

Tongues Untied

Marlon T. Riggs's Classic Documentary

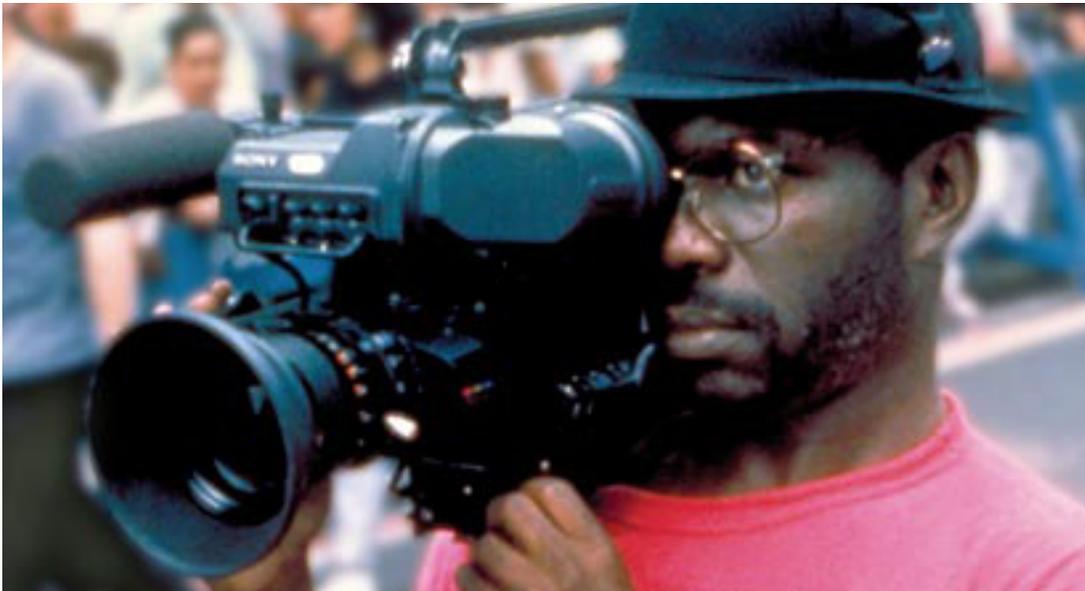
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Tongues Untied

Marlon Riggs, 1989, 54 minutes

SYNOPSIS / OVERVIEW

Tongues Untied is a documentary and collection of personal stories about the intersectional experiences of living in the US as a Black, gay man. It features the poetry of Essex Hemphill, interviews, and personal reflections. The film discusses the Black, gay communities and cultures of San Francisco, New York, and coming out in the South. It aims to undo the silencing of Black, gay voices. *Tongues Untied* offers a poetic portrait of the survival, community making, mourning, and activism within the context of the AIDS epidemic. The film was produced through a National Endowment for the Arts grant and came under attack by conservative lawmakers and media for its treatment of gay sexuality. It was a groundbreaking film that was part of a broader upsurge in organizing, visibility and art by Black gay men in the 1980s. At turns angry, loving, hopeful, sexy, open, and memorializing, it is an indictment of the silencing effects of homophobia and racism, and a powerful call to the radical act of loving one another in Black, gay communities.



KEY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the film deal with the issues of silence and breaking silence? How can silence be a weapon in struggle and self-protection? And how is breaking it important? What does the film want to exorcise with breaking silence? Why is finding voice an important step in collective, queer liberation?
2. What is the role of anger in this film? What are its effects?
3. How does the film celebrate bodies? What is important about this celebration?
4. How does this film think about community? What are the spaces and ways through which it takes place, and how do folks make it? How does it support and/or thwart anger, hostility, and silence?
5. What is the role of ancestors in this film and Riggs' experiences? Who are they? Who does he invoke? Why is it important that he invoke them?
6. What is the role of class in this film? How about urban and rural spaces?

KEY QUOTES TO USE

“Black men loving Black men is a revolutionary act.”

“I know the anger that lies inside me like I know the beat of my heart and the taste of my spit. It is easier to be angry than to hurt. Anger is what I do best. It is easier to be furious than to be yearning. It is easier to crucify myself in you that to take on the threatening universe of whiteness by admitting that we are worth wanting each other.”

“Anger unvented becomes pain unspoken becomes rage released becomes violence. Cha-cha-cha.”

“Whatever awaits me, this much I know, I was blind to my brother’s beauty and now I see my own. Death to the voice that believed that we weren’t worth wanting, loving each other. Now I hear. I was mute, tongue tied, burdened by shadows and silence. Now I speak and my burden is lightened, lifted, free.”

KEY SCENES TO USE

- ◇ “What is he first, black or gay?” 23:00- 28:00 (silence and confronting racism)
- ◇ Drag houses and performance 31:40- 37:40 (Community spaces, “I have found freedom in this village”)
- ◇ “Times are lean, baby” 44:12-35:15 (class and love)
- ◇ “Timebomb ticking inside me.” 48:00-51:12 (AIDS and ancestors)

OPTIONAL: 201 KEY QUESTIONS

1. The film uses (and interrogates) lots of different art forms and performances- poetry, snap diva performance, voguing, and even stand-up comedy. What are the different kinds of histories, stories, and ideas that we get from them? What can we learn from them, especially for our movement(s)? How might they be important to queer liberation?
2. The film moves between single voices speaking as well as choruses of voices? What is the effect of this? Why would they use these different forms at different times?
3. How does the film address different spaces of racism- internal and external to Black community? What is the role of black men loving black men in fighting racism?

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS & RESOURCES

Marlon Riggs, No Regret and Why Sacred Black Gay Cultural Production is Crucial
<http://www.musedmagonline.com/2015/05/marlon-riggs-no-regret-and-why-sacred-black-gay-cultural-production-is-crucial/>

Joseph Beam, In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology

APPENDIX: LEGAL RIGHTS CHART

The purpose of this chart is to share out the legal information that we as SONG have so that everyone is in the KNOW and can feel confident about organizing a film screening or series in your town. Over the years, SONG has screened many films including, for example, MILK, through sources like Netflix many times; in our homes, at community events and in many other places. One thing we do know is that no matter the film or setting, SONG members should not use film screenings to do any form of fundraising—meaning, you cannot charge any form of entry fee when advertising the film or make any pitches to fundraise as a part of your screening. That being said—this chart provides a little more specific information about the screening rights to each film—many of which we’ve purchased through SONG. For any further questions feel free to contact SONG at takeaction@southernersonnewground.org

FILM	LEGAL RIGHTS	SUGGESTIONS FROM SONG
How To Survive A Plague	http://surviveaplague.com/watch http://www.rocoeducation-al.com/how_to_survive_a_plague	<p>i. SONG has purchased the legal rights to screen How to Survive A Plague! We purchased a public performance DVD which includes two versions of the film on one DVD (feature-length version as well as a one-hour version) as well as unlimited public performance rights, meaning that SONG can screen the film an unlimited number of times at any SINGLE location.</p> <p>ii. Contact SONG to get a copy a copy of the document that says we have the right to screen the film</p>
Tongues Untied	http://newsreel.org/video/TONGUES-UNTIED http://newsreel.org/nav/policypopup.asp?id=36 http://newsreel.org/nav/policypopup.asp?id=34	<p>i. SONG has purchased the legal rights to screen Tongues Untied! We are entitled to the screening rights for 3 years (til 2018) and you can reach out to us when you are ready to screen.</p> <p>ii. Contact SONG to get a copy a copy of the document that says we have the right to screen the film.</p>
MILK	http://library.movlic.com/	<p>i. You can find/order MILK from Netflix.</p> <p>ii. Reach out to a local organization, community center, public library or university to see if they have a copy of the film or if they would be willing to purchase the legal rights to the film, then make a plan accordingly.</p>
<i>Call Me Kuchu</i>	http://callmekuchu.com/hostascreening/	i. SONG has purchased the screening rights to Call Me Kuchu and we now have multiple copies available in our library. Reach out to us about getting a copy of the screening rights.
<i>Pay It No Mind</i>	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bo0nYv9QIj4	<p>i. Check back with SONG for more updates; we may or may not have purchased the legal rights to screen this film organizationally</p> <p>This film is on available on YouTube and for this reason mostly likely open for public screening with license. Check back again with SONG before formally screening.</p>

IGNITING THE KINDRED



A SOUTHERN LGBTQ FILM SERIES

TOOLKIT

Acknowledgments

We want to give a huge thanks and shout out to all of the SONG members who helped develop the content of this toolkit, select the films, develop discussion guides, and format and design the toolkit. This is truly a collective, regional love offering from our political family.

Questions?

Want to talk this out? Have suggestions or ideas? Want to tell us how it went?

Contact us at takeaction@southernersonnewground.org

www.southernersonnewground.org

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