

BLACK FILM BULLETIN

If it can be said that every Movement has its golden age; its Zeitgeist moment, when the prevailing spirit, defining ideas and transcendent aspirations of a generation converge and crystallize to compel the making of new aesthetics; through a lens that very necessarily deconstructs and transforms the discourse on cultural identities - then it is within this precise context that the **Black Film Bulletin** emerges in early 90s Britain.

Black Film Bulletin magazine crystallized at the British Film Institute in 1993; the brainchild of founding editors June Givanni and Gaylene Gould. The emergence of **Black Film Bulletin** at the BFI in the year following the creation of an on-site African-Caribbean Film Unit established by June Givanni, was as much testament to the early 90s signalling a zenith moment in African Diasporic cinematic culture as a whole, as it was distinctly rooted in a British-based Black Arts Movement renaissance that had taken shape in the 1980s.

The 1980s and early 90s indeed marked an unprecedented moment for Black filmmakers in Britain, due in no small part to the express mandate of the UK film industry and government; pledging developmental support at union level to the film workshop movement in general and with the help of the GLC, the establishment of Black-British film workshop collectives, in particular. The 4 collectives were Black Audio Film Collective and Sankofa film workshop (from which auteur directors John Akomfrah and Isaac Julien emerged), Retake (prolific Asian film workshop), and Ceddo Film Workshop with its significant 'voice of the people' profile in film. Intrinsic to the ethos of Black-British film workshop collectivism was an acute awareness of a distinct kind of cultural legacy, - one autonomously evolved through cross-collaborative practice. Much of the initial output of Black British film workshops was decisively invested in the exploration of 'Black experience' as political and as

interconnected to the stories of other migrant communities both within and beyond Britain.

The existence of **Black Film Bulletin** at the BFI within this particular moment of Diaspora film culture is significant. Not only did its strategic positioning afford it a prime platform through which to project the depth of cross-collaborative ideas and intersectional dialogues around the politics of Black imagery transpiring throughout the African Diaspora, but furthermore; the insights of its editors and the plethora of voices called upon to contribute to its pages can be read symbolically as a trans-generational, critical intervention on Black creative tradition. In convening a space through which to engage the works of diverse and pioneering filmmakers, writers and intellectuals whose expressions both mirrored and challenged; in exalting the voices of Oscar Micheaux, Ousmane Sembene, Djibril Diop Mambéty, Haile Gerima, Horace Ové, Euzhan Palcy, Raoul Peck, Julie Dash, Charles Burnett, Spike Lee, Arthur Jafa, John Singleton, Kasi Lemmons, John Akomfrah, Ngozi Onwurah, Isaac Julien, Gurinder Chadha, Pratibha Parmar, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, Toni Cade Bambara, bell hooks and many more, **Black Film Bulletin** was in its timely essence a conversation founded upon both memory and Movement: dispersed yet interconnected voices of an expansive African Diaspora, historically informed by the experience of colonialism as by the magnitude of post-colonial liberation ideas, from Pan-Africanism to Négritude to Black Power and beyond; conveying the complexity of those expressions through the medium of film; daring the creation of a 'Black cinema.'

It is a tragic twist in the tale that marked the demise of both the African-Caribbean Film Unit and the BFI-situated **Black Film Bulletin** in the summer of 1996. Though the **Black Film Bulletin** magazine went on to be housed at a different institution, helmed by another impassioned editorial team, the BFB magazine ultimately ceased publication altogether at the dawn of the new millennium.

What remains today of **Black Film Bulletin** is a legacy well-

preserved within the archive of its founding editor, June Givanni, director of **June Givanni Pan African Cinema Archive**. Beyond the years at BFI, Givanni curated and programmed for various film festivals around the world- 'Planet Africa' at Toronto Film Festival, 'Africa International Film Festival' in Nigeria, 'Colours Of The Nile Film Festival' in Ethiopia, and was invited to join the board of US-based Focus Features 'Africa First' Short Film Programme. Alongside the **Black Film Bulletin** within June's archive, there resides a wealth of Black cinema ephemera, principally amassed from the 1970s up to present day, with materials referencing back to the early twentieth century - films, audio, photographic and other cinematic memorabilia and documents; all of which offer a valuably diverse window into Pan African histories and socio-political movements.

It is this enduring fascination with '**Movements**' as an overarching cultural continuum in the lives of African Diaspora peoples that indeed informs the theme of the forthcoming launch exhibition of **June Givanni Pan African Cinema Archive**. From October 16-27, *University of The Arts at Chelsea College and Birkbeck Institute Of The Moving Image* in London will play host to a selection of poignant and pioneering works and conversations preserved within June Givanni's archive. Alongside repertory screenings of iconic works by Black filmmakers, an international panel of luminaries (including filmmakers Euzhan Palcy, Louis Massiah, Imruh Bakari and John Akomfrah: and academics Professors Laura Mulvey and Ian Christie) will convene to muse on matters of '*Pan-African Cinema, Négritude and Film Archive.*' This rare, contemporary convergence of definitive Black voices in cinema will probe '*The Relevance of Pan-Africanism and Négritude in Cinema Now*' and most pivotally, question the function of a Pan African Cinema Archive; its mediating role and value in instigating a critical discourse on contemporary film culture.

So what of the potential for a revival of **Black Film Bulletin** in this moment?

2014 marks twenty one years since its emergence at The British Film Institute and significantly, three long and protracted decades since the pledges made by the UK film industry to support the work of Black-British film workshop collectives - the dissipation of which could arguably contextualise both the relative dearth of British-made Black television and film programming post-2000 and the continuing so-called 'exodus' of Black British acting talent to other shores.

Is now the ideal and opportune moment to seize upon the seeming resurgence of interest in the Black presence on screen?; evidenced as much by the recent spike in Black-centred narratives enchanting the North American award show circuit, as by the current frenzy around commitment to increased 'diversity' quotas within the UK industry. If ever there was a time to revisit and revive the mission of **Black Film Bulletin**; to diffuse the cultural wisdom of old through the contextual lens of today's makers of the moving image, that time would appear to be right now.

- **Jan Asante [CULTURE KINETICA™: Think Cinematic]**

Pan African Film Archive