

black.
womyn. • conversation with
lesbians of
African descent.

Directed/Written/Edited/Produced by:
tiona.m.
©2007

Synopsis:

black./womyn.:conversations... is a feature-length documentary focusing on the lives and views of lesbians of African descent living in the United States. The documentary is structured by interviews—“conversations”—the director had with each of the women. It features candid interviews with black lesbian women discussing coming out, sexuality and religion, love and relationships, marriage, patriarchy, visibility in media, discrimination and homophobia, activism, gender identity, Black lesbian youth and elders, balancing gender/race/sexuality, and, finally, what it means to call oneself a Black lesbian today. *black./womyn.:conversations...* is a piece that provokes honest, progressive dialogue and critical thinking among people in general—and Black lesbians in particular—about how Black lesbians are viewed and affected by society.

black./womyn.:conversations... features interviews with close to 50 out, Black lesbians including Poet/Author **Cheryl Clarke**, Filmmaker/Activist **Aishah Shahidah Simmons**, Poet/Author **Staceyann Chin**, Filmmaker **Michelle Parkerson**, Artist **Hanifah Walidah**, Hip-Hop Duo **KIN**, and Author **Fiona Zedde**.

This film encourages progressive dialogue about images of Black lesbians and the stereotypes resulting from their portrayal in media and society at large. The director hopes to create conversation among Black lesbians of differing ages, backgrounds about the lack of communication among these groups and how this affects the overall unity of Black lesbians as a group.

black./womyn.:conversations... also facilitates social change by presenting a well-rounded view of Black lesbian women. The women in the film vary in age, gender identities/expressions, and professions. Thus, the project impacts black lesbian women nationally and internationally, especially in remote areas where visibility is minimal. The film also impacts non-LGBTQ communities by deconstructing monolithic understandings of Black lesbians in the media and society as a whole. The film portrays black lesbians at all levels and stages discussing their lives as they relate to relevant topics.

Background:

black./womyn.:conversations... came as a result of the personal experiences faced by its Director/Producer tiona.m. and the complex issues she faced growing up as a Black lesbian. Every topic discussed in the film comes from a personal experience in the director’s life. The film was conceived in 2001 and the first “official” interview was conducted in late 2002. With the encouragement of mentor Larry Steele and friends, tiona.m. fully realized the potential for progressive dialogued by the topics she chose and pushed forward with the project as a feature-length film, despite of a lack of production funds. She began investing her own money into the production.

In 2007 she was awarded a Leeway Art & Change \$2500 grant to assist with the completion of *black./womyn.:conversations...*

black.
womyn. • conversation with
lesbians of
African descent.

Directed/Written/Edited/Produced by:
tiona.m.
©2007

Personal message from the Director tiona.m.:

The production of *black./womyn.:conversations...* has been a personal journey that has been well worth the years it has taken to bring to light. I hope that this film will provide a way for Black lesbians like me to see each other and be affirmed in our existence as a powerful and strong social force with important opinions. My life and work has and will continue to involve the influence of my race, my gender, and my sexuality and how to successfully fuse all three together in ways that support each equally. This film is dedicated to all of the young Black lesbians who grew up in small towns and never thought that living their lives as out Black lesbians was possible. With this, you can now see that it is a possibility. I hope that progressive conversations will come out of this project to encourage growth within our community and communities that would like to know our stories. We as black lesbians have something to say, and if given the opportunity can and will say it **LOUDLY**.

As someone who works in the film/video production industry, I promised myself to make the reality of Black lesbians visible before I moved onto different genres of filmmaking dealing specifically with the image of black lesbians. I also would have liked to have had a film like this when I came out to expose me and my family to the various Black lesbians who live out and proud in their lives. I hope those who come behind me are aided by their access to this film.

Sincerely,
tiona.m.

black.
womyn. • conversation with
lesbians of
African descent.

Directed/Written/Edited/Produced by:
tiona.m
©2007

Biography of tiona.m.

Tiona McClodden was born in Blytheville, Arkansas in 1981, and eventually moved around the United States due to her father's commitment to the US Air Force. She spent six years in London, England, and eventually moved to and grew up in Greenville, South Carolina, until leaving for college in 2000.

"Coming from overseas at such a young age...I think I was about 8 or so...was a big culture shock to me...I had friends overseas who were from all races and backgrounds and it was just fine...Moving to Greenville was like something out of a dream to me at the time...Racism was so thick and foreign to me at that age...So much so that when I started school, a white boy in my class told me I was "so Black" in a way that made me so ill that I asked to the teacher to go to the bathroom, where I threw up and walked home to an empty house...I just walked right out of the school..."

Upon her graduation from Southside High School, tiona.m. moved to Atlanta, Georgia, to pursue a college degree in Film/TV at Clark Atlanta University. While in Atlanta she met her now mentor, Larry Steele, through a close friend. It was when she expressed her distaste at how she was treated as a woman trying to get hands-on training with equipment at CAU, that Larry began to train her in Video and Film production on a daily basis in Spelman College's Educational Media Department. Shortly after their meeting, she withdrew from CAU and began to work full time with Larry.

"It was the biggest decision of my life thus far...To leave school having been the first person in my family to even attend college...It was very scary but necessary if I wanted to truly pursue filmmaking as a career...I felt that I had to do it...Larry was tough as nails...His associates helped me as well, and were tougher than he...But they all helped me...I learned everything from how to wrap cable to how to light a scene with fresnel lights in that studio....And for free at that!..."

tiona.m. eventually started to freelance in Atlanta as a camerawoman, editor, and motion graphic designer, all from her training with Larry. To this date she has been involved with the production of over ten documentary projects and several music video productions. In some of these projects she handled every aspect of production, from conception to the final product. She even "ghosted" projects for older men in the industry.

"I had to survive somehow...Even if that meant getting paid and not getting proper credit...I had to pay my bills...Mentally yes it was tough, but I did what I had to do...at the time..."

tiona.m. completed production work for clients such as The Martin Luther King Center, Spelman College, Coca-Cola Corporation, Rowdy Records, DefJam Records, Dekalb County School Systems, Staceyann Chin, and many more.

"By working with so many different people and organizations I was able to be validated for my work more so than my gender, race, or sexuality...And that helped me to move into producing projects that reflected my gender, race, and sexuality in a more confident manner...Mainly because I had certain level of work that I could place behind it..."

It was this realization that kept tiona.m focused on her latest project *black./womyn.:conversations...*

even though it was a topic that didn't reflect a lot of the work she had been involved in over the years.

"This film is who I am...All of the topics discussed in the film hold some truth to my life and how I have struggled or celebrated all these things that I am...And I feel that this perspective needs to be seen and heard...no matter how that affects my career"

black./womyn.:conversations... is tiona.m.'s attempt to inspire and uplift Black lesbians in their position or status in today's society. She hopes to continue to develop work that focuses on the complexities of race, gender, and sexuality contemporarily.

black.
womyn. • conversation with
lesbians of
African descent.

Directed/Written/Edited/Produced by:
tiona.m
©2007

FACT SHEET:

- The name of the documentary, *black./womyn.:conversations with lesbians of African descent* was chosen by the director to reflect the somewhat hidden element of what it means to be a Black lesbian. The word “womyn” is purposely substituted for the traditional spelling of the word, “women.” The substitution’s significance lies in its ability to maintain its pronunciation phonetically yet convey a different look and meaning. The word “womyn,” which has been used historically in feminist discourse, manages to remove the word “man” from the spelling of “woman” yet maintain the phonetics of the word. This reevaluation mirrors the experience of Black lesbians, since a woman who identifies as lesbian challenges societal norms yet does not relinquish all that it means to be a woman in today’s society.
- *black./womyn.:conversations...* began in late 2002 and was completed in November 2007.
- The initial documentary was to be titled *Womyn* and to be an hour-long piece focusing on a few women and few topics. The length changed to feature-length due to the greater amount of topics the director felt needed to be addressed as she grew in age over the years of the production. Some of the topics added were marriage, youth and elders, and patriarchy.
- Tiona McClodden uses the name on her production “tiona.m.” as a simple twist on her sometimes too long given name.
- tiona.m. single-handedly shot all of the interviews and b-roll footage for the productions. She also handled all of the graphic design for the film’s titles and credits.
- There also an interactive .pdf EPK version for the film which includes video clips and stills from the film. All requests for the interactive .pdf can be sent to tionamproductions@yahoo.com.
- The film features a dedication at the end to slain lesbians of African descent who have died within the past few years in the US, Jamiaca, and South Africa.
- TRT is 1:37:19

black. conversation with
womyn. lesbians of
African descent.

Directed/Written/Edited/Produced by:
tiona.m
©2007

Producer/Director/Writer/Editor
tiona.m.

The Interviews

(In Alphabetical Order by First Name)

Ain Bailey
Aishah Shahidah Simmons
Alysia Burdette
Angel L. Brown
April M. Estrich
Ashley Clemmons
Brittani Odom
Che' Johnson
Cheryl Clarke
Crystal Hudson
Elizabeth Turner
Felicia Miller
Fiona Zedde
Gwen Wells
Hanifah Walidah
Helen Lindsey
Jade' Goodridge
Jamilah Mapp
Judi Smith
Katrina Franklin
Kiantha Duncan-Woods
IQ of KIN
NOR of KIN
Knowings
Kristeon Strong

L.K. McKenzie
Leah Trotter
Libya Thomas
Lisa Smith
Loni Jenkins
Marla Renee Stewart
Mia Fields
Michelle Carter
Michelle Mapp
Michelle Parkerson
Misia Denea
Monica Dillon
Nayyirah Waheed
Nicola Jones
Patricia Carter
Q. Ragsdale
Shantelle Little
Sheila Reed
Staceyann Chin
Starlette Tolerson
Taryn Crenshaw
Teresa "Reese" Dillard
Veronica "Spooney" Jenkins
Zerandrian Morris

The "black.womyn"

Jardyn Lake