

Alternative Film History

African American Cinema

By

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The Beginning of Cinema

- Films began being made in the late 1800s.
- African Americans were freed from slavery in 1863 but did not receive fair treatment in society.
- They didn't participate in any aspects of the filmmaking process

Blacks on The Big Screen

- African Americans weren't even being filmed.
- When a film called for a black character, it was often a white actor with a black face painted on.
- African Americans were depicted as “stupid” and “lowly.”

Time for Change

- Birth of a Nation by D.W. Griffith was the first film to use black actors in 1915. They were slaves in the film.
- African Americans began making films with “colored” casts also known as “race” films.
- They wanted to change the role of black characters in films to promote change in society.

1920s

- African American owned film companies began producing and distributing films.
- Oscar Micheaux was the first African American to direct a feature length film entitled, *The Homesteader*, in 1919.
- African Americans began to create opportunities for themselves in the world of cinema.

African American Movement

- African American involvement in cinema grew with the civil rights movement.
- As the African Americans started to be seen as members of society, they also began to be seen as contributors to the film world.

Spike Lee

- African American director; attended New York's Tisch School of Arts
- Seen as influential director in the world of cinema.
- She's Gotta Have It (1986)
- Do The Right Thing (1989)

Color Lines Blurred

- It is common for African Americans to be involved in films today.
- The African American's involvement in cinema is directly correlated to his role in society.
- Cinema has evolved to a point where the racial line has been blurred.
- People from different backgrounds collaborate on films of all types today.