

Black Representation Matters: In Film and Beyond

The Black community deserves to have their stories portrayed just as much as anybody else. Here's why.

The Films

- *13th* (DuVernay, 2016)
- *Dreamland: Little Rock's West 9th Street* (Mayhan, 2018)
- *I Am Not Your Negro* (Peck, 2016)
- *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016)
- *The Watermelon Woman* (Dunye, 1997)

This film series, curated in conjunction with Black Lives Matter art exhibition at the Windgate Museum of Art, will be screened in devotion first and foremost to the Black Lives Matter movement - an expansive constellation of voices fighting for the rights of African Americans, working to end white supremacy and police brutality while promoting justice and Black liberation in Arkansas, America, and beyond. This series serves as a small yet powerful collection of Black stories, written and directed by Black voices, emphasizing overarching themes of Black resilience, hope, and progressive change in the face of America's historic and continued systematic racism. When taken together, the varying genres, styles, and perspectives conveyed in each film work to form a painful yet beautiful portrait of what it means to be Black in America today. The main intentions of this series are to elevate under-represented Black voices and raise awareness about the daily injustices that Black Americans face. But, it is also our hope that these films will prove that the Black experience is not just about survival. Each of these films represents a wide variety of unique and individual Black experiences. These experiences, translated through the dynamic medium of film, serve not only to educate but also celebrate Black life in a culture that often suppresses it.

In a world where injustice and turmoil persists within the Black community, and depictions of authentic Black life are limited in popular culture, Black representation in film *matters*.

It is well known that Black filmmakers are not as acknowledged as other creators within the film industry, with Black creators continuously generating features worthy of praise and recognition but after remaining underexposed. Alternatively, Black actors who land roles in more popular titles by non-Black directors often suffer from offensive stereotypes and tired cinematic tropes. This is where part of the importance of Black representation lies; by shining a light on Black culture through stories that exhibit an authentic perception of Black life on the big screen.

We have chosen films that essentially provide audience members with a refreshing and authentic perspective on Black life, including narratives that serve as socially conscious entertainment. Some of the other films in the series present themselves as learning tools that

break barriers and promote vital discourse on Black social issues and Black history, another idea that defines the significance of Black representation. The pertinent documentaries included in this series, with DuVernay, Mayhan and Peck as their creators, efficiently function as African American history texts assisting the audience's comprehension of the idea that tragic events of the past contribute to the detriment of the Black community in the present day.

While we have incorporated films expanding across various genres, all five of them share the same motive of highlighting the Black way of living in America and rendering a message of change for a hopeful future. Ultimately, our objective for *Black Representation Matters: In Film and Beyond* parallels the value and purpose of Black representation in media: to present images aiding in spreading awareness, inclusivity, and inspiration through Black voices.

The power of film lies in its ability to display stories that not only assist in how we perceive different people, but also aid in how we discern, understand, and express ourselves. *Black Representation Matters: In Film and Beyond* proves this and achieves several other goals. It presents Black history and showcases stories that Black people live out in their everyday lives. At the same time, it proves that it can be empowering for Black actors to undertake roles and narratives that are not usually given to them. Additionally, instead of having to imagine a society that actually values diverse media, this series offers a lens into a greater version of authentic representation that is not easily unattainable. Most importantly, the series proves that the media we view on screen can certainly translate to how we see others and ourselves in the real world, ultimately eliciting necessary change in our society. And *that* is why Black representation matters, on our screens and off.