



Voices from the Gaps

Julie Dash

“

I like to see strong women, but I like to see strong, interesting women. I like to see strong, interesting women who are at a pivotal moment in their lives.

— Julie Dash

”



Biography

“History is not what happens. They will remember what they see on the screen. I want to be here, where history is being made,” says Julie Dash’s character Mignon Dupree, in her film *Illusions*. Julie Dash is an American filmmaker responsible for *Daughters of the Dust*, the first full-length film released by an African-American woman. Born in 1952 in New York City, Dash has become a world-renowned filmmaker, music video and commercial director, author, and website creator.

Dash began her study of film in 1969 at the Studio Museum of Harlem. As an undergraduate, she studied psychology until she was accepted into the film school at the Leonard Davis Center for the Performing Arts. Before she graduated, she wrote and produced a promotional documentary for the New York Urban Coalition called *Working Models of Success*.

After attaining her B.A. , she moved to Los Angeles and attended the Center for Advanced Film Studies at the American Film Institute (AFI). As a graduate student at UCLA, she received an MFA in Film and Television Production. Here she directed the film *Diary of an African Nun*, which was screened at the Los Angeles Film Exposition and won her a Director’s Guild Award for a Student Film.

Quick Facts

- * Born in 1952
- * African-American filmmaker, director, and author
- * Directed the film *Daughters of the Dust*

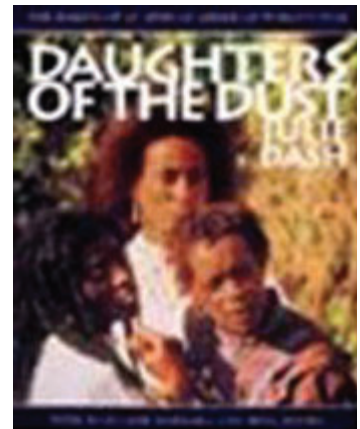
This page was researched by Jennifer Rachelburns Arntzen, Derek Eby, Michelle Lee, and Maxim Rivkin and submitted on 8/05/05.



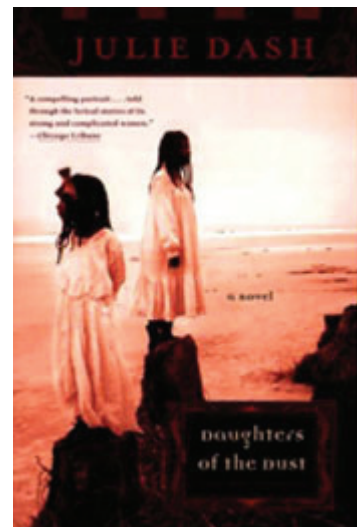
Julie Dash

Biography continued

In her career she has also garnered numerous other awards, primarily for *Daughters of the Dust*. The film, which chronicles two days in the life of the Peazant family, descendants of slaves who reside on sea islands near South Carolina and Georgia, was named one of the fifty most important independent films ever made by *Filmmaker's Magazine*, and was archived in the Schonberg Center for the Study of Black Culture. At the 1992 Sundance Film Festival, the film won "Best Cinematography" for its stunning camera work, and at the 25th Annual Black Film Festival in 1999, the release of *Daughters of the Dust* was named one of the most important cinematic achievements of the twentieth century.



Her short film *Illusions* won the 1989 Jury's prize for "Best Film of the Decade" by the Black Filmmaker Foundation. The critically acclaimed film set in 1942 Hollywood, is the film for which she is probably best known. She has also recently won awards for her website *Geechee Girls Multimedia*, and its companion CD-Rom, "Digital Diva." The site offers both information on Julie Dash and on the Gullah culture, which she featured in *Daughters of the Dust*, and of which she is a descendent.



Recently, Julie Dash completed the film *The Colored Conjurers*, which she describes as "an episodic love story told through the eyes of the daughter of traveling magicians." She has also just finished the script for *Enemy of the Sun*, a film not yet in production. Prior to these projects she directed *Love Song*, and a film version of *The Rosa Parks Story*, for both of which she also wrote the screenplay. *Love Song* is an MTV original movie starring the Grammy award winning singer Monica. Dash also directed the made for TV movie *Incognito*, a romantic thriller made by BET Arabesque Films. She also has written and directed an episode of *Women* for ShowTime and a segment of HBO's *Subway Stories*.



Julie Dash

Biography continued

She has directed many music videos, most notably Tracy Chapman's "Give Me One Reason," a clip nominated for MTV's best video by a female singer in 1996. Additionally, Julie is an accomplished author, having written the novel version of *Daughters of the Dust*, and "a perfume love story" yet to be released.

First and foremost Julie Dash is an innovator and a trailblazer. She has opened up avenues for independent cinema, and all the people involved in it, through the beauty, intelligence, and success of her films. She has challenged, and thereby instigated the change, of how black women (namely African American women) are seen and how they see themselves. In doing so, Julie Dash has revitalized the identity of all African Americans and usurped the traditionalist view of what a woman's place and a woman's ambitions ought to be.

Nonetheless, Dash's success in pressing the boundaries of today in order to establish the reality of tomorrow can most directly be attributed to her understanding of her own past. Every character Dash produces lends a small amount of insight into what it is to be an African American woman (and by extension an African American and a woman in general). This is less of a definition (she does not point and say, "Look, over there, that's an African American woman") than an experience. The poignancy of Dash's characters and the worlds they fill draws you into their stories, their struggles, and their triumphs. At the heart of all this passion for, and struggle with, life you will find a strong, intelligent, African American woman. Consequently, this person is shaped by all the burdens associated with her demographic characterization and social surroundings. However, as a strong individual this person is able to transform her surroundings in turn. This person is Julie Dash.

Julie Dash's film *Illusions* was recognized as the best film of the 1980s by the Black Filmmakers Foundation. In it, Dash exposes and challenges the traditional structures of white Hollywood. She depicts how the contributions of African Americans to the heritage of film have been censored, destroyed, hidden, and otherwise erased from both public memory and tangible record. In the story, a female movie studio executive, Mignon Dupree, is assigned the arduous task of uniting the picture and sound portions of a musical motion picture that is slipping into disrepair. Unbeknownst to the other members of the studio, Dupree is black. However, when a black singer is hired to provide the vocals for the image of the white woman who is to be the starlet of the film, Dupree's heritage risks being unveiled. Nonetheless, the two black women bond together and support each other towards mutual gain.



Julie Dash

Biography continued

Illusions is exceptional in the attributes it provides to women. The black women are portrayed as strong central characters. They are not dictated by the actions of white men (or anyone else, for that matter) but rather create their own destinies out of the positions in which they find themselves. Furthermore, these women are accomplices of friendship instead of the popularly depicted fickle, catty mistresses. This film challenges the concepts of racial identity and racial, gender, and power relations all by changing the perspective (from that of a white male to that of a black female) from which history is approached.

Selected Bibliography

Works by the author

Video/Films Directed by Julie Dash

Working Models of Success (1973).

Diary of an African Nun (1977).

Four Women (Third World Newsreel, 1975).

Illusions (Women Make Movies, 1983).

Breaking the Silence (1988).

Phyllis Wheatley (1989).

Preventing Cancer (1989).

Daughters of the Dust (Kino International, 1991)

Praise House (Third World Newsreel, 1991).

The Cinematic Jazz of Julie Dash Third World Newsreel, 1992)

Breaths (1994).

Give me One Reason (1996).

More Than One Way Home (1996).

Thinking Of You (1997).

Funny Valentines (Black Entertainment Television / Chelsey Avenue Productions / Starz! Pictures / Studios USA 1998)

Incognito (Directors' Circle Filmworks, 1999).



Julie Dash

Selected Bibliography continued

Works by the author continued

Video/Films Directed by Julie Dash

Love Song (Handprint Entertainment / Viacom Productions, 2000).

The Rosa Parks Story (Chotzen Jenner Productions / Columbia Broadcasting System / Come Sunday / Jaffe Braunstein Films, 2002).

Discussion of the Film *Daughters of the Dust*, dir. Julie Dash and Millersville University of Pennsylvania (Millersville University of Pennsylvania, 1995).

Books by Julie Dash

Daughters of the Dust (Plume, 1991).

With Toni Cade Bambara and bell hooks. *Daughters of the Dust: The Making of an African American Woman's Film* (New Press, 1991).

Articles by Julie Dash

With Houston A. Baker. "Not without My Daughters" (*Transition*, 1992).

Works about the author

Akatsa, Maurice Maloba. *African Influences in Daughters of the Dust* (University of Oregon Press, 1996).

Aldama, Frederick Luis. *Postethnic Narrative Criticism: Magicrealism in Oscar 'Zeta' Acosta, Ana Castillo, Julie Dash, Hanif Kureishi, and Salman Rushdie* (University of Texas Press, 2003).

Alexander, George. *Why We Make Movies: Black Filmmakers Talk about the Magic of Cinema* (Harlem Moon, 2003).

Branch, Shelly. "Geechee Girl Get Ready for the Big Time" (*Emerge*, 1990).

Brown-Hinds, Paulette D. "*Long-Memored Women*": *Memory and Migration in 20th-Century Black Women's Narrative* (Dissertation, University of California-Riverside, 1998).

Conrad, Heather Katherine. *The Search for Creole Identities in Julie Dash's Daughters of the Dust and Edouard Glissant's Poetics of Relation* (MA Thesis, Northwestern State University of Louisiana, 2001).

Diedrich, Maria, Henry Louis Gates, and Carl Pedersen. *Black Imagination and the Middle Passage* (Oxford University Press, 1999).



Julie Dash

Selected Bibliography

Works about the author continued

- Gascon, Zoë S. *Redefining African American Womanhood through Collective History: The use of the Supernatural in Beloved, Mama Day, and Daughters of the Dust* (MA Thesis, University of Wyoming, 1995).
- Gibbs, James Lowell. "Daughters of the Dust (1992), by Julie Dash" (*African Arts*, 1993).
- Gray-Rosendale, Laura, and Sibylle Gruber. *Alternative Rhetorics: Challenges to the Rhetorical Tradition* (State University of New York Press, 2001).
- Harris, Erich Leon. *African-American Screenwriters Now: Conversations with Hollywood's Black Pack*. (Silman-James Press, 1996).
- Hayes, Dwayne. *Authors & Artists for Young Adults 62* (Thomson Gale, 2005).
- Hewett, Heather A. "Diaspora's Daughters: Buchi Emecheta, Julie Dash, Edwidge Danticat and the Remapping of Mother Africa" (*Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2002).
- Hillier, Jim. *American Independent Cinema* (British Film Institute, 1999).
- James, Valentine Udoh. *Black Women Writers Across Cultures: An Analysis of their Contributions* (International Scholars Publications, 2000).
- Kempley, Rita. "Daughters of the Dust: Spirit of a Time Past" (*Washington Post*, 1992).
- Klotman, Phyllis Rauch. *Screenplays of the African American Experience* (Indiana University Press, 1991).
- MacDonald, Scott. *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Independent Films about Place* (University of California Press, 2001).
- Machiorlatti, Jennifer Alyce. "Implications of a Feminist Narratology: Temporality, Focalization and Voice in the Films of Julie Dash, Mona Smith and Trinh T. Minh-Ha" (*Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1998).
- Sempreora, Margot Sahrbeck. "Translating Women: The Short Fiction of Kate Chopin and Alice Dunbar-Nelson and the Films of Julie Dash" (*Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1997).
- Sharpe, Christina Elizabeth. "The Work of Re-Membering: Reading Gertrude Stein, Gayl Jones, Julie Dash, Cherrie Moraga, and Bessie Head" (*Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1999).
- Barlet, Olivier. "Filles De Poussière" (*Africultures*, 1998).