Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film (Culture And The Moving Image)

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From D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* to Spike Lee's *Malcolm X*, Ed Guerrero argues, the commercial film industry reflects white domination of American society. Written with the energy and conviction generated by the new black film wave, *Framing Blackness* traces an ongoing epic—African Americans protesting screen images of blacks as criminals, servants, comics, athletes, and sidekicks.

These images persist despite blacks' irrepressible demands for emancipated images and a role in the industry. Although starkly racist portrayals of blacks in early films have gradually been replaced by more appealing characterizations, the legacy of the plantation genre lives on in Blaxpoitation films, the fantastic racialized imagery in science fiction and horror films, and the resubordination of blacks in Reagan-era films. Probing the contradictions of such images, Guerrero recalls the controversies surrounding role choices by stars like Sidney Poitier, Eddie Murphy, Whoopie Goldberg, and Richard Pryor.

Throughout his study, Guerrero is attentive to the ways African Americans resist Hollywood's one-dimensional images and superficial selling of black culture as the latest fad. Organizing political demonstrations and boycotts, writing, and creating their own film images are among the forms of active resistance documented.

The final chapter awakens readers to the artistic and commercial breakthrough of black independent filmmakers who are using movies to channel their rage at social injustice. Guerrero points out their diverse approaches to depicting African American life and hails innovative tactics for financing their work. *Framing Blackness* is the most up-to-date critical study of how African Americans are acquiring power once the province of Hollywood alone: the power of framing blackness.

In the series *Culture and the Moving Image*, edited by Robert Sklar.

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