

Traces of the Body: Race and Documentary Film in the US
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Course outline:

- 1) Race and the Politics of the Documentary Image: This session will examine how key debates within the field of documentary studies intersect with the question of race and representation. We will discuss the unresolved debate—both within national discourse and within the field of documentary studies—around the status of the documentary image as an index of truth sparked by footage of the 1991 Rodney King beatings.
- 2) Documenting Black Power: Newsreel and the Dynamics of Representation: This session will examine the Newsreel documentaries of Black Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s as a case study in the problematics of documentary representation. Examining films made by and about members of these movements, we will address issues of labor, police brutality, and quotidian experiences of race in city life in documentary films.
- 3) Race and Documentary: the Culture Wars to the Present: In this session, we will look at a new generation of documentary films addressing issues of race that fell at the center of what is known as the “Culture Wars” in the early 1990s. The seminar will conclude with an examination of the aftermath of hurricane Katrina and the City of New Orleans through Spike Lee’s epic documentary *When the Levees Broke* (2006).

Methodology and Course Materials:

The seminar will consist of 30% lecture, 30% viewings, and 40% course discussion. Lectures will provide historical background and theoretical context, as well as present critical and formal terminology that will frame both viewings and discussions. Discussions will focus on close readings of particular films.

Films (selections):

Santiago Alvarez: *Now!* (1965)
San Francisco Newsreel Collective: *Off the Pig* (1968)
Stewart Bird, et al.: *Finally Got the News* (1970)
Marlon Riggs: *Tongues Untied* (1989)
Spike Lee: *When the Levees Broke* (2006)

Selected Readings:

Bill Nichols: *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*
Patricia Zimmerman: *States of Emergency: Documentaries, Wars, Democracies*
Geokakas and Surkin: *Detroit: I do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution*
Peniel Joseph: *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Right Black-Power Movement*