

The Sisters in Cinema Documentary

Sisters in Cinema (2003) is a 62-min documentary by Yvonne Welbon (Living With Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100) that traces the careers of inspiring African American women filmmakers from the early part of the 20th century to today.

As the first documentary of its kind, Sisters in Cinema creates a strong visual history of the contributions of African American women to the film industry.

"When I started film school in 1991 I only knew the name of one African American woman director -- Julie Dash." Said, documentary filmmaker, Yvonne Welbon. "I didn't know what she looked like. I'd never seen any of her films and I had no idea why or how she became a filmmaker. I learned that I was not alone. I heard over and over again, 'I didn't know there were any black women filmmakers.' So, I set out to find my sisters in cinema."

Welbon's first stop in her search takes her to the major Hollywood studios where she soon discovers that of the multitude of feature films produced only one was directed by an African American woman (Darnell Martin's *I Like It Like That*) and a handful produced, distributed or acquired by mini-majors. Realizing that she wasn't going to find her sisters in cinema in Hollywood, Welbon, instead travels the independent path to uncover a wide range of films directed by an African American women outside of the Hollywood studio system.

Early filmmakers include, Tressie Souders who wrote and directed a *Woman's Error* in 1922, Zora Neale Hurston, the writer and anthropologist who made ethnographic films in the 1920s, and Eloyce Gist who directed *Verdict Not Guilty* in the early 1930s.

Sisters in Cinema is a seminal work that pays homage to African American women, who against all odds made history. The careers, lives and films of inspirational women filmmakers, such as, Euzhan Palcy, Julie Dash, Darnell Martin, Dianne Houston, Neema Barnette, Cheryl Dunye, Kasi Lemmons and Maya Angelou are showcased within the film. Interviews are interwoven with film clips, rare archival footage and photographs and production video of the filmmakers at work. Together these images give voice to African American women directors and serve to illuminate a history that has remained hidden for too long.

Sisters in Cinema reveals the challenges of African American women in the directors chair and the trials and jubilations of bringing their life's passion to the screen.