

## **“We Must Discuss, We Must Invent”: Race, Filmmaking and Public Engagement**

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### Abstract

Using in-depth interviews, visual texts and theories of pedagogy and public engagement, this essay examines a film director’s experiences creating the documentary short, *Beautiful Me(s): Finding our Revolutionary Selves in Black Cuba*, to examine how combining the principles of Black studies and third cinema effectively incorporates civic engagement into learning about race and inequality.

*Keywords:* Black studies, public engagement, third cinema, Cuba, inclusion, pedagogy

The collaborative processes among a teacher and her students in creating the documentary film short, *Beautiful Me(s): Finding our Revolutionary Selves in Black Cuba* (2008) illustrate that combining the principles of Black studies and Third Cinema effectively incorporates civic engagement into learning about race and inequality. *Beautiful Me(s)* follows a group of Yale African American Studies PhD students—including the film’s director—who were drawn together by a common sense of alienation and paralysis related to their questions about how the academic profession valued their desire to connect anti-racist scholarship to activism. In the film, the Yale students form a collective named the Black Resistance Reading Group that organizes a research seminar in Havana and Santiago in May 2002. Using borrowed cameras, the filmmaking novices filmed their journey with the intention of sharing the knowledge they acquired with

communities of color, students, educators, and activists in the US. In 2006, a portion of the production and post-production of the film was completed by undergraduates as part of a student-initiated course at Williams College that the film's director (and a member of the Black Resistance Reading Group) taught about race, film, and transnationalism. Creating this documentary film gave participants an opportunity to enjoy mobility on their own terms while broadening their vision of themselves as agents of change through their scholarship and public engagement. Based on feedback received from community based organizations and audiences at film festivals committed to screening work about the African diaspora, the director/teacher expanded *Beautiful Me(s)* into the documentary feature *Black and Cuba*, which is available for educational use on DVD and the *Kanopy* streaming site.

### **Literature Review**

Black studies and Third Cinema are two traditions grounded in social movements of historically marginalized communities in the Americas, which have specific methods for acquiring and disseminating information that involve transnational collective action and democratizing knowledge (Hayes, 2015, p. 46). A desire to solve real world problems drives work in Black studies, an academic discipline which produces research about the impact of race as well as the history, cultures, and politics of communities of African descent in the US and abroad. Also referred to as African American studies and Africana studies, the field emerged in the late 1960s at college and universities in response to demands from nationwide student protests beginning with the "Third World" strike at San Francisco State University in 1968 (Joseph, 2003; San Francisco Newsreel, 1969). During this period, students and faculty asserted that the establishment of Black studies departments and programs (as well as ethnic studies, Native American studies, etc.) would diversify curriculum, improve retention of students of color, and provide a vehicle for linking research on-campus with knowledge about the contributions and struggles of Black communities, which historically had been produced off-campus in literary salons, African American publications, and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) (Biondi, 2012; Hayes & Greer, 2015; Crouchett, 1971; Rojas, 2007).

The Yale students featured in *Beautiful Me(s)* developed this project to make a record of what they witnessed in Cuba, which could be shared with people who did not have the opportunity to travel there. A film, more than an edited anthology, special journal edition, or academic conference could be most easily distributed to student groups, community organizations, and academic colleagues in a manner

that is low in a variety of costs due to advancements in the digitization of production and post-production as well as increased access to training via YouTube and other internet sources. Film is also an effective tool of popular education and public engagement related to Black studies because the visualization of certain concepts vividly confronts misinformation and lack of information about the history and cultures of the African diaspora. For example, *Beautiful Me(s)*' assertion that 60% of Cubans are AfroCuban is best illustrated to African American audiences by showing phenotypical and cultural similarities between the two populations (see Figure 1). Illuminating how AfroCubans in Havana look, rap, drum, and struggle in ways that are quite relatable challenges mainstream representations of Cuba as a predominately White country and racial inequality as solely an American issue.

The production and post-production of *Beautiful Me(s)* involved a collaborative learning and filmmaking process that drew from the heuristic traditions of Black studies and Third Cinema, which encourage members of communities in the African diaspora and the larger developing world to educate/train themselves and subsequently share their acquired knowledge and skills (Crouchett, 1971; Gabriel, 1982). These traditions consider the acquisition of knowledge as a means of empowering public engagement that aims to address racial inequality and other forms of marginalization and oppression (see for example DuBois, 1953 and Getino/Solanas & Grupo Cine Liberación, 1968). For the makers of *Beautiful Me(s)*, participating in an educational dynamic informed by Black studies and Third cinema challenged them to rethink boundaries between “town and gown”—or community and campus—that were naturalized in their university communities.<sup>1</sup> In addition, collaborating within diverse groups and outside of the campus in predominately Black spaces led participants to interrogate divisions among themselves that fell along racialized, classed, gendered, citizenship, and sexualized lines. Being an essential part of creating a visual text that counters dominant de-humanizing representations of people of African descent, students were emboldened to reframe their position in the academy from isolated consumers to producers of knowledge and action.

## Discussion

### “Trapped Inside the Fortress”: Bridging the High and Low

For students and faculty, filmmaking provides a means to push past the high/low dichotomy that often characterizes the evaluation of cultural and scholarly work in the academy. In this context, the phrase high/low dichotomy

refers directly to the judgments of work sometimes made by resource allocators within the academy (e.g. university administrators, academic journal editors, and promotion and tenure review committees) that is created primarily for academic audiences (high) and efforts to transfer knowledge to the public (low). Scholars show that work created for the public is consistently devalued by academic elites and that this work more frequently discusses the concerns and experiences of people of color, women, labor, and members of the LGBTQ community (Jacobson et al., 2004; hooks, 2014). The cumulative impact of these judgments is that scholarship that centers the voices, experiences, languages and consumption of elites are deemed more rigorous and of higher quality than work which does not.



*Figure 1: AfroCuban Rapper Performs in Havana*

This dichotomy, and how it maps onto racialized, gendered, and classed social orders, relates directly to the Black Resistance Reading Group's discomfort with their place in the academy as youth from neighborhoods like Bedford-Stuyvesant and the South Bronx who were invested in African American Studies careers (Stallybrass & White, 1986; Hayes, 2008). As cultural theorist Stuart Hall notes, Black popular culture is marginalized from high models of culture that articulate Europe as the universal subject, yet its practices, narrative, and vernacular can create significant interventions in dominant discourses (Hall, 1993). *Beautiful Me(s)* displaces this high/low (or high/popular) distinction in the academy by projecting how the histories, cultures, and perspectives of Black communities are integral to mainstream institutions such as the Ivy League.

The opening of the documentary—which includes interviews with African American Harlem residents and White undergraduates discussing Cuba—reveals the extent to which perspectives of Black communities are excluded from mainstream institutions and how this marginalization undermines knowledge acquisition. The Williams’ students suggested shorthand introduction of the story and ideas of *Beautiful Me(s)* as an opening for the piece, because the audience was likely not to be familiar with the history of the Cuban revolution in particular or Black resistance more broadly. The film director/instructor decided a “person-on-the street” interview segment—conducted and filmed by the students—which people in US public space would be randomly asked their views about Cuba could serve this purpose.

The students were surprised to learn through their interviews on the main street of their college town that many of their peers had scant knowledge about the island. “What do you think about when you think about Cuba?” a student asks. “Cigars,” an athletic student responds. In contrast, interviews the students conducted on Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard in Harlem—with a vendor specializing in DVDs about the African diaspora, a Nation of Islam member selling the *Final Call*, a young man relaxing with friends at Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Plaza—had pointed criticisms of US foreign policy toward Cuba and admiration for what they believed socialism had achieved in Cuba. The Nation of Islam member holds up that day’s *Final Call*, which has the headline “Cuba, the Good Samaritan.” The segment reveals the distinct “high” and “low” perspectives about Cuba and how those distinctions fall along racial lines.

One Williams filmmaker, who is a Bronx native, remembered:  
Talking to people on the street, I felt like I was on a cloud... finding out what real people believe. Sometimes that is lost when solely looking at academic texts... Seeing people who were similar to me, in my race, my age, my gender, actively trying to work through these issues. It’s a different thing- observing people going through these issues and being one of the people having to deal with it. (Student D, 2006)

By venturing out of the classroom and off-campus, these undergraduates were able to gain a unique perspective on racial inequality that cannot be gained through reading alone. In addition, they were able to participate in civic engagement by heightening the visibility of a community whose political opinions are rarely portrayed in mainstream media. Filmmaking allowed the participants to bridge the high/low divide and cease being “trapped inside the fortress.”

## The DIY Ethos of Third Cinema

The student collective that called itself the Black Resistance Reading Group and, later the film's director and her students at Williams, created *Beautiful Me(s)* with a DIY (do-it-yourself) ethos. Neither ensemble had formal film school training, however they seized opportunities to develop and share the technical skills needed to make the film – such as operating a professional camera, recording sound in the field, and logging hours of footage (Hayes, 2015). The filmmakers' commitment to democratizing cinematic expertise as well as creating art that valorized people of color's experiences follows the educational tradition of Third Cinema (Wayne, 2001).

Third cinema is the postcolonial cinematic movement described by Argentinian filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in their manifesto, which opens with “We Must Discuss, We Must Invent,” a quote from psychiatrist, cultural critic, and participant in the Algerian anti-colonial *Front de Libération Nationale* Frantz Fanon (Solanas & Getino, 1970). Writing during a period of heightened anti-racist and decolonizing insurgency in the 1960s, Solanas and Getino argued for a filmmaking practice that eschews both mainstream Hollywood escapism—which they name “first cinema”—as well as *auteur* driven cinema that focuses solely on individual expression and ultimately leads to independent directors becoming “trapped inside the fortress” of profit-driven art production, according to French New Wave leader and *Breathless* director Jean-Luc Goddard (Solanas & Getino, 1970). In contrast, Third Cinema aims to reflect the “throbbing, living reality” of a community then-described as the tri-continental—peoples of the Americas, Africa and Asia—using a process that breaks barriers between maker and audience as well as boundaries between expert and object of inquiry (Solanas & Getino, 1970).<sup>2</sup>

Solanas and Getino were clearly influenced by Fanon's seminal work *Wretched of the Earth*, which argues that colonial cultural institutions (e.g. churches, schools, museums) encourage colonized communities to emulate and identify with the colonizer as well as insult and evade indigenous cultures and perspectives (Fanon, 2007). Scholars including Manthia Diawara, Ed Guerrero, Kara Keeling, and Michael Martin establish this power dynamic continues to shape what kinds of Black films are made and how Black film subjects are undervalued and dehumanized in postcolonial times (see Diawara, 1993; Guerrero, 2012; Keeling, 2007; Martin, 1995). Third Cinema seeks to challenge the image—and identity—that colonial/dominant culture creates of itself as benevolent, necessary, and inevitable. Perhaps more importantly, Third Cinema constructs images of

people of color that reflect their fully human aspirations, struggles, and relationships. According to Solanas and Getino, the function of these images is not to change the hearts and minds of elites. Third cinema aims to destroy the negative self-image communities of color develop as a result of the stereotypes and misinformation common in the decision-making and outcomes of mainstream cultural production (Solanas & Getino, 1970).

### **From Alienation to Empowerment: the Black Studies Tradition of Flight**

The subjects of *Beautiful Me(s)* formed the Black Resistance Reading Group, which was driven by concerns about their intellectual, political, and career development. In the film, participants in the group discuss the fact that although they were being formally educated in an institutionalized African American studies department at a well-resourced university, they understood themselves as part of a political legacy of scholarly inquiry that dated back to the antebellum period and sought to improve the conditions of people of African descent that have been re/produced by slavery, oppression, colonization, and imperialism (Harris, 2004; Crouchett, 1971). They committed to this discipline because the democratization of knowledge about Black communities is one of this field's most consistent objectives. However, as they dove deeper into their training they found little in the way of resources or opportunities for professional survival for junior scholars or students who fully dedicated themselves to this aim. The film's subjects describe themselves as being in a location of privilege relative to the historically marginalized communities in which many of them were based, and a marginalized position relative to the university's institutional leadership. As one participant observes, "we were all for one reason or another feeling alienated" (Hayes, 2008).

The students' expressed anxieties seem linked to the conventional academic gatekeeper's view that organizing, fundraising, and building coalitions between community and campus were entertainments that the disciplined Scholar, who should be focused exclusively on manuscript output, did not indulge (Smith, 2007). Conversely, the somewhat idealized impression of the career Community Activists' perspective (you know, the people who are "really helping" communities of color) was that scholars, who were generally disconnected and dubiously credited with some form of expertise, most often exploit vulnerable populations for their own selfish ambitions while profiting from the disproportionately abundant resources of their universities. Both sides seem to agree that teaching researchers had no place in collective action or the promotion of social justice.

In *Beautiful Me(s)*, Black Resistance Reading Group participants describe how their group—which met twice per month for over a year with each member taking turn to choose readings—discussed influential African American Studies work in the context of their contemporary professional and scholarly concerns. Their readings included *Assata* by Assata Shakur, *The Black Jacobins* by CLR James, and *Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon (Hayes, 2015). According to one participant, the readings’ themes of self-empowerment and human rights enhanced the group’s conception of resistance as efforts in the “entire diaspora” to challenge racial discrimination (Hayes, 2008).

Through their readings and discussions, participants began to understand how the Black studies tradition could offer concrete tools to address their sense of alienation by creating new theoretical, activist, and methodological spaces in which they could feel fully grounded as PhD candidates and emerging scholars. Black studies pre-dates the institutionalization of African American Studies programs and departments in the academy in the late 1960s as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when African slaves in the Americas orally exchanged knowledge about their languages, politics, history, and cultures with each other for the purpose of devising emancipating strategies (Hayes, 2015). This tradition encourages operationalizing (or putting to use) understandings about the impact of racial inequality outside of the academy and building transnational coalitions among intellectuals and activists (see Gilroy, 1993; Kelley, 1999; Ransby, 2013).

The quandary in which the director of *Beautiful Me(s)* and her graduate school colleagues found themselves reveals the significance of public engagement to both students of color and students of all backgrounds who are concerned about racial inequality. Examples of migration and flight within the Black studies tradition that group members learned about—such as Frantz Fanon and Assata Shakur—inspired the students to actualize the abstractions of diaspora and transnationalism they were deliberating into specific strategies for participation and action. They were searching for a meaningful and just way to bring the outside, of how Black resistance is lived, in to their academic lives. Ultimately, the students decided to take a field trip. They chose to travel to Cuba because, according to the director, “it’s a socialist country, it’s a revolutionary country, and it’s a Black country” (Hayes, 2015).

In other words, because Cuba’s population is 60% Black, and since the Cuban revolution in 1959 the country has supported liberation organizations throughout the diaspora (including the Black Panther Party and the African National Congress), the group felt this Caribbean island was an ideal site for the



exploration of Black resistance (Sawyer, 2006). A complete discussion of the students' experiences while in Cuba can be found in *Black and Cuba* – the feature length documentary that evolved from the short *Beautiful Me(s)* (Hayes, 2015). At the time *Beautiful Me(s)* was completed, footage of the Black Resistance Reading Group's experiences in Cuba was believed to be irreparably damaged.

### **“Collectively Create a Voice”: Teaching and Learning with Film**

Undergraduate participants in a course, which the director taught about race, film and transnationalism during her pre-doctoral fellowship at a liberal arts college, helped complete most of post-production of *Beautiful Me(s)*. In this course, this diverse group of college students and their instructor created a dialogic educational process. Conducting follow-up interviews in the field, logging and editing footage, as well as contextualizing the project in readings about African diaspora and Third Cinema buoyed the students' comprehension and critiques of social injustice in general and racial inequality in particular. One student remembered, “the class was about making a change and making a difference. It gave you a chance to collectively create a voice” (Student E, 2006).

Although the Black Resistance Reading Group was able to start the process of creating *Beautiful Me(s)* by organizing resources and filming their experiences in Cuba, the pressures of completing dissertations and finding tenure-track positions inhibited them from finishing. Nearly fifty hours of footage shot before and during their journey to Cuba languished in the archives of the director for three years. During that time, the director took a pre-doctoral fellowship at Williams where she taught a seminar about Black political thought.

A few students in the director's seminar, which deliberated the life stories and political theories of activists including Harriet Tubman and Paul Robeson (Humez, 2006; Robeson, 2008), requested a follow up independent study in the spring semester to further explore this subject matter. With their teacher, these students shared concerns about how they could translate the provocative ideas they were learning about in college into tangible and transformative anti-racist action. Some students of color expressed the difficulty of feeling pressured by the academy into disconnecting from their communities and taking on disproportionate burdens of representation in the classroom. Others wondered if their commitment to advancing racial equality required them to define themselves as perpetual societal outsiders, or forsake the sorely needed economic benefits an education could bring to some of their families.

Because these undergraduates' anxieties and aspirations were nearly identical to those of her Black Resistance Reading Group, the instructor designed a collaborative learning effort in which as a collective they could all further build filmmaking skills by acquiring hands-on experience finishing the project begun by the Black Resistance Reading Group. The course—entitled Race, Transnationalism and Third Cinema—had three objectives: 1) expand knowledge about diverse discourses, histories, and experiences of race in the Americas; 2) build skills in cinematography, editing and interviewing; and 3) complete and publicly exhibit *Beautiful Me(s)*. Throughout the semester, the course met weekly to discuss readings about AfroCuban history, politics and culture and theories of diaspora to gain an empirical and theoretical grounding for the film project.

In addition, students and their teacher planned and conducted follow up interviews in the field with several of the original Black Resistance Reading Group members. The collective evaluated the usable original footage and determining what additional information audiences might need. Students were also involved in planning and shooting the people on the street segment that opens the film. Once additional footage was collected, students and the instructor collaborated on logging materials, editing, archival research and music supervision.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the course, the collective discussed the relationship between the theories they deliberated in the classroom, the knowledge they were acquiring in the field and the work they were generating to share with each others.

The instructor recognized each student in the course as an individual with a particular set of skills, experiences, and interests that were valuable to the project.<sup>4</sup> Effective participation in the course was defined as sharing knowledge while collectively acquiring new skills. In a follow-up evaluation, one student observed, “what was great about our class was that people had different skill sets and that the project could not have worked without them...[i]t was a beautiful thing, actually” (Student C, 2006).

These aspects of the course embraced the symbiotic nature of teaching and learning described by the Russian term *obuchenie*, which was advanced in education theory by Lev Vygotsky (Davydov & Kerr, 1995). Vygotsky argued that an effective education requires:

1. the creation of conditions for discovering and making manifest the creative potentials of students;
2. the student become a true subject in the process of teaching;

3. teachers guide the individual activity the students without dictating their will in a collaborative process;
4. and pedagogical methods that correspond to particular aspects of students' development and personalities. (Davydov & Kerr, 1995)

Widely cited in the fields of education and psychology, Vygotsky's theories were influential in reforming the Soviet education system from its focus on obedience to critical thinking and innovation during *perestroika*—the period of openness prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 (Davydov & Kerr, 1995). *Race, Transnationalism and Third Cinema's* centering of student concerns about how their education could facilitate community development, solicitation of student input, collaborative process and welcoming of each students specific interests and skill sets illustrate how Vygotsky's approach can be helpful to civic engagement and experiential learning.

Course texts—including *Wretched of the Earth*—coupled with the filmmaking project directly addressed the students' interest in better articulating their opinions about the causes and consequences of racial inequality. The project also challenged students to invest in constructive ways to address these problems. One student reflected, “our discussions about what is one's responsibility within the academy hit hardest for me...It's not just about power or complicity...but turning scholarship into a sense of mission...and to recognize that it has activist intonations to do so” (Student A, 2006). According to one participant, “coming from an affluent mostly White community...I had never been exposed to White supremacy as something that was still going on...it was a big eye-opener to me to see how racial inequality goes on today” (Student B, 2006).

This approach, described by education scholars Mariane Hedegaard and Seth Chaiklin as radical-local, centers teaching/learning around the cultural-historical conditions in which students live (Hedegaard & Chaiklin, 2006). In addition to advancing conventional formal education's goals of promoting students' intellectual development, radical-local teaching/learning presumes “the relationship between [students'] cultural background and the historical conditions within which they live can and should have consequences for the content of teaching if these goals are to be realized” (Hedegaard & Chaiklin, 2006, p.11). According to Hedegaard and Chaiklin, the radical-local method is especially important for youth learning in under-served communities (2006). However, this pedagogy's constructive impact on the *Race, Transnationalism and Third Cinema* course illustrates the significance of the radical-local method for the diversity of

students (e.g. people of color, White, Queer, immigrant) who are concerned about oppression and marginalizing practices.

The pedagogical approaches obuchenie (teaching/learning) and radical-local are also compatible with the public engagement objectives of Black studies and Third Cinema. Public engagement in this context is, as defined by the UK's National Co-Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement, "the myriad of ways in which [...] higher education and research can be shared with the public...a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit" (NCCPE, 2015). The specific public engagement goals of *Beautiful Me(s)* are reflected by its distributor and production organization Progressive Pupil, which aims to "make Black studies for everybody" and was founded by the director during this course (Progressive Pupil, 2015). The in-classroom pedagogical approaches of obuchenie and radical-local share with off-campus traditions of Black studies and Third Cinema the objectives of democratizing knowledge and empowering participants in the learning process to become agents of change.

## Conclusions

Through their collaborative teaching/learning process, the students and instructor were able to produce a 45-minute film. The film's website describes the piece as follows:

Within the elite cloistered environment of Yale University, the students come together from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds to form a collective based on their passionate concerns about racial inequality. As outcasts, they become intrigued by the revolutionary mystique of Cuba and its contentious relationship with the United States...In the streets of Havana and Santiago, they witness extraordinary hip hop, reggae and rumba performances and strike up conversations with Cubans from all walks of life. The group is welcomed into a raucous block party with hundreds of people in an integrated neighborhood. Behind a cultural curtain created by political conflict, the students discover that Cuban people feel a close affinity with Africans and African Americans, and are deeply committed to ending racial injustice. (Progressive Pupil, 2008)

The short is comprised primarily of the follow-up interviews with the travelers that the course collective filmed, the person on the street interviews in Harlem and Williamstown and a fragment of the footage the students shot in Cuba. *Beautiful*

*Me(s)* debuted at the conclusion of the course at a small independent theater in the college town where it was completed. The premiere was attended by a full house of students and teachers in the campus community as well as members of the community-at-large (Student B, 2006).

Between 2008 and 2010, the toured film festivals based in African American communities that are committed to screening work by and about people of African descent (Progressive Pupil, 2008). These festivals—such as the Pan-African Film Festival in the Crenshaw neighborhood of Los Angeles and the Roxbury Film Festival in a historically black neighborhood outside Boston—play a critical role in sharing films with communities of African descent and facilitating dialogues between filmmakers and audiences, and among audiences, about the issues most relevant to Black communities. The Black film festival circuit can be understood as an indigenous institution within the African diaspora because it challenges racial inequality by fostering “international Black group consciousness” and shaping “their communities’ collective identity” (Hayes & Greer, 2014, p. 354). The exclusion of women and people of color from all aspects of the film industry is well documented (see Dargis, 2016; Leonard, 2006). Films by and about people of African descent are often marginalized or ignored by mainstream/First Cinema distributors because they do not perpetuate stereotypes about Black life and/or are created on microbudgets ( $\leq$  USD\$50,000) outside the Second Cinema/*auteur* system (celebrated by, for example, the Independent Film Awards, which includes films with budgets of up to USD\$20 million) (Kohn, 2013).<sup>5</sup> In the tradition of Third Cinema, the film’s screenings on the Black film festival circuit throughout the US and in Cannes engaged communities directly impacted by the themes in the film, which include the impact of the US embargo of Cuba on AfroCubans, similarities and differences between American and Cuban discourses about race, and the intersections of race and class.

During this period, *Beautiful Me(s)* also screened on campuses throughout the US at events sponsored by African American Studies, Caribbean studies, and Latin American studies programs (Progressive Pupil, 2008). At these screenings, the film engaged diverse audiences of students and teachers in constructive dialogues about the future of US-Cuba foreign policy, African American and AfroCuban history in comparative perspective, as well as how racial discrimination remains an international human rights issue. The film also expanded into a digital humanities project with [beautifulmes.com](http://beautifulmes.com), which offers the public information resources about AfroCuban culture and the historical relationship between the African American and AfroCuban communities. For example, browsers of the site can click on an illustration of the Cuban flag that leads to a summary of the Cuban

Revolution as well as a list of recommended websites, readings and films that can deepen their understanding of that historical event and its impact (Progressive Pupil, 2008).

The director significantly expanded the short *Beautiful Me(s)* into the award-winning documentary feature *Black and Cuba* (running time 82 minutes), which became available for streaming and on DVD in 2015. The feature was crafted in response to community feedback about *Beautiful Me(s)*, which revealed that:

- 1) audiences craved more footage of everyday Cuban life so they could see what the travelers saw and get a sense of Cuba for themselves; and
- 2) audiences desired an in-depth exploration of the historical relationship between African Americans and Cuba, as well as the history of Cuba's involvement with the US. (BlackandCuba.org, 2016)

*Black and Cuba* addresses these points with expanded original sequences using extensively researched archival footage as well as restored footage from the students' original trip.

The audience engagement strategy of *Black and Cuba* follows the public engagement intentions for the project set by both the Black Resistance Reading Group and the collective involved in the course *Race, Transnationalism and Third Cinema*. To promote participation and action within the academy, the film's distributor provides a syllabi guide that assists college professors in using the film (BlackandCuba.org, 2015). The guide includes recommended readings, in-class discussion questions, and small group exercises to incorporate the film in courses such as Introduction to African American Studies and Black Political Thought. In addition, *Black and Cuba* has directly engaged the public with a broader tour of Black film festivals throughout the US and Berlin as well as screenings in African American communities at indigenous knowledge-producing institutions such as the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Cultures in Harlem (Schomburg, 2016). The film's distributor also provides a facilitator's guide on its website to encourage independent teaching/learning using *Black and Cuba* (Website BlackandCuba.org, 2015).

The learning traditions of Third Cinema and Black studies require the consideration of knowledge and skills as resources that can be sustained and enhanced through horizontal exchanges between instructors and students as well as among students. Intellectuals working in these traditions develop theories that directly address concerns about racial and economic injustice in the context of

community members' experiences and stated needs as well as strategies for distributing information that empowers and transforms. The expansion and sharing of knowledge in these traditions discovers ideas in a variety of sites and connect these ideas to collective action. The success of the auto-didactic collective the Black Resistance Reading Group and *Race, Transnationalism and Third Cinema* course described in this essay illustrates that these pedagogical principles serve students who seek to use their education to build community and dismantle marginalizing policies and practices on and off-campus. Teaching/Learning as well as radical-local educational environments are critical to showing these kinds of students a means of constructive and meaningful engagement with the academy and the public.

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#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The phrase “town and gown” refers to the often contentious relationship between communities that surround campuses (town) and the administrations, faculty, students and trustees of colleges/universities (gown) (Smith et al., 2005). Common issues that create “town and gown” conflict include labor relations (Gilpin, 1988), gentrification due to expansion of the university’s geographic footprint (Velazquez, 2009), and racial profiling by private campus police (Newman, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Examples of Third Cinema films include Solanas and Getino’s *La Hora de los Hornos* (Hour of the Furnaces) and *Handsworth Songs* by John Akomforah.

<sup>3</sup> Archival footage and music that was used in *Black and Cuba* has been licensed, used according to fair use guidelines for documentary films (see Association for Independent and Video Filmmakers, 2015), or is in the public domain.

<sup>4</sup> Student participants from Yale and Williams were fully credited for their work conducting interviews, researching footage, translating, and/or cinematography in *Beautiful Me(s)* and *Black and Cuba*.

<sup>5</sup> Public discourse about the issue in 2016 included the “OscarsSoWhite” hashtag in social media, which criticized the lack of nominations for people of African descent by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Syed, 2016).