

INTRODUCING CHERYL DUNYE

Exploring the “Dunyementary”

EDUCATION

- Born in Liberia 1966
- Raised in Philadelphia
- Introduction to feminist theory in college influenced Dunye's use of visual media to explore issues of interest
 - Earned BA from Temple University in 1990
 - Earned MFA from Rutgers University in 1992
- Has taught film and media studies at multiple institutions, including Temple, UCLA, CalArts



Image source: CherylDunye.com



EXPERIMENTAL SHORTS TO FEATURES

- *Janine* (1990)
- *She Don't Fade* (1991)
- *Vanilla Sex* (1992)
- *Untitled Portrait* (1993)
- *The Potluck and the Passion* (1993)
- *Greetings From Africa* (1994)
- *The Watermelon Woman* (1996)
- *Stranger Inside* (2000)
- *My Baby's Daddy* (2004)
- *The Owls* (2010)



Still from *The Watermelon Woman* (1996).

Image source: [CinemaQueer](http://CinemaQueer.com)



THE “DUNYEMENTARY”: ELEMENTS

- Talking-head monologue
- Person-on-the street interviews
- Confessional scenes
- Metanarrative
- Archival footage
- Mix of real and pseudo-history (photos, texts, posters, other artifacts)
- Vignettes



Screen shot of historical photo from *The Watermelon Woman* (1996).

Image source: [*Jump Cut*](#)



THE “DUNYEMENTARY”: PURPOSE

- To provide commentary on events/issues depicted in the film
- To convey to the audience a character's point of view
- To emphasize the importance of social issues the film addresses
- To blur boundaries between art and life, autobiography and documentary, film and genre, self and genre



Dunye as “Cheryl” in *The Watermelon Woman* (1996).
Image source: [University of Michigan, Lesbian History](#)



THE WATERMELON WOMAN: SELECTED CAST AND CAMEOS



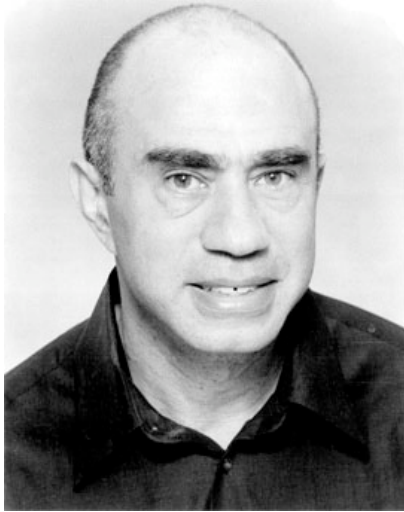
Toshi Reagon
Role: Street Performer
Lesbian Singer and
Songwriter
Image Source:
[Vancouver Folk Music
Festival](#)



Sarah Schulman
Role: C.L.I.T. Archivist
Lesbian Novelist, Playwright and
Teacher
Image Source: [New York Times](#)



THE WATERMELON WOMAN: SELECTED CAST AND CAMEOS



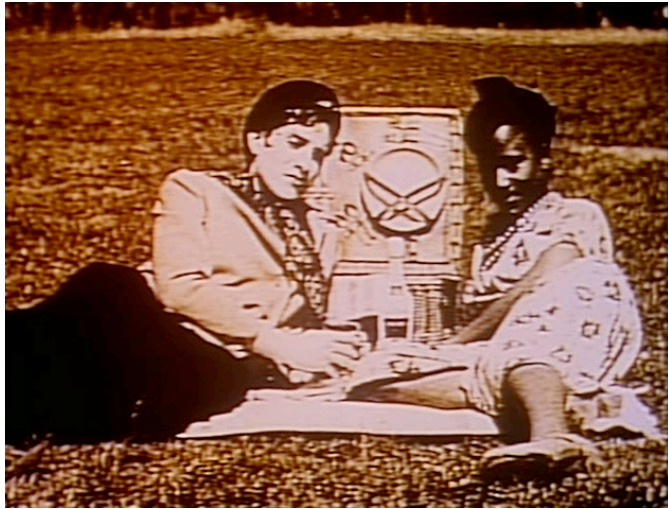
Brian Freeman
Role: Lee Edwards
Gay Playwright, Poet,
Actor, Director and Co-
founder of [Pomo Afro
Homos](#)
Image Source: [San
Francisco International
Arts Festival](#)



Camille Paglia
Role: Herself
Lesbian Author, Teacher and
Cultural Critic
Image Source: [Bright Lights Film
Journal](#)



THE WATERMELON WOMAN: SELECTED CAST AND CAMEOS



Alexandra Juhasz

Role: Martha Page
Lesbian Producer,
Director, Author and
Teacher



Guinevere Turner

Role: Diana
Lesbian Actress, Screenwriter and
Producer
Star and Co-writer of *Go Fish* (1994)
Image Source: IFC



THE WATERMELON WOMAN: SELECTED CAST AND CAMEOS



Cheryl Clarke

Role: June

Lesbian Poet, Non-fiction Author
and Teacher

Image Source: [Women Among Us](#)



IMAGES: REAL AND REEL



Louise Beavers

Image Source: Silent
Ladies & Gents



Hattie McDaniel

Image Source:
University of Georgia
Libraries



Screen Shot: *The
Watermelon Woman*



IMAGES: REAL AND REEL



Josephine Baker

Image Source:

[Harlem World](#)



Screen Shot: *The Watermelon Woman*



IMAGES: REAL AND REEL



Poster for *Murder in Harlem* ([Micheaux](#), 1935)

Image Source: [Black Film Center Archives](#)



Screen Shot: *The Watermelon Woman*



IMAGES: REAL AND REEL



Dorothy Arzner and Clara
Bow on the set of *The Wild
Party* (1929)
Image Source: [Photobucket](#)



Screen Shot: *The Watermelon Woman*



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- K. McHugh writes about *The Watermelon Woman* as experimental autobiography. Do you agree that the film is an autobiography? Why or why not?
- What is the film's commentary on media, history and identity?
- Why does the film interweave video, archival footage, home movies, still photos, and filmed vignettes?
- Both Kathleen McHugh and Laura Sullivan argue that *The Watermelon Woman* avoids essentializing lesbian identity. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- What gazes does this film construct and deconstruct?



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

On Representation of African Americans in Hollywood Film

- Donald Bogle: *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Film* (Google Books preview)
- *Jump Cut*: “The Mammy in Hollywood Film”
- NPR Podcast: Judging African American Legacy in Film
- Marlon Riggs: *Ethnic Notions*

On African American Filmmakers

- FilmReference: African American Cinema
- Indiana University Black Film Center/Archive: Race Movies

