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# 19 “A DECENT AND ORDERLY SOCIETY”: RACE RELATIONS IN RIOT-ERA EDUCATIONAL FILMS, 1966–1970

MARSHA ORGERON

After the passage of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958, substantial government funds became available for public schools to purchase audiovisual materials and equipment. Coming on the heels of the October 1957 Sputnik launch, the NDEA was inspired by the widespread fear that if communists outperformed the United States in education they might surpass America in other pursuits as well. The NDEA's project of getting “high-tech” materials into the classroom was initially focused on science and mathematics to prepare the next generation of American innovators. However, the Act both coincided with and encouraged the more widespread use of film for teaching an array of educational subjects.

Articles from this era in the industry publication *Educational Screen & Audio-Visual Guide* attest to the acute need for films about topics well beyond the sciences, especially those of the social guidance variety, often categorized as “Guidance,” “Human Relations,” “Social Studies,” or “Social Issues” films. This push to put high-tech materials in the American classroom coincided with the emerging civil rights movement and the continuing impact of school desegregation in the wake of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In the midst of a decade of class- and race-based civil unrest, culminating in a series of riots in the mid- to late 1960s, the nation was confronted with what was widely depicted and perceived as a ghetto crisis.<sup>1</sup> Articulations of concern about the present and future well-being of the nation began to coalesce around American schools, especially of a particular type. As the authors of *Education and the Urban Community* put it, “Call it what you will: the inner-city school, the ghetto school, the slum school; the large urban

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term “riot” here because it was the predominant word used in the mainstream media and literature of the day, despite the fact that other terms—such as “rebellion,” “disturbance,” or “insurrection”—also circulated (though less frequently) and signify quite differently.

areas and the schools that are in them are in deep trouble."<sup>2</sup> Many pundits concluded that the American educational system needed to address previously avoided subjects of troubled interracial relations and racial disparities.

Educational films produced in the 1950s that confronted issues of race and discrimination, however obliquely or metaphorically—as we see in *Skipper Learns a Lesson* (1952) and *What About Prejudice?* (1959)—spoke to an implicitly white audience. In these films white kids are taught to change their prejudicial beliefs and behavior to accommodate difference. As William Sloan observed, the nonfiction "integration film" was born in response to the Supreme Court's 1954 decision that led to school desegregation, and this first generation of films was "aimed primarily at preparing the white community for integration."<sup>3</sup> However, the next generation of race-conscious educational films, which are the focus of this essay, uses a different approach. Films of the mid- to late 1960s, such as *Getting Angry* (1966), *Who Cares* (1968), *Joshua* (1968), and *Evan's Corner* (1970), abandon the subject of white youth in need of a lesson about racial tolerance. No longer just encouraging white children to accommodate "difference," these productions are primarily about black youths' reactions to discriminatory or underprivileged environments. An integrationist message still undergirds most of this new generation of films, but they speak to different concerns and constituencies, reflecting widespread anxieties about the kind of explosive behavior associated with black urban areas in this "riot era." The films, then, require consideration in the context of the national preoccupation with riots transpiring in American cities large and small.

These films—which typically revolve around African American youth in New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles—focus not just on various degrees of racially specific anger but also on ways that such resentment might be productively redirected. The young black male protagonists (most often teens or younger) become frustrated, despondent, and angry in response to the daily challenges they face. However, the films under discussion here posit a solution in the form of an idealized, compensatory experience that reminds them of their own and others' humanity to suggest that a positive experience can remedy the anger that would otherwise result in racial disharmony and potentially destructive behavior. In this way, the films can be understood as an attempt to manage racial interactions and perceptions, providing an intriguing glimpse into efforts to represent and to control young audiences during this tumultuous period in American race relations. Within the context of an urban educational crisis, including widespread teacher shortages and strikes, these films also offered frustrated teachers

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<sup>2</sup> Maurie Hillson, Francesco Crodasco, and Francis Purcell, *Education and the Urban Community: Schools and the Crisis of the Cities* (New York: American Book, 1969), 2.

<sup>3</sup> William Sloan, "The Documentary Film and the Negro: The Evolution of the Integration Film," *Journal of the Society of Cinematologists* 4 (1964–1965): 67.

educational tools for dealing with potentially disruptive behavior in the name of a healthier and less volatile American body politic.

### A National Crisis with Educational Ramifications

The films under discussion here—*Who Cares*, *Joshua*, and *220 Blues*—were made concurrently with an outpouring of literature targeted at educators who taught, as a 1968 book title put it, *On the Outskirts of Hope*. These books focus on the pervasive fear, as the authors of *Community Control and the Urban School* explain, that “resignation and alienation, or a violent opposition to democratic process [read: “rioting”], will become the dominant response of young people in coming decades.”<sup>4</sup> Using the term “political socialization” to designate the way that schools needed to “instill in each new generation the political attitudes and behavior patterns that the society deems useful in its adult citizens . . . to preserve stability and consensus,” these books suggest a refocusing of the concept of “social guidance” that had been the operating principle behind certain educational films dating back at least to the 1920s.<sup>5</sup>

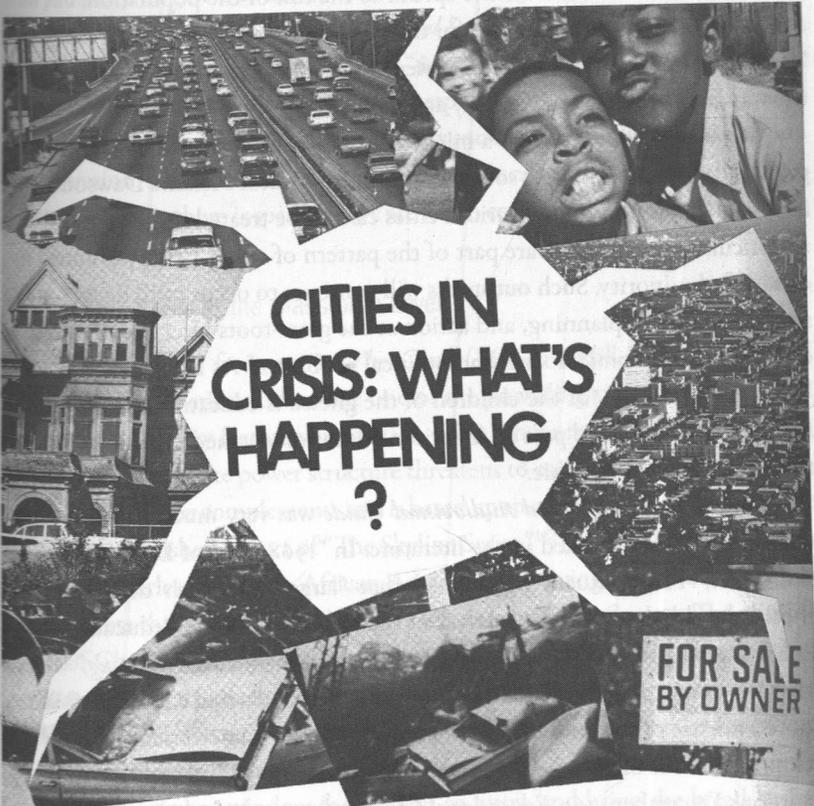
Reacting specifically to the riots of 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson tasked the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, better known as the Kerner Commission, with reporting on the problems and solutions to urban blight and unrest. Speaking to the nation on television, Johnson urged Americans to look for “long-range” solutions that would improve “the conditions that breed despair and violence,” in order “to achieve a decent and orderly society in America.” Seven months after this speech, the commission recommended three areas of response, including working on “new initiatives and experiments that can change the system of failure and frustration that now dominates the ghetto and weakens our society.”<sup>6</sup> The idea of a nation filled with *Cities in Crisis*, to use the title of a 1968 educational film, was a serious political and popular preoccupation with ramifications for the American classroom (see fig. 19.1).

Dealing with the “ghetto” or “slum,” the prevailing terms in the literature and reporting of the day, was not, according to most commentators, a problem facing just a handful of large northern cities. In *Making Urban Schools Work* (1968), Mario Fantini and Gerald Weinstein predicted that “we are beginning to see that what is happening in large urban areas is really a preview of coming attractions for

<sup>4</sup> Helaine Dawson, *On the Outskirts of Hope: Educational Youth from Poverty Areas* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968); Mario Fantini, Marilyn Gittell, and Richard Magat, *Community Control and the Urban School* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 217. Brackets mine.

<sup>5</sup> Fantini, Gittell, and Magat, *Community Control*, 216.

<sup>6</sup> *The Kerner Report: The 1968 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1968; reprint, New York: Pantheon, 1988), x, 2.



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Figure 19.1. Ad for the Universal Education and Visual Arts release *Cities in Crisis: What's Happening?* (1967) in *Educational Screen and Audio-Visual Guide* (September 1968): 12.

Note that young black boys are the human signifiers for the urban crisis and that what seems intended as a disturbing image of the boys could easily be read as a playful one if juxtaposed with positive images.

a major portion of our county . . . even in the non-urban areas.”<sup>7</sup> Not only did the problems of the cities threaten to spread to the rest of the population, but these authors repeatedly made the case for the problems of schooling being inseparable “from other problems of the city,” often invoking cancer metaphors to describe the way such problems can quickly and dangerously spread to suburban areas.<sup>8</sup>

Schools, then, were both a microcosm of the ghettos and a major staging-ground for intervention. As social worker and educator Helaine Dawson argued in 1968, “Explosions in the various cities cannot be treated singly as peculiar to a particular locality. They are part of the pattern of revolt being fashioned by a dissatisfied minority. Such outbreaks will continue to occur until deeper understanding, creative planning, and action at the grass-roots level become a way of coping with economic, social, and political problems.” As Robert Canot wrote, “The only real hope for the children of the ghetto is education,” and classroom films were an ingrained part of American education deemed capable of reaching this alienated demographic.<sup>9</sup>

*Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide* was very much tuned in to the educational needs invoked in the literature. In “1968: Year of Diversity and Dichotomies,” Henry Ruark proclaimed that “large cities with their cancerous ghettos [are] living proof themselves of the abysmal failure of ‘education-as-is.’” Ruark was an advocate for something he called “individualized *learning*,” which I interpret as meaning racially and economically particularized education.<sup>10</sup> We see some evidence of this individualized approach in the numerous films about race relations and the black urban experience in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Roger Gordon’s December 1969 *Educational Screen* column acknowledged that “we are uncertain as to the kinds of media that are most effective in given situations in a black inner city classroom.” His “Educational Technology” column concluded, “Certain films showing white children in white neighborhoods at a high level of affluence are grossly inadequate in these situations.”<sup>11</sup> There was clearly a real desire, perhaps even a sense of desperation, for educational films that would speak to, rather than alienate, a black (and presumably urban) audience. By 1968 a veritable genre of African American-focused “race” films—by which I mean films explicitly about what it means to be black and, almost always, living in an inner-city environment—were being marketed to American educators. Considered

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<sup>7</sup> Mario Fantini, *Making Urban Schools Work: Social Realities and the Urban School* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Roger Woock, ed., *Education and the Urban Crisis* (Scranton, PA: International Textbook, 1970), v.

<sup>9</sup> Dawson, *On the Outskirts*, 5; Robert Canot, “The City’s Not for Burning,” in Woock, *Education and the Urban Crisis*, 50.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Ruark, “1968: Year of Diversity and Dichotomies,” *Educational Screen* (Jan. 1969): 11.

<sup>11</sup> Roger Gordon, “Educational Technology,” *Educational Screen* (Dec. 1969): 31.

within the context of calls for "individualized" learning, these films appear to have been primarily targeted at urban classrooms, attempting to fill the representational gap invoked by Gordon in *Educational Screen*. But they may also have been used to speak to those in need of a better "understanding," to use Dawson's term, of the plight of black city-dwellers, perhaps especially for the teachers tasked with steering youth toward the "decent and orderly society" envisioned by the Johnson administration. Documentation about where educational films actually circulated and who saw them is sparse, so we are left to consider the movies themselves.

### Managing the Crisis at the Classroom Level

Two classroom films from 1968, *Who Cares* (McGraw-Hill-Lumin Film) and *Joshua* (ACI Productions), illustrate one of the prevailing types of race-focused films of this era. They feature young black males whose anger at their urban entrapment and the white power structure threatens to escalate into uncontrollable violence. *Who Cares* complements and is based upon a McGraw-Hill book by the same name, published as part of "The Skyline Series."<sup>12</sup> The film offers us a day in the life of Charles, a preteen African American boy living in one of the urban environments that threatened Johnson's vision of the Great Society. The glimpse we get of Charles's home life suggests that, while far from terrible, it is less than Ozzie-and-Harriet perfect. He is being raised in the city (we are introduced to him kicking a can down a dirty street) by a clearly overworked mother; there is no father present in the film's one brief domestic scene. Charles's mother yells down from their apartment window for her son to hurry and bring the bread he has picked up for breakfast, but Charles seems more interested in kicking the can than in facilitating the morning breakfast ritual. Later in the sequence we watch Charles compete for his mother's attention with a baby whose cries cause her to abandon her interactions with Charles; she is kind, but pressed for time.

Charles also has an older brother who refuses to walk him to school. He makes a joke about Charles having to wear his hand-me-down jacket (an event played up much more in the book, in which Charles is self-conscious about how the jacket is too big for him). On his way to school, Charles pauses at a window display of musical instruments and then drums on the street posts in front of it, suggesting both economic want (having to pretend versus having an actual instrument) as well as untapped creative potential. Subsequent shots emphasize how small and alone Charles is in the cityscape, a little boy in a big world. Three girl schoolmates who encounter Charles in another window-gazing reverie on the street tell him to hurry up or he'll be late to school, to which Charles responds with the titular refrain: "Who cares, who cares anyways."

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<sup>12</sup> Virginia Brown, Billie Phillips, and Elsa Jaffe, *Who Cares* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965).

Charles's next run-in magnifies the tensions he already experienced at home. We see Charles playfully dragging a piece of wood across a metal fence (again, making music) until a boy, who is white, takes the wood from him, to which Charles replies, "Who cares anyway. He can have the whole doggone stick, he can have the whole school." With each utterance, the phrase appears less ingenious. As this encounter makes clear, Charles's problems are both territorial and economic: he has no clothes of his own, no instrument of his own, and now even his school seems alien. And yet his isolation is also a problem. These feelings are amplified in the next scene on the school playground, where Charles apparently begins to crumble from the stresses he's already encountered. Shots of Charles walking past three jump-roping white girls imply that he is hallucinating: shots of them tauntingly laughing at him are intercut with the reality of their innocuous jump-roping, suggesting a kind of persecution anxiety that manifests itself through a false vision of a world set against him. Charles's legitimate frustrations have now become delusions. Although his experiences may justify his view that the (white?) world is against him, this scene also serves as a reminder of Charles's fragile mental state upon arrival at school. When Charles is caught aimlessly lingering in the schoolyard after the bell rings—his defensive, feigned apathy keeping him outside of the school doors—a white teacher reprimands him and personally escorts him into the school while lecturing Charles about how imperative it is that he finishes his education.

In the classroom, Charles's African American teacher calls him to the front of the class to reject an assignment he's turned in, commenting aloud that "I can't accept this, not when we both know you can do better." Charles's now-conditioned response, "who cares," is revealed to be a defensive posturing that allows him to survive in a world full of obstacles, failures, and humiliations, real or perceived. The teacher's toughness is also important. Instead of letting Charles scrape by, she tries to inspire him to aspire, one of the great challenges articulated by the educational pundits of the era. But this is also the point at which the film takes a significant turn, from escalation to release. The teacher, standing in front of her multiracial class, proclaims that the class has to finish tryouts for the leader of their band. The whole class begins banging away on their instruments. Charles, now fully instrumented, at first yawns, looking disinterested; but then, after some foot and finger tapping, and an emerging smile, he starts playing his bongos. The teacher notices his engagement and brings Charles to the front of the class to lead the band. In this moment on the bandstand, Charles thrives. He moves his arms dramatically about like a conductor and, for the first time in the film, smiles radiantly (see fig. 19.2). At the end of the number the class collectively starts cheering, allowing the teacher to chime in with the moral of the story: "Who cares, Charles? You care, lots of people care." The film closes on an image of Charles victorious, with his teacher's arm around him, still conducting, still smiling. Charles has been recuperated from the alienated margins, drawn into the consensus center.



Figure 19.2. Charles gleefully conducts the class in *Who Cares* (1968).

Clearly aimed at an elementary school audience, *Who Cares* explicitly addresses one of the refrains of the educational crisis literature regarding the “burden of self-hatred” that existed in the overcrowded cities of America.<sup>13</sup> As Helaine Dawson opined, “Every person needs a feeling of belonging.” Similarly, Wilbert Edgerton contended, “The minority group child as well as the rural and urban poor need a sense of identification and worth.”<sup>14</sup> *Who Cares* represents a successful version of this kind of preadolescent intervention and affirmation. Instead of allowing Charles’s frustrations to build to the point of explosion (to use the rhetoric of the era), his teacher provides him with a context in which these tensions can be released, effectually negating them. Note that nothing has changed about Charles’s environment—he will have to walk the same streets back to the same home at the end of the day. Charles may now have something to smile about, thanks to an affirmative experience in his classroom, but this uplift is only a momentary alleviation of long-term stressors. The film subtly but decisively suggests that Charles’s primary problem is not simply his environment, although it is that too, but his paranoid perception of it, which can be altered more easily than the root cause.

*Who Cares* also appears to have a pedagogical function that extends beyond the student inasmuch as Charles’s catharsis is entirely indebted to the teacher’s perceptive and sensitive responses to his emotional needs. Although the book

<sup>13</sup> Jean Grambs, “The Self-Concept: Basis for Reeducation of Negro Youth,” in Wook, *Education and the Urban Crisis*, 102.

<sup>14</sup> Dawson, *On the Outskirts*, 38; Wilbert Edgerton, “Practical Application to Disadvantaged Education,” *Educational Screen* (Oct. 1969): 11.

and film are targeted at a young audience, this affirmation of what good, responsive teaching methods look like is worth considering as a secondary function of the film. Administrators and educators, in fact, were having serious discussions about how to instruct teachers to reach children from an array of “marginal socio-economic backgrounds” in not only urban but also rural situations.<sup>15</sup> “Instructional technology” was perceived as one of the key tools for speaking to these constituencies and was part of a larger reevaluation of the “teaching-learning process.”<sup>16</sup> Training teachers to raise the self-esteem of their students through positive experiences and productive discussions of such difficult subjects as race was considered a priority in the battle against the “pattern of revolt.”

Released the same year as *Who Cares, Joshua* (1968) offers a glimpse of what a person like Charles might be like ten or so years into the future, if he swapped music for athletics, both admittedly stereotypical and limited options. *Joshua* was shot independently in New York City over the course of around four days in Central Park and Harlem by first-time educational film director Bert Salzman, who borrowed film equipment, a cinematographer, and a sound recordist from veteran filmmaker George Stoney.<sup>17</sup> Salzman, who made commercials and industrial films prior to *Joshua*, remembers the tumultuous cultural climate of the 1960s as the impetus for his entrée into educational filmmaking. Citing the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the riots, and the Vietnam war as motivational forces, Salzman says he wanted to make a film that was a metaphor for the larger race struggles with which the nation was not-so-successfully grappling. He approached the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) with the story of what would become *Joshua* and was given startup money from the ADL film department; he personally financed the rest. While Salzman was editing the film, Stelios Rocco of ACI, an educational film distributor, saw Salzman’s rough cut and bought it outright. After this immediate initial success, Salzman was invited by Rocco to an educational film convention, where he learned how great the demand was for educational films, especially those tackling thorny racial issues.

Salzman’s debut film, shot in a verité style, tells the story of a day in the life of recent high-school graduate Joshua. At the beginning of the film, Joshua is shadowboxing in a mirror before he and his mother pack his bags in preparation for his leaving the city on a full athletic scholarship at a Texas college. This domestic frame for the film prepares the audience to consider Joshua as a character in transition, on the precipice of relocation to a new environment far different from the

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<sup>15</sup> Edgerton, “Practical Application,” 10.

<sup>16</sup> Gordon, “Educational Technology,” 9.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Bert Salzman, June 9, 2007. All biographical and circumstantial information about *Joshua* derives from this interview. For more on George Stoney, who made many pioneering documentary and educational films about race in America, see *Wide Angle* 21, no. 2 (1999), a special issue dedicated to his work.

one he now comfortably inhabits. Joshua has a certain bravado to his character that Charles in *Who Cares* utterly lacks: he not only begins the film confidentially shadowboxing but also brags to his friend Henry out the window that “if they want Josh the great on their little old tack team, then they gotta pay for everything. It’s what they call a full scholarship, my friend.” Also unlike Charles, Joshua does not seem in any way overwhelmed or damaged by his environment; but he is also on the verge of escaping it, for better or for worse. As his mother warns him, he’ll need to choose his new friends carefully: “Texas isn’t 118th Street, you know.”

Joshua leaves his walkup apartment to go to the park for a workout and ends up on a street not unlike the one Charles traverses in *Who Cares*. Fanny, an African American girl about his age, chases after Joshua, giving him a transistor radio as a farewell present. The two horse around in a long, happy, almost delirious play sequence, set to the Box Tops’ “Cry Like a Baby,” establishing the film’s initially jubilant and optimistic tone. A shot of them dissolves into an image of Joshua running full-barrel toward the camera. After a long jog through the park Joshua ends up at the zoo, where he stops for a rest. Here he encounters a young white boy, who is roaring at a sleeping lion in a cage and asks Joshua if he might have better luck waking the lion. Joshua roars; the lion roars back. After telling the kid, and then demonstrating, that he can talk to the animals, Joshua, without any hint of self-consciousness, playfully explains that he learned these things in the jungle. The white kid then asks Joshua the transitional question of the film: “Are you a nigger?” This question is unanswered except through Joshua’s lingering, angry gaze at the boy, which dissolves into Joshua’s next and differently motivated run through the park.

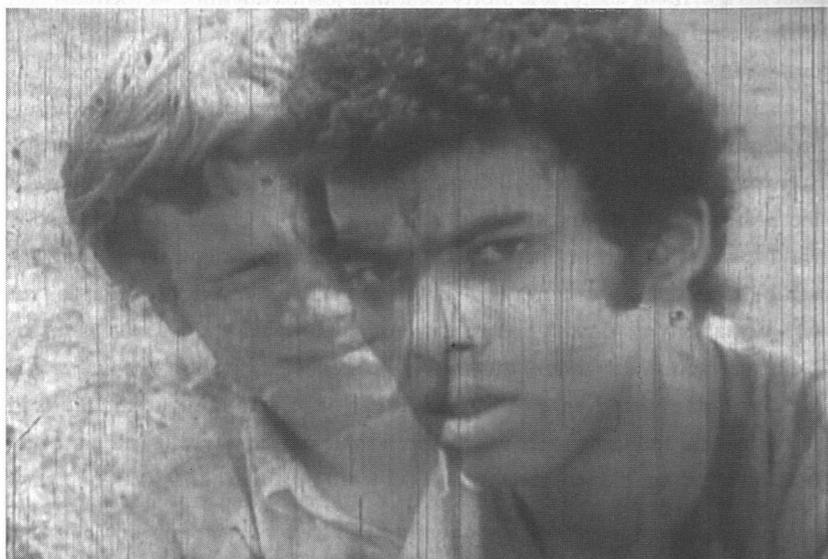
While running in the park Joshua next encounters an older white boy, about his age, flying a kite. It is pretty clear that Joshua does not accidentally run into him, but rather that he rackets him. After pushing him to the ground Joshua accuses the white boy (whose character has no name in the film or in the credits) of not watching where he is going. The white boy apologizes. Joshua mocks him, threatening to punch him in his “fat face.” Here we see Joshua redirecting his anger over the zoo incident in ways that are decidedly antisocial, precisely the kind of behavior that was perceived as dangerous, riot-era anger. After Joshua kicks his kite, calling him “boy” in the process, the white kid, with no apparent ill will intended, calls Joshua “man,” which sets off the now visibly upset Joshua who loses control of himself, eventually pinning down the white boy’s head. This hostile interaction dramatizes the kind of behavior described in *The Urban R’s*: “We may thus expect Negro adolescents . . . to be less restrained than adults in their demands, and to be more vehement in their expectation of immediate rectification of wrong.”<sup>18</sup> Here rectification comes in the form of a violent outburst,

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Dentler, Bernard Mackler, and Mary Ellen Warshauer, *The Urban R’s: Race Relations as the Problem in Urban Education* (New York: Praeger, 1967), 219.

perhaps one that Joshua had been preparing for in some way since his shadow-boxing at film's beginning. Though Joshua behaves in an unrestrained way, it is clearly due to the earlier racist affront to his dignity. But this does not, the film suggests, excuse arbitrary retaliation for an unrelated wrong. Indeed, this wrestling scene is followed by a series of shots in which the white kid and Joshua look at each other silently.

In this series of overlapping dissolves, we see thought and thoughtfulness represented as an alternative to the physical confrontation that just transpired (see fig.19.3). When Joshua walks away, the white boy calls him back because Joshua left his radio behind. This act of almost unbelievable generosity is then surpassed when the white kid fixes Joshua's radio, which was broken during the fight. These acts of kindness begin to soften the racial tensions that Joshua brought to this encounter, opening up a dialogue about the kite. As the white kid explains, the kite design was based upon an aerodynamic theory with origins in eighteenth-century science. "I won't bore you with the details," he says. His problem, however, is that he can't run fast enough to fly it. Here we revisit the territory of Charles and his conducting moment, as Joshua takes the kite, runs fast, and flies it. A racially charged fight has been transformed into a collaboration, albeit one initiated by the white boy's conciliatory and, one might argue, patronizing gesture. Although the film stereotypically assigns intellectual versus athletic capacity (the white child, after all, doesn't want to "bore" Joshua with intellectual history), each boy is allowed to showcase his talents. A communal, collaborative experience triumphs over unthinking racism. After a



**Figure 19.3.** Joshua (Errol Booker) and the kite-flying boy stop to think about their violent encounter in this series of overlapping shots from *Joshua* (1968).

quick, casual farewell, Joshua runs away, and the film ends with a freeze frame on Joshua in mid-stride.

As the one-page ACI instructional flyer for the film suggests, *Joshua* was intended to stimulate discussion about "prejudice and black-white relations" not only for peer high school audiences but also in college and adult settings.<sup>19</sup> The film can be understood as another attempt at intervention in the pattern of escalating anger that riot-era politicians and educators were seeking to defuse, offering—as one review observed—a "basic message that confrontations between blacks and whites can be constructive."<sup>20</sup> As Jean Grambs, discussing the "Basis for Reeducation of Negro Youth," put it: "Hatred breeds aggression. Aggression seeks an outlet."<sup>21</sup> In *Joshua*, the white boy flying the kite is, at first, Joshua's outlet. The film has already established that Joshua is talented and upward bound. However, one ignorant question might still trigger violently antisocial behavior, alerting us precisely to the situation Dawson envisioned when she described the outcome of mistreating poor, black youth: "Their feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness are intensified, and they develop a smoldering hatred of whites."<sup>22</sup>

*Joshua* is not just a film about appropriate African American behavior in the face of adversity. It is equally about the role that white behavior plays in both creating and reversing racist tensions. Civil interactions are not, according to the film, the responsibility of one racial group; they are universal needs for social order. Joshua is clearly the film's protagonist who experiences both a negative and a positive racial encounter. However, Salzman believes that *Joshua* was shown to both urban and suburban audiences of mixed races and that, like the content of the film itself, it allowed white and black students to articulate their feelings, to confront their racial beliefs, and to resolve differences without fists. Since there are no adult figures intervening in the outcome of this film, and since it was intended to be shown to older teenagers and adults, the stakes here are significantly different: these are peer interactions, unmediated by an authority figure and resolved only through calm consideration of the situation. The social ideal envisioned here is that, in the adult world, anger can be mitigated if it is not met with anger.

*Joshua* suggests that although one bad encounter can trigger a violent reaction, one good encounter can counteract it. Joshua thus learns a lesson about particularizing his reactions to the white world. The kite-flying boy, who has taken the high road throughout (opining that "it's ridiculous to fight over an accident" from the get-go), sees the productive outcome of his rationality and generosity. He paves the way for integration, allowing Joshua to return to the

<sup>19</sup> Flyer for *Joshua*, ACI Films, Inc., A/V Geeks Archive.

<sup>20</sup> "Review of *Joshua*," *Hospital & Community Psychiatry* (July 1971): 228.

<sup>21</sup> Jean Grambs, "The Self-Concept," in Woock, *Education and the Urban Crisis*, 87.

<sup>22</sup> Dawson, *On the Outskirts*, 4.

social order. This is an especially timely lesson for Joshua, given his departure from the city (one reviewer of the film described his Texas destination as “the strange white world,” however inaccurately this represents the racial demographic of Texas in the late 1960s).<sup>23</sup> In *Educational Screen* Don Beckwith assessed the film in these terms: “*Joshua* poses a question: can ghetto youth learn to relate to an integrated surrounding? Joshua, on the eve of his ‘escape’ from the ghetto, experiences, on a small scale, what life will be like on the ‘outside.’ He begins to realize the need for flexible interaction in human relations.”<sup>24</sup> Although I agree with Beckwith’s assessment, I think the more important question in both *Joshua* and *Who Cares* would have been: Could films like this help to guide a young, black urban audience away from destructive, antisocial behavior to facilitate Johnson’s vision of a “decent and orderly society”? Whether apathetic or violent in nature, both protagonists require, and fortunately encounter, mentorship and kindness (the other behavior being modeled here). When offered, these gestures are salves. Charles’s crisis of self-esteem is at least momentarily solved; Joshua’s lesson in tolerance serves as a counterpoint to the unthinking, juvenile violence white racism precipitated.

#### A Different Approach: Fomenting Anger

The two films discussed above offer a progressive but ultimately palliative representation of race relations and African American frustration in particular. However, this was not the only depiction of race relations circulating in the realm of educational film. A notably different take on the subject of race in America, *220 Blues* (1970, King Broadcasting Company), tells the story of Sonny, an African American teenager who appears to be fully and happily integrated in his mixed-race high school and track team (the film’s title refers to the 220-dash). All is well until a new black student, Larry, begins to stir things up with comments in class about white racism and the hypocrisies of American democracy, comparing current ghetto conditions to concentration camps. Outside of the classroom, Larry—who is articulate, persuasive, and doggedly persistent—haunts Sonny with his militant preachment about spending too much time with white boys, acting like a “good slave,” being a pawn in “whitey’s schools,” and being a token athlete in what will always remain a dominant white society intent on keeping blacks in their places. At first Sonny dismisses the comments, but Larry’s persistence and insights begin to take root. We watch Sonny begin to absorb certain aspects of Larry’s discourse and to affect an Afrocentric sartorial style, a far cry from his appearance in the beginning of the film.

<sup>23</sup> “Review of *Joshua*,” 227.

<sup>24</sup> Don Beckwith, “Film Evaluations,” *Educational Screen* (Jan. 1970): 26.

The film climaxes around a big track meet, at which Larry wants Sonny to demonstrate in an act of solidarity with his "brothers and sisters." Before the meet, Sonny explains to his girlfriend that "if I reject the medal, it will be a symbol of pride and unity." At the meet, Sonny's white track partner, whom he contentedly hangs out with prior to Larry's interruption of the status quo, asks him about the rumor going around school about black athletes planning a demonstration. Bob tells Sonny that such behavior might compromise the scholarship he earned and urges him not to mess up his future. Sonny replies that to demonstrate or not is his decision. The film ends with Sonny successfully running the anchor leg of the relay race, thereby winning the meet for his team. In the grandstand, Larry stands, clearly disappointed by Sonny's victory or expectant of the act of protest to come, as the racially mixed crowd cheers. The film ends in an open-ended fashion with an ambiguous freeze-frame: the white team members stand at the platform to receive their first-place medal, while Sonny hangs back from the group (see fig. 19.4). Will Sonny join the team and receive the award he deserves, or stand with Larry in an act of protest? Or will Sonny act in a fashion resonant of then-recent real-world behavior at the 1968 Olympics, when African Americans Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their fists at the medal ceremony, signaling black power and solidarity?

220 *Blues* is extraordinary on a number of levels. First, it does not celebrate integration as an unproblematic solution or ideal. Second, it is not set in a ghetto



**Figure 19.4.** In the final, ambiguous freeze frame, Sonny (Magere Tualamu) is on the verge of deciding if he will accept the medal he earned in the relay race or stay away from the award platform in an act of racially motivated protest in *220 Blues* (1970).

environment but rather in an apparently middle-class milieu.<sup>25</sup> Further, it gives voice to the ideas behind black separatism and militancy—Larry even refers to “ghetto rebellions” (instead of “riots”) at one point—that are absent from other classroom films about race from this period. These ideas are not merely alluded to, but laid out in a series of scenes in which Larry passionately explains his point of view to Sonny and to the film’s audience as well. Larry may be aggressive, but he is neither ignorant nor cartoonish about his beliefs, making his perspective difficult to dismiss. His anger may (or may not) seem out of place in this seemingly well-integrated environment, but it is treated as worthy of consideration, which is what Sonny—and perhaps the film’s audience, as well—does. Although we see no evidence of racist behavior toward Sonny, Larry has a bigger picture in mind: the history and legacy of racism in America, which threatens the foundation of integrationist politics. In fact, what is most remarkable about Larry is that he is able to spark and stoke feelings of anger and resentment in Sonny that do not appear to have existed prior to his indoctrination, providing a kind of alternate education to what we see in the opening classroom scenes when a white teacher, discussing German and Japanese immigrants, is confronted by Larry for ignoring civil rights issues (“We’re not at the Civil Rights movement yet,” the teacher ineffectually replies).

This is not to say that Larry is represented as an unproblematically heroic character in the story, as there is no doubt that *220 Blues* figures him as disruptive in terms of Sonny’s future plans and ambitions. Whatever choice Sonny makes at film’s end (presumably this would be the primary focus of the postscreening discussion), his thoughts about being a black person in an integrated environment have been forever complicated. Larry’s ideas have the potential to compromise Sonny’s integrated and potentially successful place in the social order. And although Larry talks about black solidarity, we don’t see him surrounded by demonstrating African American students in the grandstand in the final scene. He stands alone, an isolated figure attempting to lure Sonny away from the consensus center.

Still, the film offers a rare acknowledgment and articulation of racially specific anger without any conciliatory moment to ensure that the audience understands the way things *should* be. Unlike *Who Cares* or *Joshua*, *220 Blues* presents no transformative experience that quells the frustration and anger that Sonny now feels. Instead, Sonny is awakened to an alternative understanding of his situation in white society but he is also now conflicted about playing the role of

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<sup>25</sup> In my phone conversation on Jan. 19, 2009, with *220 Blues* screenwriter Ed Leimbacher, he explained that the people he was working with at King Pictures were deliberately pushing the envelope with films that broke from established educational film content and form. He also remembers the film being well received, at least by local (Seattle) teachers.

the "dissatisfied minority," to return to educational pundit Helaine Dawson's terminology. In this way, Larry's function in the film recalls the invasive cancer metaphor that was often invoked to discuss the problems of the ghetto as well as the provocative, militant discourse that was perceived by many as leading to rioting behavior. The existence of a film that encourages the discussion of the legitimacy of black anger and alternatives to integrationist ideology is striking, as is its ambiguous ending. The film also seems directed very specifically at an African American audience who would, like Sonny, find Larry's teachings something to consider when facing choices about how to navigate "the strange white world."

In summation, educational filmmakers in the mid- to late 1960s produced the first body of classroom films that focused directly on racial tension and especially on black male youth with the potential for antisocial behavior. In concert with a wave of literature encouraging educators to tackle racial disadvantage and discrimination head-on, these films allowed for classroom discussions of conflict during an era in which the nation as a whole was anxiously observing escalating disparities and dissatisfaction in urban centers and cities across the country. This type of film seems to have run its course by the end of the 1970s in a fashion that parallels the gradual decline in educational film production and usage as the 1980s approached. It also reflects the decreasing national urgency regarding black militancy and rioting as the decade wore on. Although it is difficult to discern how these various films were received in the classroom by students or teachers who viewed them at the time, they clearly were made with the intention of filling a very real need for broaching crucial subjects that could no longer be ignored in integration-era America.

## Filmography

### *220 Blues* (1970) 18 min.; 16mm

PRODUCER: King Screen Productions. DISTRIBUTOR: Phoenix/BFA Films. DIRECTOR: Richard Gilbert. WRITER: Ed Leimbacher. CAST: Magere Tualamu (Sonny), Rickey Ray (Larry), Michael Horton (Bob). ACCESS: A/V Geeks Archive, [www.archive.org/details/220\\_blues](http://www.archive.org/details/220_blues).

### *Joshua* (1968) 15 min.; 16mm

Bert Salzman Productions. DIRECTOR/WRITER: Bert Salzman. DISTRIBUTOR: ACI. CAMERA: Bill Godsey. EDITOR: Gary Goch. CAST: Errol Booker (Joshua), Greg Brown (Boy with kite), Gary Allen (young boy), Mira Espinosa (Mother). Alternate title: *Joshua: Black Boy of Harlem*. ACCESS: Academic Film Archive of North America, [www.archive.org/details/salzman\\_joshua](http://www.archive.org/details/salzman_joshua).

***Skipper Learns a Lesson (1952) 10 min.; 16mm***

PRODUCER: A Paul Bunford Production. DISTRIBUTOR: Encyclopaedia Britannica Films. ACCESS: A/V Geeks Archive, [www.archive.org/details/skipper\\_learns\\_a\\_lesson](http://www.archive.org/details/skipper_learns_a_lesson).

***What About Prejudice? (1959) 11 min.; 16mm***

PRODUCER: Centron. DISTRIBUTOR: McGraw-Hill. ACCESS: A/V Geeks Archive, Prelinger Collection, [www.archive.org/details/WhatAbout1959](http://www.archive.org/details/WhatAbout1959).

***Who Cares (1968) 12 min.; 16mm***

PRODUCER: Lumin Films. PRODUCTION-DISTRIBUTION: McGraw-Hill Text-Films. STORY: Virginia Brown, Billie Phillips, Elsa Jaffe. Correlated with the Skyline Series, Book/C, *Who Cares* (McGraw-Hill, 1965). ACCESS: A/V Geeks Archive; [www.archive.org/details/who\\_cares](http://www.archive.org/details/who_cares).

**Related Films**

*Dad and Me* (1971). King Screen Productions. Distributed by BFA. 11 min. This film depicts a strong and positive relationship between a young black boy and his father.

*Evan's Corner* (1970). Stephen Bosustow Productions. Distributed by Bailey-Film Associates. 23 min. Evan's crowded urban apartment leaves him no room for himself, so his mother designates a corner for him to make his own.

*Felicia* (1965). Stuart Roe for the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. 20 min. This first-person narrated film shows the challenges Felicia faces in her Watts neighborhood. The film also addresses the racial and class differences in education.

*Getting Angry* (1966). Sue and James Stinson Productions. Distributed by BFA. 10 min. A young African American boy gets a model space capsule for his birthday and it is accidentally broken on the school playground. The film shows how anger and blame easily escalate even when something truly accidental has occurred.

*Just One Me* (1971). Aims Media Productions. Distributed by ACI. 9 min. In this delirious hippie-spirited film, a young black boy imagines being lots of different things, ending up wanting only to be himself.

*The Matter with Me* (1972). Monroe-Williams Productions. Distributed by Oxford Films. 15 min. A young black boy wanders through a nice white neighborhood only to return to his own blighted community.

*A Place of My Own* (1968). McGraw-Hill-Lumin Films. 11 min. A cramped apartment is a challenge for young girls growing up in the ghetto.

*William: From Georgia to Harlem* (1971). Learning Corporation of America. Distributed by Coronet/MCI. 17 min. This film follows William in his migration from the rural south to New York City.