Projecting Race
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POSTWAR AMERICA, CIVIL RIGHTS AND DOCUMENTARY FILM

STEPHEN CHARBONNEAU
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For Ilysia, Rosie, Dorothy and my daughters, Sofia and Dahlia
The briefest of glances at this book’s table of contents will tell the tale of George Stoney’s influence on me as a film scholar. He instilled in me as a New York University undergraduate a fascination with the past, present and future of documentary film. His course, ‘Documentary Traditions’, was one of my last as a senior and left an indelible mark. Professor Stoney’s detailed notes in my modest undergraduate film journal inspired me and are indicative of a thoroughly committed educator who was always seeking to learn himself. I was humbled to be in his class and have sought to emulate him in the classroom ever since. His influence on the documentary world is legendary and I suspect I will continue to return to his life and work as a source of inspiration.

My world was rocked as well by the many energetic and brilliant film lecturers I encountered at New York University in the mid-1990s, especially David Lugowski, Peter Decherney and Joe McElhaney. Peter Decherney, in particular, deserves thanks for what has turned into a career-long advising session; his feedback on countless papers, personal statements, presentations and overall encouragement and friendship has been foundational for me and I cannot imagine being a film scholar without his help.

The faculty in film and television studies at the University of Warwick rescued me from a low-paying activist gig in Seattle. My courses there with Richard Dyer, Ginette Vincendeau, José Arroyo and Rachel Moseley were inspired and dramatically informed my own pedagogy as a film studies educator. My relationships with Chon Noriega, Marina Goldovskaya and Eric Smooldin at the University of California, Los Angeles were and continue to be sources of inspiration. I thank all three for their friendship and for their encouragement during difficult times. My peers from my time at UCLA have profoundly shaped me as a scholar and have provided much needed emotional support through the ups and downs of graduate life, so thanks to Sudeep Sharma, Emily Carman, Deron Overpeck, Agustin Zarzosa, Lindy Leong, Sharon Sharp, Jennifer Holt,
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The Chicano Studies Research Center at UCLA played a vital role in providing a home for Baylis Glascock’s extensive collection of Farmersville films and related primary documents. A special thanks, then, to Chon Noriega, Baylis Glascock and Michael R. Stone, the Archives Manager at the Center. Allen Fisher, an archivist at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, was enormously helpful in tracking down material related to Julian Biggs’ and Colin Low’s initial visit with the Office of Economic Opportunity in Washington. Colin and Eugénie Low graciously welcomed me into their Montreal home, where I listened to Low speak about his work with the OEO and his career in general. Spending time with them was an honour and an experience that I’ll never forget. My sincere thanks to Harold ‘Casey’ Case and Harry Keramidas for taking time to speak with me over the phone, revisiting their work with the OEO in the late 1960s.

No single book chapter can do justice to the collective archival and preservation work, much less the historical experience, of The Hartford Project. From day one I was inspired and overwhelmed by the labour that went into and continues to maintain the vast collection of films, transcripts, interviews and reports held at Trinity College’s Watkinson Library. A huge debt is owed to Susan Pennybacker whose work at the Hartford Studies Project made this book possible and whose generosity opened up a whole world to me that I had assumed would be closed. I am also deeply saddened by the passing of Peter J. Knapp, Trinity’s College Archivist at the Watkinson Library. My brief time researching at the Watkinson was facilitated by his knowledge of the collections there as well as his good cheer. The fleeting vision of sharing this book with him was a major motivation to finish. Pablo Delano, Glenn Orkin and Christopher Moore deserve special mention as well for their support of this work.

I am also grateful to the transcriptions composed by many at the Hartford Studies Project. The benefit of being able to refer to transcripts of the dozens of films and interviews associated with The Hartford Project cannot be overestimated. My thanks, then, to Tara Brown, Stacey Einhorn, John Forster, Christopher J. Garr, Emily Gifford, Bart Kempf, Melissa Kotulski, Chris Legrand, Kevin Massicotte, Beth Rose, Eric Ruark, Damien Vasseur and Steven Veshoshky.

Ultimately, this book aims to acknowledge the leap of faith undertaken by many activists and artists involved with The Hartford Project. The recent passing of Charles ‘Butch’ Lewis is another bitter pill to swallow considering how his generosity made the preservation and study of these War on Poverty films...
possible. His recorded testimony, along with that of Ann Michaels and Colin Low, for the Hartford Studies Project helped me cobble together a narrative of the OEO’s communication experiments. Ultimately, the enormity of what these and so many have accomplished will continue to yield research and creative work for many years to come.

Since my career began at Florida Atlantic University I have had the pleasure of working alongside Gerald Sim. We were hired together and immediately bonded as we helped each other navigate the perils of academic life. Fusing intellectual insight with his characteristic wit, Gerald has never failed to remind me that my labour is something that I control and that the best way to stop a calamitous action is to let it proceed. Whenever he says, ‘Let’s be clear…’ I know I’m about to hear something good.

Chris Robé has been a stalwart supporter and friend throughout my work on this project. He consistently saw potential in this work that eluded me, especially during periods where the research had stalled. His sense of humour and trenchant insight sustained me through many challenges. Our shared love for noisy music also provided essential outlets for escape and our garage band sessions with Mark Harvey, Phil Hough and Phil Lewin over the last two years have left me smiling and my ears ringing. Susan Reilly has also been unwavering in her support for this project and my career. I am extremely thankful for her recommendations for countless fellowship and grant applications. Eric Freedman, Mike Budd and Michael Hofmann also offered valuable criticism of and support for this research at various stages.

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A handful of film scholars have also intervened at crucial points to support this project and/or my career in more recent years and they include Zoë Druick, Deane Williams, Mary Celeste Kearney, Patricia Aufderheide and Timothy Corrigan. My editor at Wallflower Press, Yoram Allon, has been such a champion for this book and his spirited emails always picked me up. Matthew Buchholz generously shared his expertise on copyright issues and assisted with the imagery
in this book. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the anonymous peer reviewers who poured over early versions of this manuscript. Their efforts substantially improved the project and its faults are entirely my responsibility.

Finally, the summer of 2011 is a notorious one for my family as I found myself battling a sudden health crisis. I quite literally would not be here if it were not for the intervention of the medical staff at the intensive care unit of the John Muir Medical Center in Walnut Creek, California. The nursing staff there kept my family sane during a strenuous time. I am also in awe of the generosity of Stephanie and Mark Adams, who rescued my wife and me from an engulfing storm of medical diagnoses to provide us with a tour of Pixar Studios. We were strangers to them, but there was no hesitation on their part to give us a small reprieve. Since 2011, Dr Jair Munoz Mendoza has also been a calming force and has contributed in many ways to my life and hence this book.

My mother, Dorothy Charbonneau, has been encouraging me to write for as long as I can remember. Her never-wavering belief in my creative and expressive potential has been a gift that I hope to pass on to my own children. Chuck Holst – uncle, friend and best man – instilled in me a love of conversation, westerns and the value of ‘getting out of Dodge’. Over the years, Steve and Mitzi Bauer have continued to be a source of emotional support for my family. And my in-laws, Sue and Bob Shattuck, have been pillars over the last fifteen years, through good times and bad. My sister, Rosie, and her husband, Josh, are my favourite Angelenos. Rosie, in particular, never ceases to amaze me with her creativity, sense of humour and big heart. I’ve been watching movies with her since we could both walk and our sensibilities are at times indistinguishable.

The biggest thanks of all goes to my wife, Ilysia Shattuck. She has been with me on this journey since 1998 and her activist spirit informs this work. Her love of dancing and social justice inspires me and is already rubbing off on our two daughters, Sofia and Dahlia.
INTRODUCTION

LEARNING TO LOOK: THE EDUCATIONAL DOCUMENTARY AND POST-WAR RACE RELATIONS

I am frightened by how the intellectual neatness of the philosophy is so flawless that we often seem to feel there is no need to look at our motivations.

– Henry Lanford (1968)

The quote above is a reflection from Henry Lanford, a research assistant on a 1968 state-sponsored documentary film series, The Farmersville Project. A graduate student at the University of Oregon, Lanford had been invited to join a team of Canadian and American filmmakers who were committed to testing the viability of documentary film as an instrument of conflict mediation. The setting was California’s Central Valley, specifically the town of Farmersville, which was quickly developing a Mexican American majority, and the racial division between the town’s populace and its white power structure was a source of animosity and hostility. The farmworker jobs of retired Okies who still lived in Farmersville were now the jobs of Mexican Americans, whose working conditions were becoming increasingly chemical-intensive and damaging to their health. In response to such conditions, Filipino American and Mexican American farmworkers were organising themselves and standing up for better working conditions all across the state. Within this context, The Farmersville Project – sponsored by the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) and directed by the National Film Board of Canada’s (NFB) Julian Biggs and Colin Low – yielded thirty-four short documentaries about race relations, farmworkers and poverty in order to energise new lines of communication in an already polarised town. The endeavour was a new kind of participatory pedagogy but the crew consisted of outsiders. As a result, Lanford himself grew sceptical about the likelihood of the production’s success: ‘The essence of the danger,’ he wrote at the time, ‘is in [our] strange unquestioning and missionary-like devotion’ (1968).
This sense of anxiety serves as both a starting point and endpoint for the project at hand. With these comments from his production journal Lanford expresses doubt about the crew’s implied status as enlightened outsiders as well as the overall utility of their film series, The Farmersville Project. However, for me, this sentiment inspires a look back at a history of the post-war liberal documentary and its attempts to frame race relations. To this end, this volume tracks the historical development of the documentary film in the decades following World War II, with a particular focus on the maintenance of a post-war racial look in pedagogical settings. As we will see, the films of The Farmersville Project were designed to serve a unique brand of participatory pedagogy: to facilitate communication across racial lines, or to compel the town’s white status quo to truly see as well as hear from their Mexican American neighbours. The OEO hoped that this pedagogical agenda would smooth over racial barriers to communication and ease the work of organisers on the ground as they sought to address poverty as a general social problem. Accompanying the agency’s liberal reformist endeavour was a desire to stage and facilitate a particular racial look through new filmic pedagogies.

The Farmersville Project stands at the tail end of a broader history of the post-war documentary. The first half of this book analyses documentary films in the 1940s and 1950s that bear the mark of Italian neorealism, those that blend an educational mission with re-enactments designed to shadow history and capture a quotidian flavour of reality. In contrast, the second half charts the influence of new documentary approaches on sponsored educational films in the 1960s, where the intensity and urgency of that decade encouraged documentarians to record life as it unfolded in front of the camera. Nevertheless, this division should not obscure a larger continuity as the majority of the documentaries discussed here deal with race and race relations during the post-war era within particular pedagogical contexts. As a unique kind of cinema, these educational documentaries are sponsored by state agencies at various levels and most of them generate an address from the state to a particular audience. Or, to put it in more cinematic terms, these films produce racial looks that are expressed through specific sounds and images in order to educate and train. Studying the racial politics of post-war documentaries asks us to consider our textual analyses in terms that go beyond standard notions of representation. The conditions of reception for educational documentaries are often narrowly defined and their social impact may indeed be negligible. But while their social representational value is often limited, their unique ways of seeing – especially when held in light of their institutional and historical situation – can give us access to particular and often overlooked modes of knowledge formation. And, from a post-World War II American perspective,
these ways of seeing are often coordinated with certain racial values that leave an inevitable inscription. This racial residue in educational, training and mental hygiene films speaks to an American society caught up in the contradictions of its ideals in light of the brutal realities of Jim Crow.

It is quite clear that the stakes of historicising and theorising the racial look are as high as ever. In a commentary on the events of Ferguson, Missouri and the decision not to indict Officer Darren Wilson in the shooting of Michael Brown, Matthew Pratt Guterl – author of *Seeing Race in Modern America* (2013) – makes a compelling case for approaching ‘racial sight as an endemic, disturbing feature of American history and culture’ (2014). Even as Guterl acknowledges that economic disparities underpin race relations in America, he insists, ‘these are historically and politically linked to things as simple as sight’ (ibid.). In his book, Guterl sets out to study ‘racial sight in the modern United States’ and the ‘popular reliance on observable details and racial biometrics to classify, organize, and arrange different kinds of bodies, and the enrollment and imprinting of individual bodies with multiple markers that match a particular template, stereotype, or stock representation’ (2013: 3). My hope here is to direct this cultural history of the racial look into a narrower study of documentary film history, with a particular focus on the post-war educational documentary. To a substantial degree, the pedagogical film practices assessed in this book foreground the racial ‘imprinting’ as well as this process’s entanglement within particular frameworks of public policy.

Lanford, then, represents an example of the particular racial look under review here. For me, his testimony mobilises a broader post-war liberal anxiety. The educational documentaries featured in this book, most of which explicitly address issues of race and racism, were made by liberals working within particular institutional and historical coordinates. Sidney Meyers, George Stoney, Colin Low and Julian Biggs all, in different ways, produce a post-war racial look in flux, as it struggles to come to terms with racial inequality. In most instances, the films reviewed in this book accentuate the experiences of African Americans as well as Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans through the lens of specific traumas. In some cases, the trauma is displaced from a social field and etched onto an oedipal core. In other cases, the trauma is tied to severe conditions of urban or rural poverty. Stoney’s films often feature the latter while also exhibiting a more delicate touch. In these films, African American familial struggles highlight the interconnectedness of psychic strife and social circumstance. Low and Biggs’ participatory pedagogical films for the OEO in the late 1960s – on which Lanford worked – also feature testimonies from Mexican Americans, African Americans and Puerto Ricans that compel linkages between personal, social and
economic registers. A dynamic mapping of post-war racial experiences can, to some extent, be gleaned from these documentaries.

But framing these analyses in terms of the racial look reminds us of the outsider status of the filmmakers in relation to the experiences depicted, the very thing that troubles Lanford. Stitched together, the films of Meyers, Stoney, Low, Biggs and others articulate a faltering liberal racial look, one that increasingly finds itself in crisis. These filmmakers exhibit a disdain for the racism of post-war America and see their films as attempts to foreground the struggles and experiences of African American, Mexican American and Puerto Rican peoples. And yet their films are still *their* films. While the films discussed here grow more and more participatory, the cameras are still – by and large – directed at people of colour rather than by. The racial dynamic at work here is, then, complicated. The look these films mobilise is always a racial one in which a white liberal vision is constituted outright or intervenes on behalf of the state.

The historical timeline for the films considered stretches out from the late 1940s to the late 1960s, and in doing so we are able to take note of a racial look *in process* as it comes to terms with its own contradictions and implications. Here the look parallels the historical flux of post-war liberalism. Viewing liberalism as a ‘complex and variable dynamic, rather than as a singular set of substantive positions’ (Horton 2005: 4) enables us to be open to its post-war variations and its registration through a wide array of pedagogical, observational and participatory documentaries. And yet in spite of these variations and the contradictory nature of liberal discourses, scholars such as Carol A. Horton have correctly pointed out that the edifice of American liberalism has been and continues to be articulated through race. The spectre of racial inequality haunts American liberalism in the post-war era as both an internal contradiction in need of resolution and as a fulcrum for perpetuating economic inequality. As Horton notes, racism is both flaw and feature in the history of American liberalism, ‘a complex and double-edged phenomenon’ (ibid.). And a fascination that drives this book is how this fact is registered onscreen, through the use of filmmaking at a time when the medium was perceived as a key site for the inculcation of modern liberal citizenship. An assumption of this particular study is that post-war modes of liberal citizenship, at their core, seek to confront and mitigate the racial inequality on which they are based.

In the twenty-five years following World War II, the United States changed radically as a result of the Civil Rights movement. The overarching narrative of this book coincides with Martin Luther King, Jr.’s stewardship of the Civil Rights movement from – as Taylor Branch puts it – ‘obscurity to … the center stage of American politics in 1963’ (2006: xii). At that time, ‘President John F.
Kennedy declared racial segregation a moral issue “as old as the Scriptures and ... as clear as the American Constitution” (ibid.). The passage of the 24th Amendment (abolition of the poll tax), the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were testimonies to the grassroots efforts of African Americans and organisations such as the NAACP, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Congress of Racial Equality. These particular reforms followed history, as grassroots actions, resistance and violent struggles reframed race relations in America. In the process, post-war liberalism's internal contradictions with regards to the principle of equality and the harsh realities of segregation were confronted and directly resisted by the Civil Rights movement. And yet, as the Kerner Report pointed out, the ‘expectations aroused by the great judicial and legislative victories of the civil rights movement have led to frustration, hostility and cynicism in the face of the persistent gap between promise and fulfillment’ (Kerner 1968: 204). Housing, employment and education continued to be domains of struggle as a legacy of white supremacy persisted through taken-for-granted institutional practices and social attitudes. The recognition of these limits contributed to a radicalisation of the political scene as frustration in communities of colour boiled over in the streets and in the fields.

While the nation struggled to articulate a new vision of racial equality, the motion picture was integrated into post-war modes of governance across an array of institutional and industrial sites. Nonfiction filmmaking in non-theatrical contexts became a key medium for narrating as well as managing the nation’s escalating engagement with race and racism. Michele Wallace for instance notes that ‘up until the release of Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?, there is an interesting correlation between national governmental policies regarding “race,” and film portrayals of racial subjects’ (1993: 258). In the decades following World War II, the classical documentary form – or the expository mode – both persists and is reoriented to accommodate the post-war use of film by institutions as an instrument of knowledge formation (see Nichols 1991: 34). John Grierson’s famously functionalist conception of nonfiction film reverberates in the 1950s as public agencies, corporations and non-profit organisations sponsor a dizzying array of training films, classroom films and other educational documentaries. The Griersonian preference for short documentaries premised on mapping out relationships between the subject and the state – utilising formalist and realist techniques in the process – remains as a constitutive horizon for a broad cross-section of documentary culture in the post-war era. It both continues and is also transformed by a number of innovations in documentary form as French, Canadian and American documentarians develop new modalities – participatory and
observational – which seek to engage everyday life more directly while restraining the classical impulse to rely on voiceover narration and reenactments.

These transformations in documentary form during the post-war years are familiar. Nevertheless, a review of post-war educational documentaries can flesh out our understanding of these stylistic transformations with an eye towards their intersection with broader social and cultural forces. Certainly, the post-war deployment of documentary as a liberal medium for knowledge production and conflict mediation – essentially, from 1945 to 1970 – continues to be a murky terrain. The same time frame also encompasses the post-war push for Civil Rights as well as its aftermath. What *Projecting Race* sets out to accomplish is a fusion of these two lines of historical development, to present case studies of the American liberal documentary and its encounter with racial otherness. The documentary filmmaking of this period occurs against the wider historical backdrop of decolonisation, which Fredric Jameson argues should include the Civil Rights movement (1984: 180). Our diachronic survey of educational documentaries during this time charts a specific post-war racial look, or, following Alessandra Raengo, a ‘visual relation’ (2013: 12). Raengo paraphrases Frantz Fanon by arguing that Blackness is forged through a visual encounter, an interstice resting between ‘interpellator and interpellated’ (ibid.). These films, then, map this post-war racial look or visual relation and remind us of the particular work they perform on behalf of a problematic liberal discourse whose representations of people of colour is both a source of acknowledgment as well as a strategy for containment.

This is an area of scholarship that has been neglected within critical race film history. In his study of ‘black-themed cinema’ in the 1960s, Christopher Sieving notes that ‘much of the major scholarly writing since 1993 on black film history has focused on those periods or movements dominated by African American directors and characterised by a conscious opposition’ (2011: 4). The muddled and compromised world of post-war liberal documentary constitutes one of the blank spots in African American film history and critical race film history more generally. The focus on a clearly demarcated oppositional cinema is essential, of course, and this study stands on the shoulders of the research conducted on this front. My project, then, seeks to complement existing scholarship in both documentary history as well as critical race film history. The aim is to shed light on the racial politics of educational documentaries, often sponsored by various branches of the state. These agencies or institutions are clearly part of the status quo yet also resonate with a particular post-war anxiety around race. As a contribution to our understanding of this period of documentary film history, this book will highlight the documentary form’s post-war life as a managerial
tool for mitigating social conflict against the backdrop of evolving race relations. In doing so, the documentaries discussed will envelope the full breadth of approaches during this time, including expository, observational and participatory modalities. From this perspective, educational documentaries represent an intensification of documentary style, purpose and history as they mine and recombine contemporary filmmaking trends to accomplish a narrowly articulated pedagogical mission. Ultimately, this volume seeks to engage in a consideration of familiar documentary styles as they reflect and inflect a bigger national drama around the struggle to end segregation as well as confront racial inequality in a pre- and post-Civil Rights America.

The Racial Look, Liberalism and Documentary Film

This book is organised with chronological and conceptual goals in mind. Conscious of the broader context of post-war race relations in America, I trace the deployment of distinct educational documentary modes to both represent as well as manage racial otherness within a shifting liberal imaginary. The classical documentary film’s ties to liberalism are more fundamental than they are negligible. As Zoë Druick has noted, ‘a wide range of commentators as well as institutions’ facilitated the ‘formation of “documentary” as an educational instrument for modern nation building’ (2008: 67). The documentary idea ‘was seen to crystalize an alternative to Hollywood that might be developed outside of theatrical circuits for what were deemed serious purposes’ (2008: 68). Druick demonstrates how international organisations, such as the League of Nations and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), were constitutive sites for the emergence of documentary film as a means of liberal pedagogy, closely ‘tied to a discourse of neutrality seemingly outside politics’ (ibid.). The perception of documentary film as an educational tool that addresses its audience with a tone of high seriousness and a feeling of being above the fray is a legacy of the documentary tradition. This familiar affect is the by-product of documentary film’s early situation within a liberal formation centered on mitigating the traumatic effects of modernity.

By and large, the methodological disposition of this work leans toward historically situated textual analyses of well-known and lesser-known educational documentaries. Without delving too deeply into the ontology of the documentary image, let me briefly note that I read documentary imagery as imaginary. The term imaginary is used here in a rather conventional manner. Christian Metz referred to cinema as a ‘technique of the imaginary’ and suggested this was the case ‘in two senses’ (1986: 3). On the one hand, there is the Lacanian association
in which the imaginary refers to a pre-oedipal stage of development when the infant encounters the ‘endurable mark of the mirror’ (1986: 4) and is both defined and divided by the experience of misrecognition. While on the other, there is the ‘ordinary sense’ (1986: 3) of the term. Here ‘imaginary’ refers to the cinema’s reliance on a signifier that is illusory ‘from the start’ (1986: 44). What we perceive in cinema is ‘not really the object, it is its shade, its phantom, its double, its replica in a new kind of mirror’ (1986: 45). In short, there is no there there. What cinema presents to us is the paradox of a present absence or a moving image that is loaded with ‘perceptual wealth, but at the same time stamped with unreality’ (ibid.). This latter and simpler construction of imaginary is what attracts me. It articulates the contradictions and complexities of moving images in a way that encapsulates the documentary dilemma as we are drawn to an experience of perceptual indexicality – of reality registered before us – even as we are cognisant of the documentary image’s spectrality and unreliability. Neither strictly objective nor subjective, imagery – in this case, documentary imagery – of race relations produced by ostensibly ‘neutral’ or even liberal institutions played a significant role in the evolving post-war perception of racial difference in the United States. Educational films often trace a liberal discourse that is less reflective of reality and more expressive of a desired civic cohesion in the face of racial and social conflict. This book’s organisation, then, is designed to explore this role of documentary filmmaking within a shifting series of educational films that mix and match expository, observational and participatory modes in the process.

However, this familiar documentary dilemma can also be tied to the spectrality of racial imagery. In fact, Raengo echoes Metz when she deploys the shadow metaphor to challenge the paradigm of the mirror and its fixation on authenticity:

we understand racial images to be those that deliver a racial content, ultimately, a body. When the body is secured, ‘racial images’ perform an ontologizing function: they are understood to be as accurate as mirror reflections and yet as tethered, contiguous, and, therefore, trustworthy as shadows. Thus racial images are those that can be trusted at face value. (2013: 163–4)

The trustworthiness of the mirror eventually gives way to its counterpart of the shadow. While the mirror generates a ‘structure of referral’ by securing its referent and assuring the viewer, the ‘alternative paradigm’ of the shadow is aligned with a ‘structure of deferral’ and nudges the viewer away from ‘photographic fixing’ and towards ‘cinematic becoming’ (Raengo 2013: 17, 39). But the Metzian shadow and its hollow authentication is seized by Raengo and rendered in socio-historical terms, arguing that the shadow of race – and ultimately the
racial look - is the authoriser of the photochemical index. In our ongoing historical and cultural time frame, the racial image is the guarantor of indexical ‘face value’ (2013: 18). Of course, it is this apparent authorisation or ‘ontologising function’ that needs to be undone. If the faith of the index is often assured by a racialised body, then Raengo seeks to shed light on the phantasmagoric nature of this scene or encounter:

The complication, though, is that the mirror is the mode through which the white, Western subject encounters the Other, as a mirror image, but one that reflects back something that is skewed, frightening, opaque, and thus needs to be disavowed. As [David] Marriott’s reading of Fanon [in Haunted Life] shows, the face-to-face encounter between the black and the white produces blackness as a specter. The native too, Fanon explains, encounters her own other as a mirror, but quickly realizes that what is reflected back is neither here nor there; the black *imago* exists only in-between, like a ghost show, a phantasmagoria. (2013: 164)

Raengo’s aim in her book, *On the Sleeve of the Visual*, is to chart a way out of the ‘black representational space’ … whereby this moment of phantasmagoric visuality can be productively mobilized to turn these visual relations inside out, and blackness can be unhinged from the body and the image, but still claim its ‘ontological resistance’. (Ibid.)

Seeing Blackness outside the fixity of the ‘photochemical imagination’ and instead from the vantage point of ‘the shadow’ short-circuits our unconscious slippage from visible surfaces to visual depths (2013: 3, 165). This is, in fact, one reason for couching this book’s historical textual analyses in terms of a cultural history of the racial look. The idea of the racial look reminds us that what is being produced is always, as Raengo states, a visual relation between the observer and the observed rather than something fixed (a deferral rather than a referral). Raengo also empowers us to forge a critical gaze that undercuts the allure of giving ourselves over to the imagined depths of the image while also leaving the door open for imagery that foreground these visual relations in implicit and explicit ways.

**Organisation**

Over the course of seven chapters, this book tracks the post-war racial look
in sponsored cinema as it evolves from the fixity of a therapeutic gaze to the productive uncertainty of collaboration. The narrative put forward here, then, charts the development of a liberal racial look that is increasingly unsure of itself and yet always hegemonic, never completely displaced. The last chapter comes the closest as the state-sponsored film crew for *The Hartford Project* (1969) includes a local community leader and founder of the Hartford chapter of the Black Panther Party, Charles ‘Butch’ Lewis. And yet the still largely unseen films were dismissed by the OEO, the agency that sponsored them, as a failed project. Nevertheless, the elements that make *The Hartford Project* so compelling almost fifty years later are the same ones that elicited disavowal at the time of its production.2

In essence, the first half of the book (chapters 1–3) focuses on the immediate post-war years and the influence of Italian neorealism on documentary filmmaking, while the second half (chapters 4–7) centres on the incorporation of new documentary approaches (observational, participatory) into pedagogical cinema. Chapter one – ‘Documenting from Below: Post-war Documentary, Race and Everyday Life’ – provides an essential historical prologue for the book and reviews key concepts that emerge throughout, including Henri Cartier-Bresson’s *decisive moment* as well as David Desser’s *therapeutic vision*. This section initially provides a sketch of the post-war Griersonian documentary tradition and how that interfaces with a broader history of race and film in the United States. The core thematic takeaway from this opening section not only concerns the expansion of managerial and educational cinema after World War II, but – more crucially – the emergence of a ‘feeling of the new’ (Casetti 1999: 75) within the documentary domain. This sensibility draws from Italian neorealism and seeks out slices of everyday life. It speaks to what I characterise as the *documentary from below* – speaking from the vantage point of life as it is lived through the textures of everyday experience – and thus impacts the post-war racial look as African American experiences are articulated through a therapeutic address to African American characters who have incurred traumas on the battlefield, in the streets and in the home. The domain of the educational documentary charts a contradictory post-war framing as the subjective experiences of African American individuals are directly acknowledged while also inoculated from the political realities of racial inequality.

Chapter two – ‘The Sick Quiet that Follows Violence: Neorealism, Psychotherapy and Collaboration’ – presents analyses of two key documentaries from the early post-war years that pursue distinct representational strategies. While not a typical educational documentary, *The Quiet One* (1948) is nevertheless a documentary classic whose influence is discernible in all of the subsequent
films discussed in this book. It conveniently synthesises the overlapping stylistic threads reviewed in chapter one as the film draws on classical documentary techniques and Italian neorealist traits in order to highlight a particular social problem. Nevertheless, the way in which the film depicts its young African American protagonist, Donald, privileges a therapeutic approach that is more invested in tracking his familial trauma than the realities of racial inequality in the post-war years. George C. Stoney’s and William T. Clifford’s *Palmour Street* (1950), as a mental hygiene film produced by the Southern Educational Film Production Service (SEFPS), is similarly focused on psychological issues. Sponsored by the State of Georgia, the film’s aim was to promote mental health awareness among African American families. The film also shares with *The Quiet One* a neorealist sensibility as it reenacts the daily struggles of a particular African American family. The mental hygiene credentials of *Palmour Street* continue to uphold *The Quiet One*’s focus on familial struggles and yet the collaborative nature of the production opens up the film’s overall address. Rather than psychically pin down its subject through an authoritative voiceover, *Palmour Street* presents open-ended vignettes of African American family life in the south. The family’s struggles are less severe than those shown in *The Quiet One* and thus more relatable. As a form of filmic pedagogy, *Palmour Street* embraces aperture over closure as the film sets out to provoke discussion and self-reflection among its audiences. In spite of the shared properties of these two films, *Palmour Street* moderates the professionalised racial look as a result of Stoney and Clifford’s collaborative and deferential approach which seeks to pose questions without offering clear answers. This educational film’s uniqueness and divergence from *The Quiet One* is also contextualised within a history of the SEFPS.

Chapter three – ‘Charismatic Knowledge: Modernity and Southern African American Midwifery in *All My Babies* (1952)’ – picks up where the previous chapter left off by focusing on another film by George Stoney, *All My Babies*. Like *The Quiet One*, *All My Babies* is a seminal American documentary film whose innovations result in part from its neorealist posture and investment in recording everyday life by restaging events as well as capturing them in real time. However, *All My Babies* shares with Stoney and Clifford’s *Palmour Street* a commitment to collaboration with the African American subjects in the film as well as from the larger community of midwives and nurses. Sponsored by the Georgia Department of Health and the Medical Film Institute of the Association of American Medical Colleges, *All My Babies* was designed to encourage enhanced cooperation and dialogue between African American midwives and health care professionals, between traditional and modern practices of birthing. As such the film’s educational agenda dovetails with its collaborative mode of
production as a modern means of communication, and cinema enters the fray to better facilitate this encounter. Nevertheless, the film has not yet been fully considered in light of this controversial wave of modernisation, one that often sought to marginalise the figure of the African American midwife. Stoney’s film, which has been justifiably praised for its humanistic treatment of the midwife, must mitigate its own divided racial look and constitute African American midwifery as a flexible practice with a legacy formidable enough to stand up to the modern medical establishment.

Chapters four through seven shift the focus to educational documentaries whose modes of address reflect the new observational and participatory styles that became so paradigmatic in the 1960s. Stoney reemerges here as an important figure, one who laments his inability to deal directly with what he considered to be the ‘central issue of the middle 20th century,’ the Civil Rights movement; in his mind, he was ‘failing in [his] basic responsibility to record history as it is made’ (1963). The observational and participatory modes of documentary (or, respectively, direct cinema and cinéma vérité) reinvigorated Stoney and other documentarians in the 1960s. Chapter four – ‘Full of Fire: Historical Urgency and Utility in The Man in the Middle (1966)’ – reviews the emergence of these two modes and insists on reading them, in spite of their differences, as expressions of a desire to record everyday life. Of course, these modes dispense with the use of reenactments in earlier neorealist films and seek to minimise the rhetorical device of voiceover narration, especially the Voice of God. Instead, both modes of documentary prefer to capture events as they unfold, whether the filmmakers sees themselves as observers or active participants. These new documentary approaches presume a reality that plays out in real time and ultimately resist the pedagogical intentionality we associate with educational filmmaking. A clear example of how training films bore the mark of these new approaches comes from Stoney and his film, The Man in the Middle. This was one of a handful of training films that Stoney produced for various police departments in the 1960s. While most of Stoney’s police training films reflect the stylistic traits of his earlier work, The Man in the Middle takes advantage of observational and participatory techniques to transform what might have been an unremarkable training film into a pedagogically unique project. In the end, the film marries the stasis of procedure with the flux of embodied history as words of protest from community organisers from South Jamaica, Queens are featured.

Chapter five – ‘Training Days: Liberal Advocacy and Self-Improvement in War on Poverty Films’ – continues this look at how training films absorbed new documentary modalities through a discussion of select state-sponsored War on Poverty films. Through extensive archival research I show that filmmaking was
an important part of how the War on Poverty was pitched to the populace and how new volunteers were recruited and trained. While many of the documentaries were classical in style – featuring Voice of God narration, reenactments, and evidentiary editing strategies – others became increasingly inspired by new observational and participatory approaches. The narrative arc of this chapter follows the construction of the white liberal advocate whose onscreen presence eventually yields as the films grow increasingly observational in style. Films discussed here include *The First Thirty* (1965), *A Year Towards Tomorrow* (1966), *With No One to Help Us* (1967) and the Drew Associates’ *Another Way* (1967).

The final two chapters expand the consideration of the War on Poverty by highlighting the OEO’s experiments with participatory filmmaking in the late 1960s. Chapter six – ‘The World is Quiet Here: War on Poverty, Participatory Filmmaking and *The Farmersville Project* (1968)’ – centers on *The Farmersville Project*, a series of educational shorts imagined as community development films. The frustrations of which Lanford spoke at the outset of this introduction refer to one of the instances in which the OEO embraced a new participatory documentary approach – one developed in Canada – to mitigate the entrenched racial and class-based hostilities occurring on the ground. *The Farmersville Project* represents the first instance of what I call the ‘OEO Communication Experiments’ (OEOCE). Largely ignored by historians, the OEOCE involved the collaboration of American and Canadian administrators in the late 1960s. Specifically, in 1967, the National Film Board of Canada sponsored what became known as *The Newfoundland Project*: an experiment in participatory filmmaking conducted by Colin Low (NFB) and Donald Snowden from Memorial University. Initially expecting to make a traditional documentary about the problems facing the residents of Fogo Island and their response to a top-down policy of resettlement, Low wound up producing twenty-eight short topical films designed to promote a civil and reconciliatory discourse. The films were screened locally as well as to outside policymakers in order to open up new lines of dialogue on a contentious issue. While the crisis on Fogo Island eventually reached a resolution, the perception of success on the part of this filmmaking endeavour – described as the ‘Fogo process’ – traversed the border and drew the attention of Public Affairs staff at the OEO.

Chapter six as well as chapter seven – ‘An Urban Situation: *The Hartford Project* and the North American Challenge’ – review the OEO’s attempts to apply the Fogo process to communities torn asunder by racial conflict and socio-economic divisions. The two communities selected – Farmersville, California and Hartford, Connecticut – posed obvious contrasts, as the former was agrarian and rural while the latter was urban and industrial. And yet both were examples
of communities where the institutionalised white status quo was threatened by increasingly organised and politically active racial minorities. The OEO’s heightened anxiety in the face of its own precarious status – as the election of Richard Nixon loomed – as well as the rise of what Herbert Kramer, head of Public Affairs at the OEO, referred to as ‘black militancy’ (Anon. 1975: 19) compels a crisis in the agency’s managerial liberal outlook. This breaking point represents a partial conclusion to our history of the post-war educational documentary and its registration of the racial look. Ultimately, chapters four through seven seek to advance our knowledge of race-themed educational documentaries in the 1960s, a decade that – according to Christopher Sieving – ‘has gone largely unexplored by scholars in the field of black cinema studies’ (2011: 1).

Taken together, these seven chapters give a sense of how educational documentary filmmaking evolved in the post-war era as the influence of Italian neorealism waned and new documentary approaches were developed. The documentary film activities addressed here collectively represent – in spite of their variety – a racial look transfixed by a double desire to acknowledge change while upholding a sense of stability and stasis. The dramatic fight for racial equality during these decades brought about incredible transformations while also shedding light on an entrenched white normativity across a number of everyday and institutional settings. Post-war liberal institutions were similarly caught in a series of contradictory maneuvers, taking one step forward and two steps back. And one of the best ways to access these ideological machinations is through particular modes of communication in a number of different settings at different times. This overview of educational documentary activities will help us chart a narrative of post-war liberalism’s schizophrenic navigation of racial difference, entailing a dance of recognition and denial.

Documentary Studies, Film History and Participatory Culture

In remarks made at an event sponsored by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago – ‘Public Media 2.0: A Conversation on the Future of Urban Documentary and Social Change’ – B. Ruby Rich, a noted feminist film scholar and critic, observed that the study of documentary film had evolved from an initial infatuation with ‘authors’ – or great documentarians – to a study of radical media and social change. The former impulse was motivated by a desire to validate the documentary film as an aesthetic object of study and counter claims of realist naïveté. The subsequent response focused on the documentary’s deployment by a wider range of practitioners and activists, many of whom were and are socially marginalised based on their race, gender, sexual orientation and/or class status.
Documentary form – in its cinematic, video and digital manifestations – offered and continues to offer a crucial means of intervention into the public sphere and the politics of visibility. When looked at from this vantage point, this volume combines a heuristic investment in the aesthetic study of documentary filmmakers with a materialist commitment to mobilise their filmmaking and films within a social and political field. To be blunt, many of the filmmakers highlighted here are white males working for the state. The point of this project is not, however, to simply trumpet the filmmakers’ technical and aesthetic achievements. Rather, the aim is to understand the historical and political presence of their work and its engagement with race at a time when liberal institutions were evolving rapidly.

Textual analysis of key films is, then, at the heart of my methodological tool kit; but, as David E. James has written, ‘a film’s images and sounds never fail to tell the story of how and why they were produced – the story of the mode of their production’ (1989: 5). While much of my own discourse is spent on the films’ ‘images and sounds’, these analyses are mindful of their institutional purpose and historical situation. Whether we’re talking about the SEFPS, NFB or the OEO, I read the resulting films or film series – *Palmour Street, All My Babies, The Man in the Middle, The Farmersville Project*, etc – against the historical backdrop of their production, reconstructed through archival research as well as oral history. The retroactive work of critical analysis also necessarily includes framing these film practices in relation to their historical circumstances. All of the film activities reviewed represent a post-war liberal engagement with race and race relations that fluctuates over two and a half decades from an early Cold War variation, with its ‘emphasis on the strictly formal aspects of racial discrimination’ (Horton 2005: 122), to the last gasps of Great Society managerial liberalism in the late 1960s.

Many of the filmmakers discussed in this book are underappreciated, if their work is known at all. George Stoney has been well known for a very long time, and yet a sustained study of his work and its significance has been fleeting, perhaps attributable to his commitment to collaboration and social activism over and above his own authorial contributions to documentary. Nevertheless, the recent critical mass of academic interest in the history and theory of educational films sets the stage for a consideration of Stoney’s work at the SEFPS and later. Anthony Slide, Geoff Alexander, Heide Solbrig, Haidee Wasson, Lee Grieveson and Dan Streible have helped underscore the significance of the moving image as a pedagogical instrument throughout the twentieth century. Research centered on non-theatrical films frequently combines an exciting range of historiographic methods, attendant to the particularities of educational film form as well as the variety of its institutional situations. In this light Stoney, whose work has been
sidelined or ignored altogether, assumes greater significance. For quite some time now, histories of the moving image have exceeded the boundaries of entertainment and art to incorporate other educational and communicative domains. This openness to the deployment of the moving image to manage perceptions of public health, labour and race relations in specific historical circumstances makes a fresh appreciation of Stoney as well as the SEFPS possible.

A materialist enquiry into the post-war documentary’s negotiation of race and race relations, then, both renews our appreciation of familiar documentarians as well as generates new knowledge about the moving image’s incorporation into an array of communicative procedures. Tracing these filmmakers’ experiences also contributes an understanding of the state and its inevitable ties to social movements. Out of respect for the ‘ambiguous location of Chicano cinema’, Chon Noriega – in his book, *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema* – acknowledges the methodological necessity of teasing out and foregrounding the interlocking strands that bind the study of social movements to the study of the state (2000: xi). George Stoney was both an activist and a filmmaker for the SEFPS. Colin Low and Julian Biggs were employees of both the Canadian and American governments whose approach to participatory filmmaking reflected a desire to bring about social change. These are complicated individuals in very contradictory institutional settings. Their sensibilities register the flow of post-war liberalism and its dialectical embrace of change and stasis, management and malleability.

Finally, this book will risk proposing a metanarrative. As a contribution to film history, this project charts another affinity among these filmmakers in spite of the neatness of the conceptual divisions implied by its chapters. The formal distinctions acknowledged here belie a broader impulse towards a participatory cultural formation. Stoney’s subject-centered production engenders a revision of documentary practices with an eye towards participation and collaboration between the filmmaker and the subjects of a documentary. In this sense, his work at the SEFPS looks ahead to his time as the head of the NFB’s ‘Challenge for Change’ (1966–70) project, when he championed the teaching of production skills to indigenous peoples so that they may author their own films about their community. Low’s work on *The Newfoundland Project* – which inaugurated ‘Challenge for Change’ – as well as the OEOCE, he described as ‘vertical’ rather than ‘horizontal’ (Crocker 2008: 66). By this he meant that the Fogo process and its promotion of condensed filmic portraiture diminishes the intervention of the filmmaker and places greater emphasis on the life experiences and expressions of documentary subjects. While divergent in important ways, these documentary practices also cohere around a notion of privileging voices and daily experiences...
that are otherwise excluded from broad historical narratives. The idea of a documentary project whose perspective on the historical world comes from below opens up the frame to accommodate contingency and subjective expression.

Upon his return to the United States and the fading influence of the blacklist, John Grierson recognised a similar paradigm shift in documentary production from expository norms to cinéma vérité. He recognised that new participatory practices entailed ‘decentralizing the means of production, taking the myth out of it … and making the documentary film a living tool for people at the grass roots’ (Sussex 1976: 196). With the participatory turn, as Bill Nichols has put it, the filmmaking process is the result of an interaction or an ‘encounter’ (2001: 17) rather than something imposed. And with this an element of contingency is overtly introduced and the dream of representing reality in any totalised sense falters. The privileging of subjects’ voices yields a more inductive and fractured whole, nudge the documentary project that much closer to the everyday and the actual as opposed to a presumably deeper real (see Aitken 1992: 12). This epistemic break suggests a more modest and less confident documentary endeavour that parallels cracks in modern liberalism in the 1960s and eventually engenders heightened reflexive sensitivities on the part of film diarists, essayists and ethnographers. This book’s concluding sections suggest that the state’s crisis mentality of 1968–69, then, found a synchronous avenue of expression in new participatory documentary practices. State agencies were seeking new ways to access the thorny issue of racism and poverty, to address as well as call out subjects caught up in untenable socio-economic circumstances. Vérité modes of production resonated with the needs of a state agency in crisis and, in turn, registered a parallel crisis in consciousness as classical expository aims were increasingly seen as untenable. The politics of visibility were changing and called for an embrace of greater expressivity, to unsettle the authority of a voice outside and above the subjective experiences conveyed. Instead the ‘voice’ of the documentary and the voices of the subjects depicted should meet at some point, inscribed together in new documentary practices. The OEO’s use of the Fogo process in 1968 and 1969 presents us with an opportunity to explore a concrete manifestation of these aesthetic and managerial crises in intersection with one another and with specific material conditions. As Henry Lanford notes, previously unquestioned motivations were coming into sharper focus.

Notes

1 Excerpts from this chapter were previously published in Stephen Charbonneau (2014) ‘Exporting Fogo: Participatory Filmmaking, War on Poverty, and the

2 The title, *The Hartford Project*, is partly a critical construction on my part. The reality is that *The Hartford Project* unlike its counterpart, *The Farmersville Project*, was left largely unfinished and partial. As we will see, this was largely because the production encountered a wide range of difficulties. Nevertheless, in spite of this sense of incompleteness, the title corresponds to a series of twenty-four films that are by any measure a coherent body of work that documents life in Hartford in 1969.

3 ‘Public Media 2.0: A Conversation on the Future of Urban Documentary and Social Change’ was held on 6 March 2013 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. It featured discussions with Gordon Quinn, Allan Siegel, Steve James and Michelle Citron. The event was also moderated by B. Ruby Rich, Mark Shiel and Brendan Kredell and was sponsored by the Society for Cinema and Media Studies and the University of Chicago.

4 Bill Nichols characterises the ‘voice’ of a documentary as a synonym for the ‘social point of view’ of the film (1985: 260).