interested in local histories of the city. The Living *Los Sures* project was very invested in the local history of South Williamsburg, which was a place that otherwise was difficult to learn about. That project involved about 200 community participants from the neighborhood who engaged in an oral history project that annotated and interspersed stories within a film called *Los Sures* about the neighborhood that we restored. So we're interested in those local histories that the real estate market has pushed aside or the growth machine has run over.

CR: How do diversity and representation influence your own work?

CA: We're interested in new forms of records of our reality and we're interested in that from as many perspectives as possible. So diversity means the voices of the producers and the backgrounds of artists that we invite to our space and that we engage with through our production programs. For us, diversity also has an international component so we're one of the few places that show documentary work from all over the world. I would also include criticality in this discussion of diversity because our space isn't just about promoting the work and voices that are the most popular, but looking for new

voices and voices on the margins that represent a critical perspective on the topics they're approaching and also on the way documentaries are made.

CR: Which New York films or filmmakers do you draw inspiration from, and how have they influenced your work or that of others?

CA: Certainly *Los Sures* has had a major impact. It started in the context of our screening series. A couple of artists whose work we were showing and who lived in the neighborhood told us about this film from 30 years ago about this place. We hadn't heard about it and so they showed it to us and we were blown away... so we had screenings of it at our place and around the neighborhood and saw it as a way to bring people together to talk about the place.

We're more interested in the stories of the 50% of New Yorkers who live at or just above the federal poverty level and bringing attention to the ways people have creative solutions for surviving in the city.

- CHRISTOPHER ALLEN, UnionDocs

Because of the attention we were bringing to it we were able to partner with the New York Public Library and they raised funds for a 16mm restoration project while we raised funds for a digital restoration project. In addition to restoring the original we did these two other pieces – a web documentary with POV on PBS called *89 Steps* that did an update on one of the main characters from the film and another project called *Shot by Shot* where we chopped up *Los Sures* shot by shot and turned those shots into starting points for longstanding members of the community to tell their stories.



DIEGO ECHEVERRIA

Diego Echeverria is a documentary filmmaker known for his 1984 film *Los Sures* about the Latino community in South Williamsburg Brooklyn. Echeverria was born in Chile and lived in

Puerto Rico before immigrating to the United States to study filmmaking at Columbia Univer-

sity. Prior to making *Los Sures*, Echeverria made a number of television documentaries on Latino culture in the U.S. with a particular focus on Puerto Rican communities.

CR: When representing New York and New Yorkers, what issues are most important to you, and why?

DE: The way I tended to do films when I was in television was always trying to have a balanced

Los Sures wasn't so much a direct response to Hollywood as it was saying that there was so much more that we haven't been seeing that is so much a part of this city.

- DIEGO ECHEVERRIA,
Documentary Filmmaker

view. When I arrived in *Los Sures* I wanted to break those rules. *Los Sures* was a much more intuitive film than I had done before and I got the sense as I was watching the footage that this was a story that this material was telling me. All these people had contrasting stories that represented a different reality, but that were all very much rooted in the common experience of that neighborhood. ... We knew that the main character had to be the neighborhood and it had to come alive with the breakdancing scenes, with the religious ceremonies, with the small scenes of people playing billiards, and all the scenes we shot on the streets. The characters had to be inserted into that environment.

CR: What have been some of the most important turning points in how diverse populations are represented in films set in New York?

DE: I arrived in New York in 1971. I came to study at Columbia and do my Master's there. Once I finished the Master's, I got to meet a few people working on a program called *Realidad* on Channel Thirteen and later I worked on *The 51st State*. There were several of us there who were trying to document the immigrant experience for what it was and respond to some of the different stereotypical views. Many of us in that period were very much concerned that the view

of Puerto Ricans and Puerto Rican immigration into New York promoted in popular media was really exaggerated and distorted. ... *Los Sures* wasn't so much a direct response to Hollywood as it was saying that there was so much more that we haven't been seeing that is so much a part of this city.

CR: How would you like to see representations of New York change in the future?

DE: The issues more than ever are still there. ... New York City has changed so drastically in the last 35 years that it's almost like a different city when I go there now. But the stories are still there. It's still such a difficult place for many people and families to survive. This continues to be true for many Latino communities. And because of what's going on in the country today they will be going through some particularly difficult times with families disintegrating and family members being sent back to their original countries. The level of repression that we're seeing is frightening and it's worrisome. I feel that I'm not seeing enough effort to understand those communities and I would really love to see more of those stories being told.

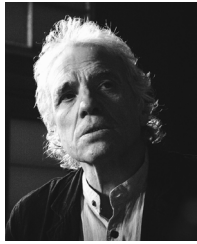
CR: How do diversity and representation influence your own work?

DE: My first reflection when we speak about diversity has to do with my own history. That's what attracted me the most to New York. It was a place where someone like myself could develop a whole set of possibilities in my own life and in my professional work that very few places in the world could offer. Diversity has always been a big part of the city and

I wish this country could look in a less threatening way at the benefits of its diversity. That's why finding and creating those spaces for reflection and discussion are important for us to consider who and what we have been and are becoming.

- DIEGO ECHEVERRIA,
Documentary Filmmaker

it's always been a big part of the country. ... On the one hand it's very present and we feel comfortable, but on the other hand we have to struggle with those elements that are imposing some clear limitations on diversity. Speaking for Latinos we've come a long way, but today I see elements in the political discourse that are very frightening. I wish this country could look in a less threatening way at the benefits of its diversity. That's why finding and creating those spaces for reflection and discussion are important for us to consider who and what we have been and are becoming.



ABEL FERRARA

Abel Ferrara is a director known for many notable independent New York fiction films

including *The Driller Killer* (1979), *Ms. 45* (1981), *King of New York* (1990), *Bad Lieutenant* (1992), and *The Addiction* (1995).

CR: When representing New York and New Yorkers, what issues are most important to you, and why?

AF: The neighborhood I'm living in at the time and the kind of people I'm with. ... I make features inspired by the life I live and in that regard they're somewhat documentary. It's a different film when you're living in Union Square or when you're living on Mulberry Street. The inspiration is different and that's key to the characters and the movie. The locations are specific to the characters and specific to the story.

CR: How would you like to see representations of New York change in the future?

AF: The responsibility of the next generation of filmmakers is to themselves, to just keep making films. You don't have to tell them that, they're already doing it, they're born with it. They have all

the tools, it's great. And the energy in New York is still there. It may not be in Manhattan necessarily, but it's still there and you're not going to lose that. Who knows, maybe somewhere in the Bronx will be the next SoHo or Tribeca. The ultimate responsibility of a filmmaker is to their

characters and their vision. But that's not isolated from where you are, where you live, where you eat, what you see, what you drink, not that you can't think of a film about a tropical island when you're in the middle of a blizzard in Brooklyn, but it's just not the same.

CR: Which New York films or filmmakers do you draw inspiration from, and how have they influenced your work or that of others?

AF: Obviously Scorsese is a big influence. He's so encyclopedic and has such a

range of things that he's drawing on. It's like he does all that work and you just watch him – you get the distilled version of all these movies he's watched and studied and taught. ... I also grew up with Michael Snow, Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas – we were big fans of all that.

The ultimate responsibility of a filmmaker is to their characters and their vision. But that's not isolated from where you are, where you live, where you eat, what you see, what you drink, not that you can't think of a film about a tropical island when you're in the middle of a blizzard in Brooklyn, but it's just not the same.

- ABEL FERRARA, Feature Film Director



PAUL GETTO

Paul Getto is the Vice-President of Strategy and Operations for Focus Features, an arm of Universal Pictures whose films have included *Moonrise Kingdom*, *Milk*, *Eternal Sunshine of*

the Spotless Mind, *The Kids are All Right*, *The Pianist*, *Coraline*, and *The Dallas Buyers Club*. He formerly worked at Miramax and International Creative Management.

CR: When producing films about New York and New Yorkers, what issues are most important to you, and why?

PG: Even though we're part of Universal Pictures, we like to think of ourselves as the way

I think it's not so much about what needs to change in terms of how the city is represented, but that the changes the city is going through need to be documented.

- PAUL GETTO, Focus Features

the mainstream comes.

CR: How would you like to see representations of New York change in the future?

PG: I think it's not so much about what needs to change in terms of how the city is represented, but that the changes the city is going through need to be documented. The films that are made in New York are such important documents of what is happening. So it's more of a change in content, whether that's the skyline or the culture, rather than how it's depicted that is the important issue to me.

CR: Have you found it to be particularly challenging to be a producer working in New York? What are some of most notable obstacles that you've faced producing films in New York?

PG: I'm L.A. based now, but I can tell you that no one else in the world goes to the movies like

Diversity, because there's no place like New York City: it's a country in a city, a whole world within a city.

- BETTE GORDON,
Feature Film Director, Producer, Writer

that are more readily available than they ever were. When I started working at the company fifteen years ago, our movies were competing with *The Sopranos* that were on Sunday night only or you could buy a box set of VHS tapes or

the studio can play in that space. We will continue to vibrantly and aggressively champion independent films using the muscles that we have globally around the world to get those voices out there. As James Schamus once said, it starts in the fringes and then

DVDs. Now people can sit at home and watch *The Crown* and ... they won't go out to see *Loving* or *Nocturnal Animals* or *A Monster Calls* because they've got enough to drink at home and the pool from which they drink is getting larger every day.



BETTE GORDON (interviewed by Noelle Griffis)

Bette Gordon is a pioneer of American Independent Cinema and a film professor at Columbia University. Gordon has directed four features, including

the iconic *Variety* (1984) and most recently *The Drowning* (2016). Considered a seminal figure in the Downtown independent film scene of the 1980s, Gordon first earned acclaim for her early short works, most notably *Empty Suitcases* (1980).

NG: When representing New York and New Yorkers, what issues are most important to you, and why?

BG: Diversity, because there's no place like New York City: it's a country in a city, a whole world within a city. New York is made up of so many kinds of people, ethnicities, styles of living, colors; visually, there's not another physical city like this one. The neighborhoods have completely different feelings but there's no real separation, so things flow between them. ... Having lived here for 30 years, I have still not discovered every corner. It's a vertical city so it has many layers that allow us to keep going deeper. Flatter cities don't have the nuance—what you see is what you get, but here, you have to dig, you have to “smash the mirror to get to the other side” (to quote Harold Pinter).

NG: How do diversity and representation influence your own work?

BG: Sometimes these decisions are more unconscious, you're responding to what's around you. In *Variety*, I was thinking about the whole issue of women and the way the female has been represented in film (and it's still an issue). I was also thinking about the women's movement's phrase “Take Back the Night” and the idea of reclaim-

ing territory. So what I did by sending the main character into male spaces so that she could watch men (“women watching men watch women”) was about having her take back aspects of desire. The places she explores – the porn store, the XXX theater, Yankee Stadium, Fulton Street Fish Market at night – they’re all iconic New York City places, but also male spaces. Having the female character go there was about seeing what can we do to take back these places and look at them another way. *Variety* is about New York as much as it is about desire – the desire to bite into that (big) apple, the sin and the celebration.

NG: Which New York films or filmmakers do you draw inspiration from, and how have they influenced your work or that of others? Are there particular works of cinema whose representation of New York you admire, either because they resonate with your own experience or because they depict experiences that are less familiar to you?

BG: New York film noir was important because of that edgy quality – films like *The Naked City* – how enticing. ... Films like the *French Connection*, and *Midnight Cowboy* also. Films with characters who have to figure out what you have to do to survive in a place like this. I love Scorsese, especially his early career before *Mean Streets*, and Brian DePalma’s early films, and I love John Cassavetes’ *Shadows*. And of course there’s Jonas Mekas, Robert Frank, and the Beat filmmakers. Our group drew from these avant-garde filmmakers; we were interested in pushing further what they did. Shirley Clarke, a woman director who really made her mark, was a major influence because she found a place for herself among all of these male Beat artists.



JOE HALL

Joe Hall is the President and Founder of the non-profit Ghetto Film School in Hunts Point, the Bronx, and a former Bronx social worker. After studying film at the University of Southern Cali-

fornia, in 2000 Hall started Ghetto Film School, which aims to provide an intensive film production education to young people. Since then the program has grown dramatically and expanded to start a branch in Los Angeles.

CR: How do diversity and representation influence your own work?

JH: [Ghetto Film School] is this interesting nexus of a lot of different people. Even in a city like New York, you’d be hard pressed to find a place filled with people of such different backgrounds, whether in terms of race or socio-economic background. In many ways our work has been more than just training students. It’s been partnering in a very real way with industry and universities and other organizations that have to be part of the mix and I think that’s what makes us unique. ... People are always really struck by how diverse and mixed the larger Ghetto Film School community is. To me that’s where you affect real change – you gotta get all

the folks together and normalize things in a way you can move forward with.

CR: Which New York films or filmmakers do you draw inspiration from, and how have they influenced your work or that of others?

JH: Spike Lee in my mind is a New York treasure and three of his films to me are just masterpieces. But if you look at his career, what’s more important than the content is that he’s been his own diversity machine. He was his own black and Latino underrepresented studio in a way. And then he pulled that into the commercial world. I saw *Do the Right Thing* right before I came to New York in the summer of 1989 and that influenced me. I had this image on the screen that was informing my understanding of New York.

CR: Have you found it to be particularly challenging to run a film school in New York? What are some of most notable obstacles that you’ve

faced running a film school in New York?

JH: What we do at Ghetto Film School flies in the face of the conventional wisdom of what is possible with black and Latino teenagers, particularly lower income teenagers. ... One of our big things that we have to do is make sure that people understand that in the creative sector our students are capable of excellence. ... Over sixteen years we've had three program evaluations and they always try to come in and figure out what's the secret sauce at Ghetto Film School and I always tell them it's high expectations.



DENNIS LIM

Dennis Lim is a film critic and Director of Programming at the Film Society of Lincoln Center. He has previously written for *The New York Times*, *The Village Voice*, *The Los Angeles Times* and *Artforum* and is the author of *David Lynch: The Man From Another Place* (New Harvest, 2015).

CR: What have been some of the most important turning points in how diverse populations are represented in films set in New York?

DL: I think a film that got quite a bit of attention recently is *Los Sures*, which was a fascinating time capsule of a part of Williamsburg that is very different now. I've also been thinking a lot recently about New York films from the 70s and 80s that are pre-gentrification films, early Jim Jarmusch films like *Permanent Vacation* and *Stranger Than Paradise*, which give a different sense of the Lower East Side, and Chantal Akerman's *News from Home*, which is an amazing portrait of an almost unrecognizable Manhattan and an extremely diverse one.

CR: How do diversity and representation influence your own work?

DL: Every program is its own thing. We look at gender diversity certainly and depending on the program economic diversity, balancing big films with small films and films that are well known with new discoveries, so it's always this tension

between trying to provide variety while maintaining a coherent programmatic point of view.

CR: Which New York films or filmmakers do you draw inspiration from, and how have they influenced your work or that of others?

DL: My colleague Dan Sullivan has over the last two years programmed a series of New York shorts for the New York Film Festival but most of our programming is defined by genre or region. One very important program that we did recently [Tell it Like it Is] was a survey of black independent cinema in New York City between 1968 and 1986 tracing the pre-Spike Lee era of black independent cinema. Spike Lee was certainly a pioneer in his own right, but this movement didn't start with him and there was a very healthy tradition of black independent cinema.

CR: Are there particular works of cinema whose representation of New York you admire, either because they resonate with your own experience or because they depict experiences that are less familiar to you?

DL: One of my favorite recent New York films was made by an Argentinian filmmaker named Matías Piñeiro who now lives in New York called *Hermia & Helena*. We showed it at the New York Film Festival this year in the Main Slate and I think that was an interesting film for showcasing parts of the city, particularly Manhattan and Brooklyn, that are not seen on screen that much. It was very much a New Yorker's film with a little bit of distance since it's made by someone who's a relatively recent transplant to New York. I thought that was a very fresh use of the city as a backdrop in a fiction film because it's easy to be overly touristic when filming New York.



EDWIN MARTINEZ

Edwin Martinez is best known for the documentary he co-directed, *To Be Heard* (2010), which follows three teenagers from the South Bronx and chronicles the role poetry plays in their lives. As a cinematographer, he has also worked on feature-length fiction and documen-

tary films including *Rachel Is* (2009), *Leave No Soldier* (2008), *Las Marthas* (2014) and *What Alice Found* (2003).

CR: When representing New York and New Yorkers, what issues are most important to you, and why?

EM: I grew up in a very poor neighborhood in the Bronx and my parents didn't have very much money so geographically, economically, and ethnically (I'm Puerto Rican) I felt from a young age was that I was someone on the edges. When I went to Manhattan I felt like I was traveling away from my "home" rather than it being a part of my home. ... I think that New York is a city where geography and economy and segregation are all very intertwined. What I'm interested in is who wins and who loses. I'm an idealist living in a realist body and for me the question is who loses and for me it seems it's always the same people who lose.

CR: How would you like to see representations of New York change in the future?

EM: I'm really interested in a further broadening of what to me has always felt like a top down gaze on New York. ... There are all these things in the city that nobody knows about and when the same thirty people are always making films and TV shows about New York we always see the same thing and I feel like new stories come out when new people are able to talk.

CR: How do diversity and representation influence your own work?

EM: I kind of hate the word diversity – not as a part of the English language, but how it's been lazily co-opted as a panacea for all the problems we have. Like if we have all these problems, if we just add diversity to things it will be fine, like it's some lemon juice that's gonna make the salad taste really good. The real meaning behind that to me is about having perspective. The lack of diversity in certain kinds of places is for me a problem of keeping certain people out and keeping certain people in. What I try to do with my work, whether it's how I make my work or what I make my work about, is flip that imbalance as

much as possible so that the perspectives that are excluded from certain conversations can become included and people who are kept outside of rooms are able to be brought into those rooms. And that's one of the great things about cinema – you're able to transport someone into a room that they otherwise couldn't or wouldn't walk into. Through a film you can bring a girl in the South Bronx who's going through a certain thing into a screen in Oregon ... That's what I'm interested in – helping to bring voice to power and power to voice.

CR: Which New York films or filmmakers do you draw inspiration from, and how have they influenced your work or that of others?

EM: A lot of the more stereotypical films about the Bronx still make me super angry. It feels very colonial. ... That idea of reducing the place to a stigma both narratively and visually didn't make sense when I was younger and there was a dissonance that I couldn't quite figure out. Then I realized how intentional it was – how the Bronx was being used as shorthand for all that was wrong the city. ... So making *To Be Heard* was the first film I made in my town in a real way and I was very conscious of showing the Bronx in a way that people who actually live here see it.

CR: Have you found it to be particularly challenging to film in New York? What are some of most notable obstacles that you've faced filming in New York?

EM: Most of the problems of being a filmmaker in New York are lifestyle issues, mainly how

I kind of hate the word diversity – not as a part of the English language, but how it's been lazily co-opted as a panacea for all the problems we have. Like if we have all these problems, if we just add diversity to things it will be fine, like it's some lemon juice that's gonna make the salad taste really good. The real meaning behind that to me is about having perspective.

- EDWIN MARTINEZ,
Documentary Filmmaker

to support yourself. It's a long path for people who grow up in poor areas to become filmmakers and I got really lucky. There's a high bar for young people to break in and it takes a lot of time, energy, money, and stubbornness to make it. ... So it comes back to economic inequality again; hence the need for having places that help those who don't have the means to be able to stand on their own two feet.



JOHN MHIRIPIRI

John Mhiripiri is the Director of Anthology Film Archives, which specializes in the exhibition, study, and preservation of independent and experimental cinema. As the head of administration and exhibition at Anthology, Mhiripiri is responsible for the administrative, building, and theater operations as well as the overall coordination of public and private programs there.

CR: What have been some of the most important turning points in how diverse populations are represented in films set in New York?

JM: Anthology came out of the American avant-garde and experimental film movement and that's sort of the core of our collection and our work as an archive. ... A lot of the experimental films that we have in our collection were

Anthology has always believed that it's important to be here. The city has a lot of different perspectives so it's important to us to highlight the multiplicity of voices here in the city.

- JOHN MHIRIPIRI, Anthology Film Archives

made by people living in New York and made in New York. They're a big part of my understanding of what this city is and represents. It's part of what brought me to New York and they've definitely been an important part of my understanding of the city – a film like *Twice the Man* by Gregory Markopoulos begins on the Staten Island Ferry and his feature-length film *The Illiac Passion* features beautiful Queens and Central Park scenes and I think other New York parks as well. Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* and films by Jonas Mekas

like *Walden* have amazing footage all over the city and all over the area, from Montauk to up-state.

CR: How do diversity and representation influence your own work?

JM: It figures pretty prominently. Anthology was founded in order to highlight film as an art form, to really focus on experimental and avant-garde cinema as well as more generally more non-commercial and independent cinema. We premier films that otherwise aren't going to get premiered. Every time we have a programming meeting we look at how many films are coming from not just different countries but different continents. Anthology has always believed that it's important to be here. The city has a lot of different perspectives so it's important to us to highlight the multiplicity of voices here in the city.

CR: Which New York films or filmmakers do you draw inspiration from, and how have they influenced your work or that of others?

JM: I don't feel like I had a sheltered experience growing up in the Midwest and being African American, but nobody has diversity like New York has diversity, nobody has the number of languages. The richness of it was always reinforced with each next artist. I would mention *Paris Is Burning*, which I saw before coming to New York and which showed me a community I was less familiar with and it definitely broadened my horizon. When I was in college Spike Lee was coming up and I saw all of his movies as they came out. When I saw *Do the Right Thing* I saw Brooklyn in a new way for the first time. I've always valued what some of these filmmakers have done.



CRYSTAL MOSELLE

Crystal Moselle is a director best known for her documentary *The Wolfpack* (2015). In the past, she was a producer on the critically acclaimed documentary film *Excavating Taylor Mead*. In the last decade she has been working with short-form storytelling for publications such as *Vice*, *Nowness*, and *The New York Times*. Mo-

selle's project for Miu Miu, *That One Day*, premiered at the Venice Film Festival.

For me it's important as a female director to have the female gaze, to create work that pushes limits. Because when you're telling a story, it gets woven into the moment in time that we're in right now and it becomes history.

- CRYSTAL MOSELLE,
Documentary Filmmaker

teenagers because that's who's keeping the city alive. There's just an energy that is really powerful in New York and they're the ones who are really keeping it alive and creating new things and new ideas and new art. So for me with my work I aim to give young people a point of view. In New York, there are so many different worlds you can create and capture so it's nonstop inspiration. I found the guys for *The Wolfpack* when I was walking down First Avenue. They ran past me and they had this beautiful long hair and they were all wearing black and they just had an energy to them that I was drawn to so I ran after them.

CR: How do diversity and representation influence your own work?

CM: I think it's very important for my work and something I think about with everything I do. But I think it naturally gets woven into what I do as well. For me the way that I work I find characters and I create a film or a short film or a music video around them. Right now I'm working with these skater girls and I've basically embedded myself in their lives. The world that I'm in is a naturally more diverse world whether in terms of race or sexuality or whatever. For me it's important as a female director to have the female gaze, to create work that pushes limits. Because

CR: When representing New York and New Yorkers, what issues are most important to you, and why?

CM: I think that giving the use of voice is important to me. Several people have said to me that New York is dead, that it's had its day and I always say to them, well you're not hanging out with enough

when you're telling a story, it gets woven into the moment in time that we're in right now and it becomes history.

CR: Have you found it to be particularly challenging to film in New York? What are some of the most notable obstacles that you've faced filming in New York?

CM: I think it's hard because it's expensive. You have to hustle really hard which I've done and I like the hustling but sometimes it gets exhausting. I'm in a different place now where the hustle is different, but there was a long time where it was really difficult to make things happen and you have to do a lot of it yourself. Now I feel like I could create anything here since I have the right support and the right way of doing things.



SAM POLLARD

Sam Pollard began his filmmaking career in 1972 as an apprentice in a WNET-sponsored film-training workshop and has been a feature film and television editor and documentary producer for over 30 years. He has edited numerous Spike Lee films including *Jungle Fever* (1991), *Clockers* (1995), and *Bamboozled* (2000) and produced documentaries such as *Eyes On The Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads* (1989) and *I'll Make Me A World: Stories of African-American Artists and Community* (1997). He is a Professor at New York University in the Department of Film and Television.

CR: What have been some of the most important turning points in how diverse populations are represented in films set in New York?

SP: If I had to highlight some New York films that speak to the diversity and the level of complexity that the city has I go back to *Edge of the City* directed by Martin Ritt and starring John Cassavetes, Sydney Poitier and Ruby Dee. I go to Ossie Davis' *Cotton Comes to Harlem* with Godfrey Cambridge and Raymond St. Jacques. I go to Sidney Lumet's *Serpico*, *Dog Day Afternoon*, and *Prince of the City*. Those films are wonderfully evocative of New York City – the grittiness of

it, the edge of it, everything. I think of other films that have depicted New York like Spike's *Malcolm X* and *Jungle Fever*, which I edited – those films really captured New York. Also Woody Allen's films capture New York. Those filmmakers and films capture the city, all on different levels.

CR: Which New York films or filmmakers do you draw inspiration from, and how have they influenced your work or that of others?

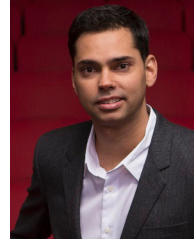
Filmmakers who love and grew up in New York and who work both in documentary and fiction know how to really honor the city.

- SAM POLLARD,
Film/TV Editor and Documentary
Producer/Director

ful films in New York. Scorsese, even though he shoots features, also shoots documentaries. He did a wonderful film about Fran Lebowitz called *Public Speaking* that's a great New York documentary. Filmmakers who love and grew up in New York and who work both in documentary and fiction know how to really honor the city.

CR: Have you found it to be particularly challenging to film in New York? What are some of most notable obstacles that you've faced filming in New York?

SP: To me it's both challenging and exhilarating. When you're on location you have to deal with traffic, you have to deal with noise, sometimes you have to deal with police saying you can't shoot here, you can't shoot there. You have to deal with passersby getting in your shots. But that also gives the city a certain kind of energy that you won't get in many other places – the raw vitality. You get a different kind of vitality if you shoot in L.A. or Chicago, but you get what I call the New York edge when you shoot in the city and you're going to get surprised. The thing about making films on location is you have to be open to surprise, which can be a great positive for your film if you're up to it.



RAJENDRA ROY

Rajendra Roy has been the Celeste Bartos Chief Curator of Film at the Museum of Modern Art since 2007. He has organized exhibitions there including *Wim Wenders* (2015), *Tim Burton* (2011), and *Mike Nichols* (2009). He is a member of the selection committee for MoMA's New Directors/New Films series and has also served on numerous juries and selection committees for organizations such as the Sundance Film Festival and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences.

CR: What have been some of the most important turning points in how diverse populations are represented in films set in New York?

RR: I think you really have to go back to the origins of cinema when New York and New Jersey were the centers of film production in the United States. We had the opportunity to discover a remarkable unfinished work from 1913 that had been in MoMA's vault for many decades but because it was unfinished it was never recognized as part of its collection. That happened to have been the first feature film with an all African American cast and it was shot throughout the city and in New Jersey and I think that also represented a clear link between the theater community and the burgeoning film production community, between Harlem and Broadway, and everything that New York City represented and in some sense still represents in terms of the way the different arts in the city collaborate and combine to create a robust and diverse experience.

CR: How would you like to see representations of New York change in the future?

RR: New York is diverse in extremis and we have a President who is really at odds with much of what this city's artist community stands for and I think that has been a call to arms for artists across the city. I don't know exactly how that challenge is going to manifest, but I know it's coming and I know that cultural institutions are more essential than ever in a way because we have to remain citadels of free expression.

CR: How do diversity and representation influence your own work?

RR: It's not something that's even a question. It's something that's central to my practice as a curator going on 24 years now in the city and has been an essential part of MoMA's mission in film as well. In our industry diversity means a lot of things. On one hand, we make an effort to show work by and about underrepresented people, including women. While film is a collaborative art form a lot of focus is put on directing, but I certainly don't consider directing the only point of entry into the study or exhibition of filmmaking. So women and diverse folks from a number of ethnic backgrounds have had and continue to have a spectrum of roles within filmmaking so we're also looking at diverse ways that people contribute to a film or the filmmaking process.

CR: Are there particular works of cinema whose representation of New York you admire, either because they resonate with your own experience or because they depict experiences that are less familiar to you?

RR: Spike Lee shot *Do the Right Thing* a couple years before I moved to the city, but it spoke to an experience of friendship and racial tension that I was familiar with growing up in California. It also really inspired me in terms of the city's ability to navigate that tension, not without conflict and not without heartbreak.



IRA SACHS (Interview conducted by Erica Stein)

Ira Sachs is a director, producer, and editor of independent feature films including *Married Life* (2007), *Keep the Lights On* (2012), *Love Is Strange* (2014), and *Little Men* (2016). He is the founder of Queer/Art, a non-profit mentorship program serving the LGBT community.

ES: When representing New York and New Yorkers, what issues are most important to you, and why?

IS: The thing that I try to bring to any representation of the city or any story that I tell based on

the city is intimacy. ... So I feel like my focus is to try to tell stories from the inside, not through a mode of observation, not from the external – viewing New York through a long lens – but in close quarters. For me that often means domestic spaces, the spaces of communities, bars and restaurants, things that are part of the everyday. I am trying to be accurate in my depiction of the details of communities, including identities of class, racial makeup, and histories of ethnicity, which I find particularly important.

That word, apparatus, was always significant to me: when we're trying to effect change, we need to look at how systems are working and make our own.

- IRA SACHS, Producer, Writer

ES: What have been some of the most important turning points in how diverse populations are represented in films set in New York?

IS: There have been artists with a real originality. That's where I find significant change, films that impacted me personally, and that's people like Andy Warhol, Jack Smith, Chantal Akerman, John Cassavetes in *Shadows*, Spike Lee. These are filmmakers who managed to change the way that I look at New York with just one film or sometimes over the course of their work both in terms of their aesthetics and the world that they're opening up for us. But I think aesthetically what's also been very important to me as a New York filmmaker, when I get lost and I try to go back and remember films I care about, the ones I care about most are marginal. Marginality has been embraced here and been important to shaping our view of the city.

ES: Are there particular works of cinema whose representation of New York you admire, either because they resonate with your own experience or because they depict experiences that are less familiar to you?

IS: *Los Sures* and *Parting Glances* represent a New York just before I got here. *Rear Window* serves as a metaphor for everyone's experience

in New York. I recently saw a couple of films, *Desperately Seeking Susan* and *Times Square*, which are both wonderful films about searching for freedom in the city. There's *Ms. 45*, there's *Crooklyn* – really underrated, such a sweet film, and very few films about what it's like being a girl in the city have been as successful.

ES: How would you like to see representations of New York change in the future?

IS: One way they are changing is access, at least on a small scale. The digital revolution gives some possibility of newness. That said, capital for independent narrative cinema has nearly disappeared over the past ten to fifteen years. So, for me, one of the ways that I try to address the lack of diversity in representation is through my second job running *Queer/Art*, which supports the creation of work by LGBT people, and which is very focused on New York City. In some ways, institutions are the way to make change possible. When I first moved here, there was *Apparatus Films*, run by Todd Haynes, Christine Vachon, and Barry Ellsworth. That word, *apparatus*, was always significant to me: when we're trying to effect change, we need to look at how systems are working and make our own.



SUSAN SEIDELMAN

Susan Seidelman is a feature film and television director, producer and writer whose work includes *Smithereens* (1982), *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985), *Making Mr. Right* (1987), several episodes from the first season of *Sex and the City* (1998), and *Musical Chairs* (2005).

CR: When representing New York and New Yorkers, what issues are most important to you, and why?

SS: If I wasn't a filmmaker, I probably would have wanted to be a social anthropologist so for me there's something interesting about capturing the feel of a place. New York is so diverse, so I focused on the New York that I knew when I was making films downtown and I was trying to capture the spirit of the times as well as the

people that inhabited that world. Even in movies that use some fantasy element like *Desperately Seeking Susan* I was trying to be authentic to the spirit of the time and the place.

CR: How would you like to see representations of New York change in the future?

SS: New York City is so multicultural and there's so much interaction between different ethnicities, races, religions, and cultures and we're seeing a lot of that reflected, maybe not so much in mainstream movies but certainly in independent movies. And maybe not so much in Manhattan stories, but Brooklyn stories or Bronx stories. In speaking about Manhattan in particular since it's getting so expensive, I really hope there'll always be a place for people of all different economic levels because I think we make each other better by being in the same space.

CR: How do diversity and representation influence your own work?

SS: To me it's about embracing your dif-

ferentness – whatever that thing is that makes us unique and authentic and seeing that in a positive light. One of the things I enjoyed so much about working on *Musical Chairs* was that it was embracing all kinds of diversity. It's about people who are physically diverse since it's about wheelchair ballroom dance competitions. There also was a character played by Laverne Cox, before she became so famous with *Orange Is The New Black*, so there was gender diversity and there was cultural diversity since the characters were WASPs, African Americans, Hispanics. It was a different New York than I had experienced, which was one of the appeals of making it.

CR: Which New York films or filmmakers do you draw inspiration from, and how have they influ-

To me it's about embracing your differentness – whatever that thing is that makes us unique and authentic and seeing that in a positive light.

- SUSAN SEIDELMAN, Feature Film Director, Producer, Writer

enced your work or that of others?

SS: When I was just starting out in the 1970s, pretty much the only way to be a woman director was to create your own project. ...My role models were female directors working in Europe like Lina Wertmüller and Agnès Varda. Women have always had to make their own opportunities to some extent so independent film allows you to hire yourself basically and forge your own way. My producing partner on *Smithereens*, Joanne Gross, was a woman, and *Desperately Seeking Susan* was a heavily female above the line production. Really starting in the 1990s you started to see more women directors, producers, cinematographers making movies that were getting out there and finding audiences, although there still aren't too many.

CR: Are there particular works of cinema whose representation of New York you admire, either because they resonate with your own experience or because they

depict experiences that are less familiar to you?

When I was just starting out in the 1970s, pretty much the only way to be a woman director was to create your own project.

- SUSAN SEIDELMAN,
Feature Film Director, Producer,
Writer

see New York in movies and want to go there. Although it's a very Hollywood version of New York, as a 13-year-old girl watching *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, I really connected with this character from the sticks who reinvents herself in New York. It was a place where you could go to be something different and become part of a bigger world and that film was a huge influence on me. I also really gravitated to the early Woody Allen and Scorsese movies. For me they captured not just New York, but the authenticity of New York. Whether their characters were Italian or Jewish, they weren't generic Hollywood characters but had an ethnic flavor and specificity that I found interesting.



JAMES SCHAMUS

James Schamus is an award-winning screenwriter (*The Ice Storm*), producer (*Brokeback Mountain*), director (*Indignation*), and former CEO of Focus Features. Today he heads his own production company, Symbolic Exchange. He is the author of *Carl Theodor Dreyer's Gertrud: The Moving Word* (2008), published by the University of Washington Press. He earned his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in English from the University of California, Berkeley. He is a Professor of Professional Practice at Columbia University's School of the Arts.

CR: When making films about New York and New Yorkers, what issues are most important to you, and why?

JS: I really have a big problem with the concept of diversity as it is deployed in these situations and I would rather replace it immediately, but not with an erasure of any of the historical and identity issues that need redress and address like racism for example or the question of "culture" and what it means to be a hyphenated American of one kind or another. If one is a hyphenated American, does that mean there are Americans who are not hyphenated and they're the ones who are celebrating the other hyphenated ones? That just seems really bizarre to me. So I'd rather replace the discussion of diversity with a discussion of quality.

CR: How would you like to see representations of New York change in the future?

JS: In terms of the diversity discussion, I think it can be used as a very easy move to basically create the shiny object that gets your eye off what we really need to be talking about which are issues of equality like minimum wage, guarantees for working conditions, health insurance, etc. If you really want to diversify media in this country, try universal single-payer national healthcare, getting rid of student loans, genuinely opening up access to higher education, including education in media studies, so that then kids who are coming from "diverse" backgrounds could ac-

tually afford to grab cameras and make movies and do their thing.

CR: How do diversity and representation influence your own work?

JS: Since we've elected a proto-fascist regime to take over the country, diversity as a topic starts to look a little like an ideological maneuver. To

To be honest, even the construction of a celebration of diversity is to me quite suspicious because if I were "diverse" why would I need to be celebrating diversity, why can't I just be?

- JAMES SCHAMUS,
Feature Film Writer, Producer,
Director

be honest, even the construction of a celebration of diversity is to me quite suspicious because if I were "diverse" why would I need to be celebrating diversity, why can't I just be?

resonate with your own experience or because they depict experiences that are less familiar to you?

JS: I think this question begs its own limitations for a number of reasons. First, like many so-called New Yorkers, we're used to living with the idea that we only live in a tiny sliver of what New York is. We have our own little pods, our neighborhoods, our social networks, our restaurants, our class, race, gender, or whatever, but New Yorkers are really used to that fact. There are probably 2,000 other artists with different perspectives in New York that I'm not aware of because they don't have the means of production and circulation, credibility or capital to get past the creative executives at HBO or whatever.



NEAL SHAPIRO

Neal Shapiro is the President and CEO of WNET. He worked previously as the President of NBC News and the executive producer for *Dateline NBC*. Prior to this Shapiro spent 13 years

as a news producer at ABC News. He has taught at the Columbia University Graduate School of

Journalism and his alma mater, Tufts University.

CR: When producing or programming films about New York and New Yorkers, what issues are most important to you, and why?

NS: I think broadly speaking the issue of sustainability is incredibly important to us. Now it refers often to just the environment, but I think the notion of how the city works and how we get so many different people together is central to our mission. So whether it's economic issues facing our city or educational issues or environmental issues we cover them in our news programs and we have a show now called *MetroFocus*, which is a daily show, that reflects exactly what the city's about. It's about smart coverage of the issues, not the traffic accidents of the day but a deeper look at issues like education and economic development and poverty and culture and climate change.

CR: What have been some of the most important turning points in how diverse populations are represented in films set in New York?

NS: For WNET, it dates back to our earliest days when years ago we did this show called *The 51st State*. With each interesting movement or political topic, we've been around that. In the 1960s we were one of the first television stations anywhere to talk about the notion that there should be a show (*Black Journal*) that was hosted by black people and about issues affecting the black community but that was also a show that white people could watch and try to understand what some of the cultural issues are. And we've maintained that drive all the way through our time.

CR: How do diversity and representation influence your own work?

NS: It's central to our mission. We're about serving the city and there's no city on the planet that's as diverse as ours and we want to reflect all the different cultures that make up our audience. One of the great things about New York is that it is a melting pot where you are exposed not just your own culture but to so many others. And as public media we want to share that.

CR: Have you found it to be particularly chal-

lenging to run a public television station in New York? What are some of most notable obstacles that you've faced in programming and producing content for WNET New York?

NS: I think there are a couple. Obviously there's always the financial challenge when you're a not-for-profit enterprise. Your dreams always exceed your resources and we dream big here so we'd always like to do more. I think for all the excitement and possibilities there are challenges the city faces and we would like to service that more. I think one huge problem facing the city is the gap between rich and poor, which only gets magnified with the success of some sectors of the city and what seem to be intractable problems in other sectors of the city. And that leaves all kinds of issues, not just for the people at the top and the bottom, but people in the middle and the social unrest that comes out of that. And if we are to be the city of possibilities, we need to figure that out.



J.T. TAKAGI

J.T. Takagi is a third generation Japanese American independent filmmaker who is currently serving as the Executive Director of Third World Newsreel, (Camera News, Inc.) an alternative media arts organization based in New York that fosters the creation, appreciation and dissemination of independent film and video by and about people of color and social justice issues. Takagi's films include *Community Plot* (1984), *Homes Apart: Korea* (1991), co-directed with Christine Choy, *The #7 Train: An Immigrant Journey* (1999), and *Beyond the DMZ* (2003), co-directed with Hye Jung Park.

CR: When filming or distributing films about New York and New Yorkers, what issues are most important to you, and why?

JT: We still don't see much of ourselves (com-

munities of color) in mainstream media, and when we do it's still usually a one dimensional or stereotypical character, that rarely leads the action. ... However, on the alternative and independent side, which we represent, it's always been important to nurture diverse filmmakers to bring their own stories and visions to the screen, through distribution, production, training, exhibition and fiscal sponsorship. I think you could say that in all our films, whether our own productions, sponsored or in distribution, we are interested in the lives and stories of people not typically represented, presenting both the challenges that they face and how they are actively working to change conditions.

I think broadly speaking the issue of sustainability is incredibly important to us. Now it refers often to just the environment, but I think the notion of how the city works and how we get so many different people together is central to our mission.

- NEAL SHAPIRO, WNET

CR: What have been some of the most important turning points in how diverse populations are represented in films set in New York?

JT: Historically in terms of mainstream screens, two things that come to mind are Gordon Park's *Shaft* films, and of course, Spike Lee's work. Lee's early work also impacted the film crews that were forced to become more diverse. In terms of independent work, our Newsreel films also contributed greatly in their depiction of communities of color in the late 1960s and early 70s. Films like *El Pueblo Se Levanta* (*The People Are Rising*, 1971) was, at the time it was released, both unprecedented and thrilling in its forthright depiction of the Young Lords Party organizing Puerto Rican communities for human and civil rights in New York City.

CR: How do diversity and representation influence your own work?

JT: Third World Newsreel is an alternative media arts organization whose mission is specifically to foster the creation, appreciation and dissemination of social issue media by and about people of color and historically marginalized groups. Not only do we carry out educational media dis-

tribution of media by and about people of color, but we also embody that diversity through our board and staff, made up of diverse New Yorkers who are primarily women (50%), from communities of color (African American, Latino and Asian) (100%) and 25% LGBTQ. The stories and

On the alternative and independent side, which we represent, it's always been important to nurture diverse filmmakers to bring their own stories and visions to the screen, through distribution, production, training, exhibition and fiscal sponsorship.

- J.T. TAKAGI,
Third World Newsreel Director

CR: Have you found it to be particularly challenging to run a film distribution organization in New York? What are some of most notable obstacles that you've faced in being an independent filmmaker and distributor in New York?

JT: One challenge that I face in parallel fashion as a filmmaker and as the recently appointed Executive Director of a media center like Third World Newsreel is the constant need to find and secure funding. Our most popular (and free) workshops are ones dealing with funding and devising achievable film budgets, and that is the most consistent complaint of almost everyone in media – whether progressive, alternative or mainstream. We're pleased to report that at least on the governmental level, Third World Newsreel has been lucky so far to have partial support for our Media Training Program, from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, and public funds from the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, as well as the Peace Development Fund and individual donors.



DEBRA ZIMMERMAN

Debra Zimmerman has been the Executive Director of Women Make Movies, a non-profit New York-based film distribution organization that supports women filmmakers, since 1983. She

has given talks on independent film distribution, marketing and financing as well as on women's film at a variety of conferences. She was the recipient of the 2012 Loren Arbus Award for Those Who Take Action & Affect Change and the IMPACT Award from the Sarasota Film Festival.

CR: When producing or distributing films about New York and New Yorkers, what issues are most important to you, and why?

DZ: We started as an organization that was teaching women to make films because back in the 1970s there were so few women that actually had the skills and access to equipment. Then in the 1980s we moved more towards distribution. Today we have probably one of the largest, if not

the largest, collections of films by and about women of color as well as women from other cultures in the world and I think for sure in New York. We distribute more than 600 films and almost half are by and about women from diverse backgrounds. We also have a production assistance program where we assist women and try to help get their films made and in that program as well we're very committed to diversity. The why hasn't changed over the years, unfortunately, the what hasn't changed, but the how has changed.

CR: How do diversity and representation influence your own work?

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- DEBRA ZIMMERMAN,
Women Make Movies

DZ: It's actually really central to our mission, purpose, and activities. We are an organization that's focused on giving voice to women and representing those who are the most misrepresented or absent from mainstream media. We are of course also concerned with the self-representation of women of color, of older women, disabled women, or physically challenged women, lesbians, and LGBTQI individuals. It's about really increasing the diversity of voices and visions that are on the screen.

CR: Which New York films or filmmakers do you draw inspiration from, and how have they influenced your work or that of others?

DZ: We have a really wonderful film from this past year about an amazing young woman named Angie Rivera who is undocumented living in Queens and actually becomes an activist leader for young undocumented people with a blog that she has online. The film is called *Don't Tell Anyone* and it actually won a Peabody Award last year and was on national public television. I think it's a fantastic portrait of young immigrant undocumented girls and the issues that they face.

CR: Have you found it to be particularly challenging to be an independent film distributor in New York? What are some of most notable obstacles that you've faced as an independent film distributor in New York?

DZ: Women have been discriminated against so much in this industry and it does not change. It's really hard. I've been through so many "Year

of Women" in Hollywood that have been little blips and then it goes back to the way it was. I'm really hoping that #OscarsSoWhite in 2015 has some real lasting impact. People come to New York because of the culture that is all around them and it would be really wonderful if there was more support in general not just for the arts but for those of us who are working at the grassroots in the communities and working on diverse voices. I think we need to look at the process by which the City gives out money and make sure that there is an equal number of men and women or sometimes maybe a majority of women on the panels that are choosing the grants.

People come to New York because of the culture that is all around them and it would be really wonderful if there was more support in general not just for the arts but for those of us who are working at the grassroots in the communities and working on diverse voices.

- DEBRA ZIMMERMAN,
Women Make Movies

Appendix: Filmography

Coney Island

The Cool World (1964) 125 min.; 16mm

PRODUCTION: Wiseman Film Productions. DIRECTOR/WRITER/EDITOR: Shirley Clarke. DISTRIBUTOR: Cinema V Distributing Inc. CAMERA: Baird Bryant. CAST: Hampton Clanton (Richard "Duke" Custis), Yolanda Rodriguez (Luanne), Carl Lee (Priest). ACCESS: VHS, DVD, and 16mm purchase and rental from select retailers. The film is primarily available through libraries, archives, and universities. <http://www.worldcat.org/title/cool-world/oclc/369183221>

The Wiz (1978) 133 min.; 35mm

PRODUCTION: Motown and Universal Pictures. DIRECTOR: Sidney Lumet. DISTRIBUTOR: Universal Pictures. CAMERA: Oswald Morris. WRITER: Joel Schumacher. EDITOR: Dede Allen. ART DIRECTION: Tony Walton. CAST: Diana Ross (Dorothy), Michael Jackson (Scarecrow), Nipsey Russell (Tinman), Ted Ross (Lion). ACCESS: Film is available on DVD and streaming via commercial retailers such as iTunes and Amazon.

Crossover Dreams (1985) 86 min.; 35mm

PRODUCTION: Max Mambro Films. DIRECTOR: Leon Ichaso. DISTRIBUTOR: Miramax Films. CAMERA: Claudio Chea. WRITER: Manuel Arce. EDITOR: Gary Karr. MUSIC: Mauricio Smith. CAST: Rubén Blades (Rudy Veloz), Shawn Elliot (Orlando), Elizabeth Peña (Liz Garcia). ACCESS: Film is available for purchase on used VHS via commercial retailers such as Amazon.

I Like It Like That (1994) 104 min.; 35mm

PRODUCTION: Columbia Pictures. DIRECTOR/WRITER: Darnell Martin. DISTRIBUTOR: Columbia Pictures. CAMERA: Alexander Gruszynski. EDITOR: Peter C. Frank. MUSIC: Sergio George. CAST: Lauren Vélez (Lisette Linares), Jon Seda (Chino Linares), Lisa Vidal (Magdalena Soto). ACCESS: The film is available via DVD and streaming from commercial retailers such as iTunes and Amazon.

He Got Game (1998) 136 min.; 35mm

PRODUCTION: Touchstone Pictures, 40 Acres & A Mule Filmworks. DIRECTOR: Spike Lee. DISTRIBUTOR: Buena Vista Pictures. WRITER: Spike Lee. CAMERA: Malik Hassan Sayeed. EDITOR: Barry Alexander Brown. MUSIC: Scott Hardkiss. CAST: Denzel Washington (Jake Shuttlesworth), Ray Allen (Jesus Shuttlesworth), Rosario Dawson (Lala Bonilla), Milla Jovovich (Dakota Barns). ACCESS: The film is available on DVD and streaming via commercial retailers such as iTunes and Amazon.

The Warriors (1979) 94 min.; 35mm

PRODUCTION: Lawrence Gordon. DIRECTOR: Walter Hill. DISTRIBUTOR: Paramount Pictures. WRITER: David Shaber. CAMERA: Andrew Laszlo. EDITOR: David Holden. MUSIC: Barry DeVorzon. CAST: Michael Beck (Swan), James Remar (Ajax), Deborah Van Valkenburgh (Mercy), Marcelino Sanchez (Rembrandt). ACCESS: The film is available on DVD and streaming via commercial retailers such as iTunes and Amazon.

The Last Immortal (2011) 90 min.; Digital Video

PRODUCTION/DIRECTOR/WRITER/CAMERA/EDITOR: Charles Denson. CAST: Keith Suber. ACCESS: The film is available through Charles Denson and the Coney Island History Project.

Sammy's 80th Birthday Party at Ruby's (2007) 4:30 min.; Digital Video

PRODUCTION/DIRECTOR/WRITER/CAMERA/EDITOR: Lou Dembrow. CAST: Sammy Rodriguez and Ruby Jacobs. ACCESS: The film is available through Lou Dembrow.

The Last Night in Astroland, Redux (2009) 36 min.; Digital Video

PRODUCTION/DIRECTOR/WRITER/CAMERA/EDITOR: Lou Dembrow. CAST: Jimmy Prince. ACCESS: The film is available through Lou Dembrow.

Coney Island Dreaming (2016) 8:59 min.; Digital Video.

PRODUCTION: Joe Carraha, Resister, Vagabond Beaumont. DIRECTOR/EDITOR: Vagabond Beaumont. STORY: Mondriana Villegas and Omar Villegas. CAMERA: Jeff Akers. MUSIC: "Be Comfortable, Creature," Explosions in the Sky. CAST: Mondriana Villegas. ACCESS: This film is available through Vagabond Beaumont.

Harlem

Black Journal (Episode 1) June 1968, 60 min., 16mm

PRODUCTION: NET. CO-HOSTS: Lou House and William Greaves. EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: A.H. Perlmutter. DIRECTOR: Marvin Schlenker. EDITOR: Lou Potter. CINEMATOGRAPHY: St. Clair Bourne, Hugh Bell, and Gerald Cotts. ACCESS: First episode on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7g9ROouhpQ&t=2419s>. Individual episodes are available for viewing at the Yale Film Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut.

Cotton Comes to Harlem (1970) 97 min, 35mm

PRODUCER: Samuel Goldwyn, Jr. DIRECTOR/ WRITER: Ossie Davis WRITERS: Chester Himes (based on Novel by), Arnold Perl (screenplay) DISTRIBUTOR: United Artists CAMERA: Gerald Hirschfeld EDITOR: Robert Q. Lovett CAST: Godfrey Cambridge (Grave Digger Jones), Raymond St. Jacques (Coffin Ed Johnson), Calvin Lockhart (Rev. Deke O'Malley) ACCESS: Video & DVD Cotton Comes to Harlem (MGM Home Entertainment, 2001)

Paris is Burning (1989), 78 min., 16mm

PRODUCTION: Off White Productions. DIRECTOR: Jennie Livingston. DISTRIBUTOR: Prestige. CAMERA: Paul Gibson. EDITOR: Johnathan Oppenheim. CAST: Pepper LaBeija, Willi Ninja, Venus Xtravaganza, Dorian Corey. ACCESS: Library of Congress; DVD Paris is Burning (Miramax, 2005); Internet Archive (http://www.archive.org/details/paris_is_burning)

Twice as Nice (1989) 70 min, 16mm

PRODUCTION: LJ Productions DIRECTOR: Jessie Maple WRITER: S. Pearl Sharp CAST: Pamela and Paula McGee (Caren and Camilla Parker) CAMERA: Leroy Patton ACCESS: 16mm, Jessie Maple Collection, Black Film Center/ Archive, Indiana University-Bloomington

Will (1981) 70 min, 16mm

PRODUCTION: LJ Productions DIRECTOR/ WRITER: Jessie Maple CAMERA: Leroy Patton CAST: Obaka Adedunyo (Will), Loretta Devine ACCESS: 16mm, Jessie Maple Collection, Black Film Center/ Archive, Indiana University-Bloomington

Lower East Side

Basquiat (1996) 106 min.; 35mm

PRODUCTION: Built a Fort DIRECTOR/ WRITER: Julian Schnabel DISTRIBUTOR: Miramax Films CAMERA: Ron Fortunato EDITOR: Michael Berenbaum CAST: Jeffrey Wright (Jean-Michelle *Basquiat*), Michael Wincott (Rene Ricard), Benicio Del Toro (Benny Delmau), David Bowie (Andy Warhol) ACCESS: Miramax Films DVD; Streaming on Amazon Prime.

Crossing Delancey (1988) 97min., 35mm

PRODUCTION: Midwest Film Productions/ Warner Bros. Presents DIRECTOR: Joan Micklin Silver WRITER: Susan Sandler DISTRIBUTOR: Warner Bros. CAMERA: Theo Van de Sande EDITOR: Rick Shaine CAST: Amy Irving (Isabelle Grossman), Peter Riegert (Sam Posner), Reizi Bozyk (Bubbie Kantor) ACCESS: Warner Bros. DVD.

Desperately Seeking Susan (1985) 104 min.; 35mm

PRODUCTION: Sanford/ Pillsbury DIRECTOR: Susan Seidelman WRITER: Leora Barish DISTRIBUTOR: Orion Pictures CAMERA: Edward Lachman EDITOR: Andrew Mondshein CAST: Rosanna Arquette (Roberta), Madonna (Susan), Aidan Quinn (Dez) ACCESS: MGM Video and DVD.

Downtown 81 (2001) 71 min.; 16mm

PRODUCTION: New York Beat Films DIRECTOR: Edo Bertoglio WRITER: Glenn O'Brien DISTRIBUTOR: Zeitgeist Films CAMERA: John McNulty EDITOR: Pamela French CAST: Jean-Michelle *Basquiat* (Jean), Anna Schroeder (Beatrice), Deborah Harry (Baglady), Fab Five Freddie Braithwaite (Graffiti Artist) ACCESS: iTunes, Google Play, YouTube streaming/ digital download.

The End (1968) 9 min., 16mm.

PRODUCTION: Film Club DIRECTOR: Alfonso Sanchez, Jr. DISTRIBUTOR: Youth Film Distribution Center ACCESS: New York Public Library, Reserve Film and Video, Young Filmmaker's Foundation Collection.

The Smithereens (1982) 89 min.; 16mm/35mm

PRODUCTION: Domestic Films DIRECTOR: Susan Seidelman WRITER: Seidelman, Ron Ny-swaneer, Peter Askin DISTRIBUTOR: New Line Distribution Corp. CAMERA: EDITOR: . CAST: Susan Berman (Wren), Brad Rinn (Paul), Richard Hell (Eric) ACCESS: Streaming on Google Play and You Tube. Blue Underground DVD.

Stranger Than Paradise (1984) 89 min.; 35mm

PRODUCTION: Cinesthesia Productions, Inc. WRITER/ DIRECTOR/ EDITOR: Jim Jarmusch DISTRIBUTOR: Samuel Goldwyn Company CAMERA: Tom DiCillo CAST: John Lurie (Willie), Eszter Balint (Eva), Richard Edson (Eddie) ACCESS: Criterion Collection DVD, which also includes Jarmusch's first feature, *Permanent Vacation* (1980).

The Wolfpack (2014) 90 min.

PRODUCTION: Kotva Films/ Versimilitude DIRECTOR/ CAMERA: Crystal Moselle DISTRIBUTOR: Magnolia Pictures EDITOR: Enat Sidi ACCESS: Magnolia Pictures Blu-Ray/ DVD/ digital download

South Williamsburg

Living Los Sures (2014) various

PRODUCTION: UnionDocs. DIRECTOR/EDITOR: Christopher Allen et al. DISTRIBUTOR: UnionDocs. ACCESS: Institutional streaming license through UnionDocs. This is a multi-media project featuring several different components, including an interactive documentary, *89 Steps* (2014) that can be streamed at <http://lossur.es>.

Los Sures (1984) 57 min.; 16mm

PRODUCTION/WRITER/DIRECTOR: Diego Echeverria. DISTRIBUTION: Oscilloscope Pictures and UnionDocs. ACCESS: UnionDocs institutional DVD release or streaming at <http://los-sures.oscilloscope.net>.

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