

Televising Watts

Joe Saltzman's *Black on Black* (1968) on KNXT

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Joe Saltzman's *Black on Black* challenged staid conventions of broadcast journalism and stereotypical representations of Watts when it premiered on Los Angeles station KNXT on July 18, 1968. Shot in the thick of urban uprisings sweeping the country, the documentary took aim at prestige public affairs specials' depiction of Watts as a site of poverty, a crime-ridden neighborhood, or a war zone. Saltzman, a white liberal documentarian from the nearby suburb of Alhambra in the San Gabriel Valley, sought to provide a platform for black residents to speak for themselves and to reorient mainstream television audiences' understanding of South Central Los Angeles. *Black on Black* portrayed Watts as a community of people with deep ties to their neighborhood. Residents reflected on the meaning of black identity and spoke openly about their struggles living within a city that marginalized their presence.

Cinema and media studies scholars have written extensively on the television industry's engagement with the Black Power movement, most often analyzing nationally broadcast situation comedies (*Sanford and Son* [NBC, 1972–77]), variety shows (*The Flip Wilson Show* [NBC, 1970–74], *Soul Train* [1970–2006]), and public affairs series (*Black Journal* [NET, 1968–77]). However, the expanding field of local programming constituted a crucial site of innovation and resistance to the whitewashed mainstream media.¹ *Black on Black* directly addressed topics such as systemic racism and black cultural expression. Investigating Saltzman's documentary demonstrates how social forces in Los Angeles shaped a national debate about the fraught relationship

between minorities and the film and television industry, as well as how this debate influenced on-the-ground media production and race relations in the city. The documentary was widely seen and discussed within Los Angeles and was broadcast in St. Louis, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia. But like many films primarily intended for local exhibition, it quickly fell out of circulation, only to resurface decades later for occasional retrospectives.²

Black on Black's enthusiastic reception in the news, entertainment, and African American press encouraged stations across the country to devote more resources to reporting on inner-city neighborhoods. At the same time, the documentary revealed broader tensions within cultural liberalism concerning the limited role of a film's subjects in the conceptualization, creation, and outreach of the film itself. Just as *Black on Black* anticipated future television documentaries that took an in-depth and nuanced look at minority communities, it also marked a pivot within broadcasting institutions toward supporting projects where minorities asserted more authorial control in front of and behind the camera.

Station Renegade

Saltzman's experiences as an undergraduate at the University of Southern California gave rise to his interests in alternative kinds of social documentary. Saltzman studied nonfiction with film critic Arthur Knight and also served as editor in chief of the school newspaper, the *Daily Trojan*. After pursuing a graduate degree in journalism at Columbia University, he returned to Los Angeles in 1962. Saltzman covered the crime beat for the *San Fernando Valley Times* and worked as news editor for the *Palisadian Post*. He then took a job at the CBS-owned and -operated station KNXT as an interviewer and researcher for *Ralph Story's Los Angeles* (1964–70), a popular magazine-style series that covered the city's cultural milieu. For example, programs looked at the exotic decor of Clifton's Cafeteria, the immigrant history of Boyle Heights, and the biographies of movie stars. Saltzman enjoyed the valuable training in on-location filmmaking; however, the fact that the series typically avoided pervasive issues of racism, government corruption, and displacement left him wanting to work on other kinds of programs.³

When the Watts Uprising erupted on August 11, 1965, it was depicted by print and broadcast journalists from the point of view of the police and city officials. This skewed portrayal heightened Saltzman's conviction that television programming needed to address the views of the city's minorities. While the protests were triggered by the arrest of the African American

resident Marquette Frye at the intersection of 116th Street and Avalon Boulevard, the unrest stemmed from a sense of injustice concerning the persistence of police brutality, the choking off of public utilities from the neighborhood, exploitation by business owners, neglect by absentee landlords, and the lack of employment opportunities.⁴ Occurring only five days after the signing of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Voting Rights Act, which outlawed discriminatory practices that disenfranchised minorities, the Watts Uprising signaled a rupture in the Great Society and prefaced the wave of nationwide street protests in cities throughout the late 1960s.

In KTLA's *Hell in the City of Angels* (1965), the reporter Hugh Brundage describes the heated summer confrontations as "hoodlums" committing "indiscriminate" acts of "violence" that brought about rampant destruction. Flyover views from the station's telecopter surveyed burning commercial establishments along Avalon Boulevard, police officers dispersing crowds and making arrests, and individuals carrying stolen objects moving quickly down alleys and sidewalks. In an interview within a bustling newsroom, cameraman Ed Clark spoke about Watts as a "war zone" that was "worse than Korea" and Mayor Sam Yorty confidently declared that the only effective way to meet the "mob" was with "overwhelming power." Throughout the documentary, Watts residents were talked about rather than listened to.

Coverage by KTLA was consistent with the alarmist headlines of the *Los Angeles Times*, stories in *Time* and *Newsweek*, and Universal's newsreel *Troops Patrol L.A.* (1965). The CBS Reports documentary *Watts: Riot or Revolt* (1965) reinforced the recently published *Violence in the City—an End or a Beginning?*, authored by Governor Edmund Brown's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots. Members of the commission did not take seriously the fact that widespread police prejudice and excessive use of force was a direct cause of the tension and considered the uprising a detestable act of anger rather than a protest. In the documentary, Police Chief William Parker blamed members of the black community for the current crisis, stating that a criminal element in Watts, stirred up by civil rights leaders, created unreasonable demands and had promoted widespread disrespect for law enforcement. The lack of black voices in the show resonates with how scholar Devorah Heitner describes public affairs programs of the era, in which an "emphasis on the expertise of people in power meant an overwhelming exclusion of Black points of view."⁵

Saltzman proposed a documentary on South Central residents in which the film's subjects would be the only voices heard. He believed that the program would be meaningful for black viewers as well as educational for white

Angelenos who would constitute the program's main viewing demographic. Saltzman thought that the documentary would increase awareness of and dialogue about what life was like for African Americans in South Central and urban America more generally.⁶ But KNXT rejected the idea, arguing that the absence of an in-house anchor would give viewers the impression that the station lacked control over its content. Flagrant racism also prevented the program from getting off the ground. The show was frequently called "Saltzman's N***** Project" by staff.⁷ It was not until 1968, when two factors contributed to a climate of media reform, that KNXT greenlit the film.

The first of these factors was a report issued by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders and chaired by Illinois governor Otto Kerner. The report was the upshot of the Johnson administration's July 27, 1967, mandate to explore the motivations behind four years of urban unrest.⁸ The Kerner Commission researched the mass media's interpretation of these events and investigated the larger relationship between minorities and the film, television, and newspaper industries. The document stated that these outlets "have not shown understanding or appreciation of—and thus have not communicated—a sense of Negro culture, thought, or history."⁹ The report elaborated on the need to bring more minority personnel into the culture industries and also claimed, "the news media must find ways of exploring the problems of the Negro and the ghetto more deeply and more meaningfully."¹⁰

The second major factor involved the efforts of lawyers, advocacy groups, civil rights leaders, and entertainment personnel to make television stations more responsive to their minority constituencies. Their fight led to a 1966 court case with the station WLBT in Jackson, Mississippi, that established the right of citizens to participate in a station's license-renewal proceeding. A 1969 court decision stripped the same station of its license because of its failure to address the views of the area's black community. Media historian Allison Perlman has argued that the WLBT case showed that a station's racist programming and lack of attention to minority audiences could serve as reason for revocation.¹¹ This climate of media reform touched down in Los Angeles, the nation's fastest-expanding multiracial metropolis that was also the country's film and television capital. The owned-and-operated status of KNXT encouraged station executives to shift their position on Saltzman's program from rejection to reluctant acceptance. On the one hand, the station was distant from the New York-based corporate oversight of the CBS network. On the other hand, KNXT was defined by its identity as a flagship

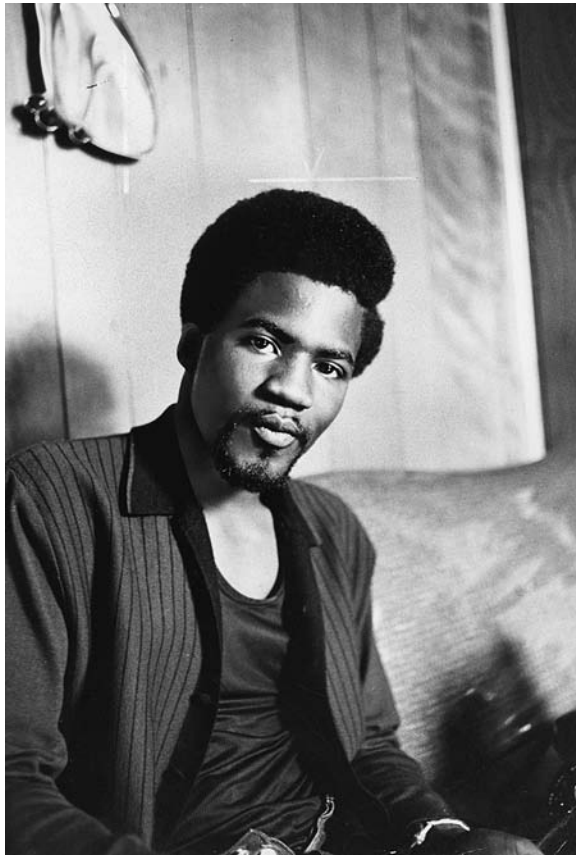


FIGURE 10.1. Donnell Petetan, 1968, Herald-Examiner Collection/ Los Angeles Public Library.

Southern California station, and thus was under pressure to respond to issues facing Los Angeles.

Listening to Los Angeles

Saltzman and his producer, Dan Gingold, convinced KNXT to give their documentary a ninety-minute (rather than the standard sixty-minute) slot and a more flexible budget. The small crew spent approximately three months working on the film, including three weeks on location during the spring and early summer of 1968. Saltzman's main liaison with Watts was Truman Jacques, a community organizer and aspiring broadcast journalist. Through Jacques, Saltzman met Donnell Petetan, a resident who worked for the Concentrated Employment Program helping to provide services to job seekers. Petetan became Saltzman's main interlocutor with Watts, showing him

around, introducing him to various business owners, and helping to set up interviews with family and friends.¹²

The race prejudice harbored by some of the crew made filming difficult, forcing Saltzman to think of ways to routinely remove them for periods of time during production.¹³ Radio engineers for KNX proved to be more congenial collaborators. Saltzman worked with them for the editing of ambient noises, individual testimony, and music. He was more drawn to the 1930s British and American social documentary practice of recording interviews and overlaying voice-over onto observational footage, rather than the 1960s direct cinema techniques that stressed mobile, immersive cinematography and sync-sound recording. “I was far more concerned with audio than video,” Saltzman would later recall, for sound could document “the things that were happening inside the heart and the mind of the people.”¹⁴

Black on Black foregrounds sound from the outset. The film begins by way of Lou Rawls’s “Southside Blues” monologue playing against a black screen that gradually becomes dotted with perforation marks. This musical opening marked a point of divergence from standard television documentaries, which seldom used nondiegetic music based on the notion that it compromised the program’s ability to dispassionately communicate information. *Black on Black* encourages emotional connections to its subject. Rawls’s incantatory monologue, recorded live at Capitol Studios in Los Angeles in 1966, maps black neighborhoods within cities, before announcing the particularity of Watts and the belief that it is in a state of change. Rawls’s chant, “Burn Baby . . . Burn Baby . . . Burn Baby . . .” then transitions to the opening of his song “Tobacco Road.” The illuminated dots can be interpreted as corresponding to individual black enclaves. Or, considering that protestors of the Watts Uprising appropriated local DJ Magnificent Montague’s phrase “Burn, Baby! Burn!” as a militant rallying cry, the perforation marks can also be interpreted as referring to the intensity of the urban unrest or even bullet holes.

As the monologue comes to a close, the camera focuses on one of the dots, which dissolves into the headlight of an oncoming train rolling through Watts. Next, a cut to a tracking shot follows Petetan driving past small homes, the Watts Towers, housing projects, weed-filled vacant lots, children playing, and adult men and women walking down the street. Petetan explains that “Tobacco Road” is slang for the “black ghetto” that exists in every American city. Watts at once shares characteristics of other black urban working-class neighborhoods and is also distinct in its makeup and relationship to its metropolitan area. People reside in all sorts of single-family homes; however, “there is very little ownership here of houses” and landlords are most

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FIGURE 10.2. Walter Butler, from *Black on Black* (Joe Saltzman, 1968), DVD, with thanks to Joe Saltzman.

often absentee and neglectful. Landlords live elsewhere, as do those who own many of the businesses, ensuring that money flows out of the community. But Petetan contends that Watts is not simply a blighted terrain or a problem for urban planners to solve. Residents feel affection for and draw psychological support from the environment. The film then proceeds by examining a range of topics that coalesce around black self-identification, cultural practices, oppression, and hopes and anxieties for the future. Saltzman explores these subjects in one-on-one interviews where his own presence is beyond the frame. These segments are then interwoven with observational sequences matched with voice-over narration from the interviewees.

Speaking from within his bedroom in his East 112th Street home, Petetan asserts that cultivating a black identity begins with embracing the word “black.” Popular culture has for so long attached negative connotations to “black” and positive connotations to “white.” It is important to resituate the former as affirmative and beautiful. Male and female interviewees then extend the discussion of identity through reflecting on the significance of wearing clothing that



FIGURE 10.3. Ethel Petetan, from *Black on Black* (Joe Saltzman, 1968), DVD, with thanks to Joe Saltzman.

relates to one's ancestral heritage or styling their hair to express racial pride. Talking as he cuts a young man's hair in his own shop, barber Walter Butler explains how at one time black people were urged by the cosmetic industry to process, curl, and straighten their hair, emulating that of whites. He claims that wearing a "Natural" allows African Americans to develop a more acute sense of self. A woman getting her hair washed describes, "This is the way I came into the world. I didn't come into it pressed and curled. I came into it nappy."

Ethel Petetan (Donnell's mother) provides a more in-depth reflection on black culture through the preparation of chitterlings in her kitchen. While washing and plucking the hair off the intestines, seasoning them, and cooking them in a pot, she shares that she learned everything observing her mother when she was a child growing up in rural Texas. Making and eating food is something that bolsters family ties, Ethel explains. Cooking is a way of passing on knowledge from one family member to another, and preparing a big meal is an occasion for bringing the whole family together. Petetan's own voice-over commentary during this scene notes that racial prejudice and

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FIGURE 10.4. Ethel Petetan, from *Black on Black* (Joe Saltzman, 1968), DVD, with thanks to Joe Saltzman.

substandard material conditions shaped the evolution of his family's food. Petetan discusses that black families have had to be creative with the vegetables and meat more easily accessible to them.

Additional scenes in *Black on Black* explain that conflict is part of everyday life. This conflict can take the form of television's psychological attack on people of color. "Why does TV make fool[s] out of other races?" Petetan asks. The white man is "always the supreme being," while minorities are always the butt of jokes or absent from television all together. Conflict can also involve face-to-face indignities, such as being pulled over by police who look for any kind of minor violation. Footage of policemen interrogating a black driver on the side of the road followed by a quick shot of a squad car with the LAPD's official slogan, "To Protect and to Serve," prominently in view, underscores the disconnect between the LAPD's ostensibly virtuous mission and its treatment of minorities. One young woman shares an aggravating story of a time when her boss discouraged her from applying for a higher-paying position because he thought she wouldn't "enjoy working

in this office where there are all white people.” Petetan’s sister says that a boss she once had lied to her about there not being an opening within her company and then ultimately gave the job to a white woman. Criticizing a racially divided workforce, Ethel looks directly at the camera and states, “I tell you why the white man is a snake in the grass. The white man will train you for any kind of job that he wants you to do. . . . He won’t train you for the better jobs. He’ll save his better jobs, his best-paying jobs, for the whites.”

While numerous interviewees share common frustrations, *Black on Black* does not try to build consensus or to provide a monolithic view of Watts. Religion, for example, is a divisive issue. Inside a service at the Garden of Eden Church of God in Christ, where Reverend W. D. Willis is seen preaching and teenagers sing “The Lord Is Blessing Me Right Now,” a woman shares with the congregation how the church offers a safe space for children. Another woman recounts how the church has helped provide a moral compass for her family. By contrast, Petetan speaks of religion as “the biggest hustle of all,” a form of economic exploitation and even mind control. He proudly asserts that agency lies with humans rather than an abstract entity.

The film’s individual perspectives, often framed in intimate close-ups, humanize Watts for network audiences. However, *Black on Black*’s focus on individuals speaking about their lives ignores the efforts to build institutions devoted to progressive change in South Central. The documentary eschews the impact of grassroots organizing as well as broader economic and political forces affecting life on the ground in Watts. Saltzman might have tried to document the initiative to bring Watts its much-needed hospital, course offerings in political theory at the Mafundi Institute, and the films and theatrical productions by the Performing Arts Society of Los Angeles. Additionally, the film could have examined corporate disinvestment from the central city and the industrial growth of suburban Los Angeles, factors that ultimately hurt job opportunities for Watts residents. Expanding the purview of the documentary might have more clearly connected distinct experiences to the social infrastructure of the region.¹⁵

Instead, *Black on Black* stays focused on particular individuals through its conclusion, where it presents residents’ desires and predictions for the future. Voice-over plays against evenly paced medium and long shots of the younger generation of South Central going about their daily routines: children amusing themselves on the playground and walking to school, young adults going to work, and groups of friends hanging out near commercial establishments. One woman declares that the ultimate goal is to become part of society, to have equal opportunities, and that violence never yields

tangible benefits. Petetan and his friend argue that violence is an American tradition that stretches back to the country's founding. In the context of sustained oppression, violence has been the only thing that gets the attention of those in power and forces the government and civic elites in Los Angeles to recognize and address the needs of the black community. These perspectives in *Black on Black* pointed to a debate between the liberal belief in nonviolence and the militant nationalist interest in physical force as a tool of self-defense and protest. At the same time, presenting these voices as stand-alone opinions made Black Power seem less threatening, as if it was a view held by select individuals rather than a political movement.

Still, *Black on Black's* final song gives the documentary a defiant tone. Whereas "Southside Blues"/"Tobacco Road" takes the viewer from black enclaves across America to Watts, the film's conclusion moves from the local to the national through soul singer Nina Simone's incendiary "Four Women." The song, in which Simone takes the first-person perspective of four black women, plays against a montage of figurative paintings by art students at Watts's Fremont High School.¹⁶ The searching gaze of the camera explores painterly surfaces, at times rendering much of the canvas in view, at other times highlighting a detail of a face or body part. First, the slave Aunt Sarah, whose "back is strong, / strong enough to take the pain / inflicted again and again," strikes a rebellious posture. The mixed-race Safronia, whose "rich and white" father raped her mother, appears with flowing, multicolored hair and faces the viewer with eyes closed. Sweet Thing, a prostitute forced to sleep with anybody with "money to buy," stands tall and looks directly at the viewer, refusing to be submissive or objectified. The militant Peaches proclaims, "My skin is brown, / my manner is tough, / I'll kill the first mother I see, / my life has been rough." She is depicted with a steely glare, wearing a broken handcuff emblematic of her body and mind breaking free of imposed shackles. The pairing of song and paintings foregrounds how black women in particular, and black people in general, have resisted oppression throughout U.S. history, reinforcing the importance of these struggles for present-day conceptions of black identity.

Broadcasting *Black on Black*

As the airdate for the documentary approached, producer Dan Gingold battled KNXT executives to prevent them from inserting Jerry Dunphy, the prominent white anchor of the nightly public affairs program *The Big News*, as *Black on Black's* narrator. Gingold also fought to ensure the film's music

remained intact.¹⁷ Finally cleared for broadcast, *Black on Black* premiered on July 18 at 7:30 p.m. The station placed an advertisement in the *Los Angeles Times*, announcing the film's innovative approach to representing race on television and touting the program's wide appeal.¹⁸ An article in the African American newspaper the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, expressed, "*Black on Black* will be a departure from standard 'documentary' presentations because it will be structured by black citizens of Los Angeles. There will be no reporter, narrator, or writer to give it traditional documentary form. Rather, it will be presented in the faces and voices of those who know black people best—black people."¹⁹

Saltzman was not the only broadcast journalist going into inner-city neighborhoods, but his approach to documentary differed from that of many of his contemporaries. *Television* critic Sherman Brodey cataloged the efforts of broadcasters to intensify coverage of black communities in San Francisco, Denver, New Orleans, Little Rock, Chicago, Baltimore, New Haven, and Boston. He noted that Saltzman's *Black on Black* both was part of and distinguished itself from this trend.²⁰ *Variety* stated that *Black on Black* "transcended any previous effort to picture the black people as they are, without the embellishments of extraneous dramatization." Saltzman's hometown paper, the *Alhambra Post-Advocate*, echoed this sentiment. Journalist Bonnie Epstein wrote that the man who "spent five years washing 'some of the best windows' in Alhambra" made an important film that takes a "unique" approach to its subject. In his *Hollywood Reporter* review, Bob Hull wrote that black subjects speaking for themselves was a breakthrough, providing a more penetrating account of the dual presence of hope and hopelessness that currently exists. Following up on their previous story on the film, the *Los Angeles Sentinel* commented that most news programs provide a "recitation of statistics on crime, violence, poverty and despair," but *Black on Black* shows residents "articulat[ing] what it's like to be black as it is to them."²¹

Black on Black received an encore broadcast on September 8 and was then sent to other CBS-owned and -operated stations. The documentary won two local Emmys as well as numerous national awards.²² Station KNXT gave the Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL) a 16mm print, and Saltzman frequently appeared in person with the film during its exhibition in schools and churches. Letters of support streamed into KNXT headquarters at 6121 Sunset Boulevard. The film found a welcome audience among middle-class white liberals, who affirmed that the documentary increased awareness about social issues. For example, San Pedro resident Barbara Wasser wrote, "*Black on Black*, which appeared last night, offered me more insights



FIGURE 10.5.
Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1968, 29. Copyright © 1968. *Los Angeles Times*. Reprinted with permission.

into Negro problems than any TV show I've seen to date. I find it incredible and gratifying that you would devote 90 mins. to such a worthwhile, probing show." Activist and UCLA philosophy professor Tom Robischon wrote to the station, saying, "I must say I found this one of the most enlightened and hard-hitting things I have seen whites do. . . . I think you ought to turn [Saltzman] loose on other similar zones of ignorance and misapprehension in our society." Rowena Boylan of North Hollywood exclaimed that the documentary was "spellbinding" and implored KNXT to broadcast the film again so that others who missed it could see it. Producer-director and animator Chuck Jones of MGM had this to say about the program: "*Black on Black* is a remarkably tight, retina-searing, cortex-lashing documentary. . . . We were not glued to the set; we were glued to the idea."²³

The film was also used to teach black history. Horace Mann Elementary School in Glendale hosted a screening with Saltzman, after which students sent him letters. Mike Acosta wrote that he “wasn’t so much aware that black[s] had so much against them.” Cindy Evans mentioned that she gained knowledge of “how black people feel now.” Following Saltzman’s screening the film at Markham Junior High School in Watts, English teacher Allen Gross sent Saltzman a letter noting that *Black on Black* was a favorite of the class and also enclosed short student reflections on the film. Freddie Howard agreed with Ethel’s testimony that supermarket food was better quality in the white neighborhoods. McKinney Ferry wrote, “The main thing that I like about this film was th[at] black people could express their feeling[s] towards white people.”²⁴

Despite the positive reception, *Black on Black* inspired some hateful backlash. Saltzman later recounted that following the broadcast, calls came in through the CBS switchboard slamming the program as liberal propaganda and grossly inaccurate.²⁵ Attorney Maurice Mac Goodstein wrote in a letter that he could not see any value in the program and that he, as a white man, felt offended that *Black on Black* did not even consider the white perspective and the “doctrine of self-help.” Rena Rogers of Downey mailed a six-page angry rant about the program, asserting that the same opportunities were open to black people as white people. San Fernando Valley resident George Donahue wrote that the program was most likely “communist inspired and communist paid for.” Shortly after a copy of *Black on Black* was donated to the LAPL, it was mutilated by a patron. The LAPD even demanded that KNXT add a disclaimer to the end of the film for the rebroadcast stating that police officers in the city were working to improve community relations.²⁶

Saltzman spent a significant amount of time speaking with Watts residents about their reaction to the documentary. In an early August memo to Gingold, he wrote that many people he talked to were extremely positive about the show. Seeing their own faces and voices represented in the mass media made them feel listened to and recognized. One interviewee said, “It made me proud to see it. I’m not saying it made me hate less, but it made me feel very good to see something like that on television for everyone to see.” In many cases, people expressed disbelief that a white man had created *Black on Black*. Saltzman remembers that while many had kind words to share, some claimed that *Black on Black* did not capture enough of a cross-section of the community, that the documentary was an isolated program created by outsiders, and that the broadcast would not lead to any kind of positive

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change for Watts.²⁷ Such comments point not only to the limitations of *Black on Black* as a standalone program on individual experiences, but to a more entrenched tension within the film's production: the documentary was created by a white crew, and editorial control remained with Saltzman.

To be sure, Saltzman's interests and expertise in providing a platform for black people to talk candidly about their lives resulted in a critical intervention in standard network programming and put pressure on mainstream journalism outlets to create more socially conscious films. *Black on Black* also enabled Saltzman to make future hard-hitting documentaries throughout the early 1970s.²⁸ However, the dissatisfaction with the program voiced in Saltzman's informal postbroadcast survey signaled a desire for a more sustained effort for homegrown media primarily produced by and intended for the people it was representing. This perspective was not unique to those in the survey. As the minority liberation movements of the late 1960s intersected with activist calls for media reform, representation became an increasingly politicized issue. Minority groups argued for the ability to assert authorial control over projects, and the public and private broadcasting sectors were at times amenable to providing new channels of access to the means of production. For example, the Performing Arts Society of Los Angeles collaborated with KTTV to create the documentary series *From the Inside Out* that focused on community issues in South Central. The Human Affairs Department within Los Angeles public television station KCET provided a home for black and Chicano filmmakers. Jesús Salvador Treviño worked on *¡Ahora!* (1969–70), a documentary series broadcast out of East Los Angeles that concentrated on such topics as Chicano history, contemporary mural art, job-training programs, and protests against the deplorable conditions of local high schools. Sue Booker set up a KCET satellite studio at 4211 South Broadway that took a similarly inclusive view of the African American community in South Central. Her series *Doin' It!* (1972) and then *Doin' It at the Storefront* (1972–73) included profiles on cultural establishments, avant-garde musicians in the Black Arts movement, and pressing issues such as the horrific conditions for black inmates in prison.

Examining the production and reception of *Black on Black* reveals how the film resonated with viewers within and beyond Los Angeles as well as contributed to a turning point in social documentary practice. The broadcasting industry's representation of minority communities during this politically heated period was not confined to a few flagship network series. Analyzing *Black on Black* makes visible the increasingly central role of local television in forging new understandings of racial identity.

FILMOGRAPHY

The film discussed in this chapter can be streamed through the book's web page at <https://www.dukeupress.edu/Features/Screening-Race>.

Black on Black (1968), 90 min., 16mm

PRODUCTION: KNXT. DIRECTOR: Joe Saltzman. NARRATOR: Donnell Petetan. EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: Dan Gingold. PHOTOGRAPHY: Jack Leppert. EDITOR: Robert Heitmann. PRODUCTION ASSISTANT: Ruth Fleishman. MUSIC: Lou Rawls, Nina Simone. ACCESS: UCLA Film and Television Archive, Los Angeles. NOTE: Transferred to two-inch videotape for broadcast.

NOTES

I would like to thank Mark Quigley at the UCLA Film and Television Archive, who kindly showed me a valuable collection of Los Angeles-related television programs. Deep gratitude goes to Joe Saltzman for making his personal archive available. This essay addresses themes and subjects that I expand on in Joshua Glick, *Los Angeles Documentary and the Production of Public History, 1958–1977* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018).

- 1 Television's engagement with Black Power came after its coverage of civil rights sit-ins, marches, and rallies. In this former period, networks covered the civil rights movement to grow a national television audience, legitimize themselves as experts on topical issues, and offset claims concerning television's status as simply a for-profit medium of entertainment. Civil rights programming tended to depict industrious, respectable black and white citizens working together to bring about integration through nonviolent protests. For this earlier history, see Aniko Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012). For accounts of television and Black Power, see Tommy Lee Lott, "Documenting Social Issues: *Black Journal*, 1968–1970," in *Struggles for Representation: African American Documentary Film and Video*, ed. Phyllis R. Klotman and Janet K. Cutler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 71–98; Christine Acham, *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 24–169; Devorah Heitner, *Black Power TV* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).
- 2 For *Black on Black*'s fortieth anniversary, USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism screened the film on October 27, 2008. The Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA screened the film for a Black History Month event on February 25, 2009.
- 3 Email correspondence between Joe Saltzman and Joshua Glick, June 19, 2011; March 5, 2014; May 29, 2016. Joe Saltzman, interview by Joshua Glick, May 28, 2014, Los Angeles. "Valleyites Land 'Trojan' Posts," *Pasadena Independent*, May 13, 1959, 12. For more on local broadcasting during this period, see A. William Bluem, *Documentary in American Television: Form, Function, Method* (New York: Hastings House, 1965),

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221–39; Michele Hilmes, *Only Connect: A Cultural History of Broadcasting in the United States* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2011), 207–85.

- 4 I use “Uprising” to imply that the unrest in Watts constituted a form of social protest against abusive state power. This line of interpretation follows how journalists, intellectuals, and scholars used “Uprising” or “Rebellion” to write about the unrest, in contrast to how much of the mainstream media used “riot” to imply a chaotic and irrationally violent expression of rage. See Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (New York: Da Capo, 1997), 45–167.
- 5 John A. McCone, chairman, *Violence in the City—an End or a Beginning? A Report by the Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots* (Los Angeles: The Commission, 1965), 1–37; Heitner, *Black Power TV*, 7.
- 6 *Black on Black’s* effort to inform a mainstream white audience about black life in South Central Los Angeles through the perspective of neighborhood residents followed important pre-Uprising projects. Alan Gorg, Robert Dickson, and Trevor Greenwood’s 16mm film *Felicia* (1965) documented the aspirations and concerns of a female African American high school student living in Watts. Marsha Gordon and Allyson Nadia Field, “The Other Side of the Tracks: Nontheatrical Film History, Pre-Rebellion Watts, and *Felicia*,” *Cinema Journal* 55, no. 2 (2016): 1–24; Joe Saltzman, “Guest Columnist,” *TV Week, Pasadena Independent Star-News*, July 14, 1968, 6, Joe Saltzman Papers (JSP), private collection of Joe Saltzman, Palos Verdes Estates, Los Angeles.
- 7 The quotation is from Saltzman’s written introduction to the film at USC. Joe Saltzman, “An Introduction to *Black on Black*,” presented by IJPC and Visions and Voices, USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, October 27, 2008, 3–4.
- 8 Otto Kerner, chairman, and David Ginsburg, executive director, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam, 1968), 1–29.
- 9 Kerner and Ginsburg, *Report of the National Advisory Commission*, 383.
- 10 Kerner and Ginsburg, *Report of the National Advisory Commission*, 384. Also see Nicholas Johnson, “‘White’ Media Must Meet Challenge of Negro Antipathy and Disbelief,” *Variety*, January 3, 1968, 1.
- 11 Allison Perlman, *Public Interests: Media Advocacy and Struggles over U.S. Television* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 46–51. For additional coverage, see Leonard Zeidenberg, “The Struggle over Broadcast Access,” *Broadcasting*, September 20, 1971, 32–43; Leonard Zeidenberg, “The Struggle over Broadcast Access II,” *Broadcasting*, September 27, 1971, 24–29.
- 12 *Variety* reported that the program cost “more than \$25,000.” “*Black on Black* Now Rescheduled,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 20, 1968, C11; Saltzman, “Guest Columnist,” 6; Helm, “*Black on Black*,” *Variety*, July 24, 1968, 38; Joe Saltzman, “Shooting Notes and Schedule,” n.d., JSP.
- 13 Saltzman, “An Introduction to *Black on Black*,” 6.
- 14 Saltzman, interview by Joshua Glick, June 19, 2011; Saltzman, interview by Joshua Glick, May 28, 2014; Saltzman, “An Introduction to *Black on Black*,” 5; John Luter, “Investigative Reporting, 1968–1969,” in *The Alfred I. duPont–Columbia University*

- Survey of Broadcast Journalism, 1968–1969*, ed. Marvin Barrett (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1969), 75.
- 15 Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 169–97; Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 90–218.
 - 16 Art Peters, “B’Cast Stations Ban ‘Bold’ Tune by Nina Simone,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, September 13, 1966, 11; Joe Saltzman to Bob Malcolm, Fremont High School Principal, May 12, 1968, JSP.
 - 17 Dan Gingold, phone interview by Joshua Glick, September 30, 2014.
 - 18 Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1968, P29. Similar advertisements appeared in African American newspapers. Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 18, 1968, B8.
 - 19 “Black on Black KNXT-TV Special,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 9, 1968, B8.
 - 20 Sherman Brodey, “In Local Television the Eye Begins to Open on the Ghetto,” *Television*, August 1968, 40.
 - 21 “Black on Black Special,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 9, 1968, B8; “Black on Black,” *Variety*, 38; “Black on Black: S. Central L.A. Negroes Tell Own Story,” *Independent Press-Telegram*, July 14, 1968, 17; Aleene MacMinn, “Black on Black Show Airs Tonight,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1968, F17; Bonnie Epstein, “AHS Grad Now TV Producer,” *Post-Advocate*, July 18, 1968, 1; Bob Hull, “Television Review: Black on Black,” *Hollywood Reporter*, July 19, 1968, 3; Robert A. Malone, “Local TV: Public Service with a Capital P,” *Broadcasting*, June 22, 1970, 50, 58.
 - 22 See, for example, “WCAU TV Presents Black Documentary on Life in Ghetto,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 9, 1969, 24; “KNXT Is Awarded Two Local Emmys,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, February 19, 1970, B2A.
 - 23 “KNXT to Donate ‘Black on Black’ to L.A. Library,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 6, 1969, F4; Barbara Wasser to CBS Programming Dept., Beverly Hills, July 19, 1968; Rowena Boylan to Ray Beindorf, July 19, 1968; Tom Robischon to KNXT Offices, July 18, 1968; Chuck Jones to Joe Saltzman, July 19, 1968. All letters are included in the JSP.
 - 24 Compiled letters from students at Horace Mann School to Joe Saltzman, dated January 16–17, 1973. Allen Gross to Joe Saltzman, June 23, 1972. Reflections by Markham Junior High School students, compiled by Allen Gross, sent to Joe Saltzman, JSP.
 - 25 Saltzman, “An Introduction to *Black on Black*,” 6; Joe Saltzman, email interview by Joshua Glick, March 5, 2014.
 - 26 Saltzman, “An Introduction to *Black on Black*,” 6, 14; Maurice Mac Goodstein to KNXT, July 19, 1968; Rena Rogers to KNXT, July 19, 1968, 1–6; George Donahue to CBS, July 19, 1968, JSP. Saltzman remembered that the day after the donation of the 16mm print of the film to the LAPL, a librarian called him to say that someone had checked out the documentary and scratched swastikas all over the frames, distorting the print beyond recognition. Joe Saltzman, email interview by Joshua Glick, October 2, 2016.
 - 27 Joe Saltzman to Dan Gingold, memorandum, CBS, August 5, 1968, 1–5, JSP.

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- 28 Saltzman's later films focused on American Indians and Red Power (*The Unhappy Hunting Ground*, 1970), the plight of elderly pensioners (*The Very Personal Death of Elizabeth Schell Holt-Hartford*, 1972), abuses of power in junior high school (*The Junior High School*, 1971), and sexual violence against women (*Rape*, 1972). Many of these programs, along with episodes of *Ralph Story's Los Angeles*, are available for viewing at the UCLA Film and Television Archive. Saltzman left KNXT in the mid-1970s to help create the broadcasting sequence at the journalism school at USC. Saltzman, email correspondence and interview by Joshua Glick, June 19, 2011.