

Julie Dash Dialogue with Lindsay Law, 1993

Marlena:

I'd now like to introduce the two guests of honor for tonight. Lindsay Law is the president and executive producer of *American Playhouse*. He has produced such films as *Daughters of the Dust*, *Straight out of Brooklyn*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The Thin Blue Line*, among others. He's also the executive producer of the two new features, which are being featured through this tribute, Phillip Haas's *Music of Chance* and John Hanson's *Shimmer*. Julie Dash is the African-American filmmaker who astounded audiences around the country and in other countries around the globe with her remarkable first feature length film, *Daughters of the Dust*. She had also prior to doing *Daughters* produced some short films in her career prior to *Daughters*. She has done films entitled *Illusions*, *Four Women*, *Praise House*, and *A Diary of an African Nun*. Please welcome to the Walker stage Mr. Lindsay Law and Ms. Julie Dash.

Julie Dash:

Good evening.

Lindsay Law:

Thank you and good evening. I thought I'd start this evening before we get into *Daughters of the Dust* and Julie Dash and film making in general for black Americans today in America with a brief history of *Playhouse* and how we came to meet and how this film got to be made. *American Playhouse* is a drama series on public television. It was initially founded to counteract the fact that most drama on public television had a British accent, and a variety of unions representing actors, stage hands, cinematographers, musicians fought with public television saying we needed our own drama series. We wanted our own artists to be working in this country. We wanted public television to be supporting that. *American Playhouse* was formed primarily to then, once the financing was put together, to create work that was different than other work that was out there.

Lindsay Law:

Meaning to create work that would serve underserved audiences, to bring work to television and to movie theaters that was different than other work. Something that was significant, distinctive, substantive, something that had something to say. Most importantly, perhaps, something that would outlive the people who even made it if one is really aiming high. In the course of the last 12 years, we've made 40 feature films and approximately 150 television programs. Within that body of work, I can say without qualification that the most surprising work, the boldest work, the work that will indeed live beyond the lives of the filmmakers who made them, was work created by people working outside the mainstream. For the most part that has meant minority filmmakers, culture minorities, and sexual minorities.

Lindsay Law:

The work includes films, for example, such as *El Norte* or *Gregorio Cortez* or *Stand and Deliver*. Gordon Parks' film, *Solomon Northup's Odyssey*. A film of Richard Wright's novel, *Native Son*. *Straight out of Brooklyn*, a piece we had on recently *Fires in the Mirror*, which gave voice to the remarkable actress, writer, director, anthropologist Anna Deavere Smith. *For Us the Living*, a film about Medgar Evers, Wayne Wang's film, *Eat a Bowl of Teal*. *Long Time Companion*, which was the first film, and still is the only film, that has dealt with AIDS as it has affected the gay community in this country.

Lindsay Law:

In the top, I would say, one's not supposed to have favorite children, so I'll say the top three or four as opposed to saying the top because that's only fair, but one of the most surprising works we were ever involved in, and one for which our own sense of pride and being a part of the process, and by part of the process I mean providing a film maker the tools to do what he or she wants to do not that we want to tell people what they should be doing is a film called *Daughters of the Dust*. It's a film that is taught in colleges and universities. It is in high school curriculums. It has been seen all over this world, much less all over this country.

Lindsay Law:

It is a film in which everyone who told Julie she couldn't do what she wanted to do, she proved them wrong at every step of the way from how to get it made, when to get it made, how to make it, how it should be released, where it should be released, who would be interested in seeing it, to the fact that the absolute bedrock of belief that she had that there was an audience for this film, and I must say with great pleasure that she was right every step of the way. It is a film that for those of you who have not seen it, it is being screened here tomorrow at 5 o'clock, defies mainstream forms of storytelling. It does not have a linear structure. It does not have any stars in it. It is not a contemporary urban struggle, and it is a story about women. Everything that I've just mentioned is on the list of everything to not put into a mainstream film today.

Lindsay Law:

On top of that, something that I don't even know if I was aware of at the time, only actually when the press pointed it out when the film was released, it was the first film to be released in a major manner in this country by an African-American woman director, which is on one hand a tribute to Julie that this took place. On the other hand, I must say, a great slap in the face to the entire movie business. It is part of our process, and it has been a rewarding one to work with new people. Not just new to us, but new to the industry. First time filmmakers, and that doesn't usually mean really first time filmmakers. They've probably been playing in their garage or with a high eight camera or video cameras, or they've made commercials, maybe, or documentaries or industrials or something, but in the back of their mind a feature film is what they're really aiming to make.

Lindsay Law:

It is an enormously, I say selfishly I feel like I have one of the luckiest positions in the world to be able to do this, but to meet people at that stage of their career in which everything is at stake, and yet nothing is at stake in which you're not having to prove or live up to a reputation because you don't have one. So, you can just be as bold as can be and just tell people to get out of your way and do what you want to do. That's very much what Julie did, and it's very much the result, I think, of the excellence in the film, but I thought of all the things one could become if you determined even that you want to be an artist and you want to express yourself in some way. Perhaps you want to be a writer or a musician or a painter, a photographer. Of all the really impossible fields to decide you want to become is a filmmaker.

Lindsay Law:

Primarily because the tools to execute your craft are so wildly expensive. It isn't just a matter of getting a yellow tablet and some pencils or some paint or some film on a camera. It's got to be the most expensive art form there is. At the same time, it probably is one of the most satisfying since of course it includes all those other art forms in terms of its

storytelling, but I thought I'd ask Julie before we met what on Earth got you, what inspired you, what made you, want to become a director?

Julie Dash:

Okay, first I'd like to acknowledge this audience and publicly, which I never really get the chance to do what a wonderful, wonderful executive producer, creator Mr. Lindsay Law is. Thank you from all of us because he has not only supported my work, he's also supported Nina Barnett, *Zora's My Name*. So very few African-American women do have an opportunity to do something, to have a wide broadcast or a feature film and Mr. Law has done that for us. Okay, what made me decide to be a filmmaker?

Julie Dash:

I really did not plan to be a director. I started studying film at a local filmmaking workshop in Harlem in 1968 in the way, way, way back time. It was called a cinematography workshop at the time. We made documentary films, news reels. I had no idea that I would eventually want to grow up and become a director, writer, producer, et cetera. It wasn't real to me. It was just fun making films, controlling worlds, and telling stories, learning how to tell stories. At that time there was no competition. We didn't have that same competitive edge that's out there now to make this film make money, do this, do whatever. It was just very enjoyable. It was something that I liked to do.

Julie Dash:

I was able to build up a body of work over the years. I was able to major in film making in undergraduate school, and then later go on to the American Film Institute, and at the time it was a conservatory, a two year film conservatory. Now, it's an MFA program, so after I finished with AFI I was able to go to UCLA to the graduate program in film there in Los Angeles and work with some fine filmmakers like Larry Clark, Charles Burnett, Haile Gerima, Alile Sharon Larkin, Barb McCullough, et cetera. Of course, that group of people, filmmakers became known as the L.A. Rebellion because we made films in the belly of the beast in Hollywood, but in the shadow of Hollywood. Very combative films.

Julie Dash:

I was very, very fortunate to come up in a time where we had a passion for making films. We were not competitive, and we just kind of did what we wanted to do, and I guess I became very arrogant in my own way, and in a way very selfish too because I started making the films that I wanted to see, and I still do that. I still want to make the films that I wanted to see as a child or see situations or stories told that I was not able to experience sitting on the edge of the seat in a cinema. So, my focus is on films about women, women of color. What are our issues? The culture of women without it having to be something about what society or how the outside forces affect family, friends, love relationships, et cetera. What happens in our inter group relationships? That's what fascinates me.

Speaker 6:

Go girl!

Lindsay Law:

How did the idea for the story of *Daughters of the Dust* evolve. It is certainly not, quite often when a young filmmaker's decided, "Okay now it's time for me to make my big splash. I've got to come up with my film" they tend to be small, personal films related in some way perhaps to that particular filmmaker's life or experience. *Daughters of*

the Dust is, I suppose, epic in portions. It has a large cast. It's a period film. It requires sets, costumes. It's on location as opposed to in the hometown of the filmmaker.

Julie Dash:

It's my father's hometown.

Lindsay Law:

But, in terms of the evolution of this particular story being the one that you decided, "Okay, this is going to be it."

Julie Dash:

Actually *Daughters* started out as a very small movie. It started out as a short, and it grew over the years because it took that long to get the financing together to do it, so it just kept growing and expanding and expanding, and as I grew and learned more about life, learned more about what it meant to be a mother, et cetera then the story expanded. I originally intended, my task for *Daughters* was to do, excuse me, a film that was so visual that you did not need a lot of dialog to tell the story. So, I originally wanted to do it as a silent film, which would not fly.

Julie Dash:

After I got past that, I decided to do the film in the Gullah language because that was appropriate for this type of film. As an African-American, we grow up in a country that's multi-cultural, multi-lingual. Everyone's multilingual, and we have to come to understand that we have other languages also. *Daughters* kind of celebrates the Gullah language. I know that it's difficult for many who watch the film, and that's why we have the subtitles early on to get their ear adjusted to the sound of the Gullah dialect or language, but I think that it's something that's necessary because as a child we grew up, I grew up, listening to Irish American dialects, Chinese American dialects, Italian American dialects, and you learn to translate, but when it comes to African-American culture, if it's not a southern dialect, then everyone's saying, "Wait a minute. You've got to throw some subtitles. You can't do this."

Julie Dash:

I was told by many people after the film was completed that I needed to completely re-dub it into English, standard English, or at least a southern accent, which is more recognizable and acceptable. I said, "Absolutely not." Thank you for not pressing me to do so.

Lindsay Law:

Was it conscious on your part in terms of how strongly you were flying in the face of convention or was it one of the great advantages of perhaps being more naïve in terms of knowing how many battles you were taking on by a story of this size and scope, but also supposedly in the parlance of the business world of movies, how supposedly uncommercial this idea was?

Julie Dash:

Well, since *Daughters*, even though it was my first feature length film, it was my eleventh film. I knew that I was creating, and I had been trained formally in undergraduate school at the American Film Institute and at UCLA, so I knew that I was breaking... It was a cardinal sin in almost every area of the production that I was making because, for instance, the having two people narrate the story, in writing, that's a cardinal sin. You can not have two people

narrating a story. Only one person, the protagonist, but I wanted this story told from the point of view of an unborn child. How could you do that? That child is not born yet. And from a great grandmother.

Julie Dash:

Also, the structure of the story is very different. I did not want this story told from a male, a white male western point of view. This was a story about a very, very different culture, so I wanted it told from a West African point of view, and so that's how I got into telling a story like a Griot would tell the story. The story kind of unfolds and unravels, so there were so many things that I knew that I was breaking the rules, but I had learned the rules. It was a conscious choice to break those rules.

Lindsay Law:

It was a shocking fact to me because I guess I was not aware of the fact that there had not really been, at least not released on the scale that *Daughters* was because *Daughters* played all over this country and generated a very large box office. I had not been aware though until press reports that this was the first feature length film released on this kind of scale.

Julie Dash:

Right because Kathleen Collins had done *Losing Ground*. She had completed *Losing Ground* and *The Cruise Brother's* and *Mrs. Malloy*, and I forget the other one's name, but she had done a feature also, but they never reached broad distribution like *Daughters* did.

Lindsay Law:

There has been since Leslie Harris's film, *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.* In a way it's as if perhaps a dam has broken through your great efforts.

Julie Dash:

Well, let's hope so. It's about time.

Lindsay Law:

Are you seeing evidence of it, though, through your cohorts?

Julie Dash:

There's interest, but there's not a lot of follow through. There's interest if, I always call them the Hollywood Casignati, the gatekeepers, the people like at Columbia, Warner Brothers. Let's name names. Twentieth Century, all of that. If we as a group, African-American filmmakers, are willing to do the films that they want us to do, the films coming out of their own realities, coming out of their heads, the remakes, the retreads, then it'll be a lot easier for those people.

Julie Dash:

But, since for the most part I don't choose to do that, it's just as difficult as ever. It really is just as difficult.

Lindsay Law:

I thought, at this point, we could show a bit of *Daughters* especially for those of you who don't know it. Actually, it's hard to see in here, but how many people have seen *Daughters of the Dust* here? Oh wow. Spectacular. Okay. Well,

this will be a great reminder bringing the film back for you. For those who haven't, you are indeed in for a treat. This is a film, Julie met Lynn Holst, who runs our story department. We commission scripts from writers, and there was a conference. I think it was called the Rocky Mountain conference.

Julie Dash:

Right it was the Minority Women's Retreat at Sundance, and we went up there for a weekend, and I had shot a short trailer of *Daughters*, and I screened it to the audience because everyone wanted to show what they were working on, what was in their head, what kind of ideas they had. Lynn Holst was there, and she saw this, and she came up to me afterwards, and she said, "I've never quite seen anything like this before." She said, "It's so lush. It's so sensual. I love it." And I was looking at her like, she loved it? And then from there we went into development.

Lindsay Law:

My big question was, I remember the time because I can't remember five, eight minutes something like that, but I wasn't sure anything less than ten million dollars could make a full length of the richness that we had seen, and it does incorporate in my mind all the elements of all the art that you could possibly decided you wanted to go into in terms of the language of it, which is what attracted me to it at first. Lynn was extremely attracted to Julie's visual sense and what this short clip that Julie had shot over the period of a week with a group of actors, fully costumed, and on location, and it was the language in my mind, which is why I was so shocked at first. Julie said, "Gee, I really wanted this to be silent." And I was saying, "Gee, it's your language that's really kind of won me over on this."

Lindsay Law:

At that point actually we engaged on a further draft of the script in which you did indeed enlarge many of the areas of language and storytelling. But, why don't we go ahead? You do want to set up this clip a little bit?

Julie Dash:

I believe this is a clip showing Eula Peazant who is alone in the Peazant shanty, and she's kind of peeling scraps of memories, pieces of newspaper off of the walls, things that she thinks that she's going to take north with her, and let's see.

Lindsay Law:

Okay. I'm not sure how we run the clip, but I'll say let's run the clip and see if it happens. There it is.

Julie Dash:

That was a hard one to introduce. It's so many different ideas.

Lindsay Law:

The richness of, I mean the film to me succeeds on so many levels, but the richness of the interconnection of all these different women's lives and the sense of family in this film and the richness and the diversity within that family and those who are angry with one another and pleased with one another and afraid of one another and the different beliefs and myths within these family members. One of the things the film is able to incorporate are the enormous number of beliefs of the different family members from Bilal to Viola to Nana's beliefs and the-

Julie Dash:

Exactly. It just shows the diversity of the African-American community, and you don't see that very often. It's either we all come from Christian Baptist religion. When actually we were influenced and informed by not only Christianity but Islam and the west African religions and deities.

Lindsay Law:

We've arrived at this stage where the film is now, indeed, a classic and has been extremely well received, but there were certainly dark moments where the film upon being completed and literally dripping wet from the lab was indeed invited to the Sundance Film Festival, which is an extremely prestigious film festival, but also one in terms of where the business of filmmaking has also taken over there. Meaning every agent and every distributor in the world now hangs out at Sundance to snap up the newest film maker. And, *Daughters* screened there, and we thought indeed the way would be easy from there on once the film made it's premier, which was indeed an extremely successful premier.

Lindsay Law:

A.J., the cinematographer, won the award for best cinematography for this film, and yet it was many, many, many, many months, I mean another ten months I think.

Julie Dash:

Yeah, it was about nine to ten months before we could get distribution for it because every major and minor distribution company and studio turned it down even as a completed film. They just insisted that there was indeed no audience for it. They were not interested in it, and they didn't think anyone else would be interested in it. Kino International who finally did pick it up for distribution saw it as a foreign film because most of their work that they distribute is foreign film. They saw it as a foreign film, and I liked that idea because I said, "Yeah, it is a foreign film." It's so different from mainstream America, it's foreign. We went from there.

Lindsay Law:

We had kind of split up who knew who and taking this film around trying to sell it to people I had worked with or people Julie met with. In terms of the people I met with everyone who said no to me, without exception, was a white executive. Was there anyone at that time in sufficient authority to pick up the film who wasn't white? Do you remember?

Julie Dash:

Yes. They could have at least pushed it-

Lindsay Law:

Pushed it within their company?

Julie Dash:

Some of the execs at Columbia University and Warner Brothers, and they too said that, "Oh I love it, love it, love it. It reminds me of my grandmother. It makes me cry, but Columbia would never put out a film like this."

Lindsay Law:

Because one of the battles facing all of us who would like to see the diversity in our movie theaters greatly increased is that it literally is a handful of people who determine what this country wants to see. They determine what the taste of the audience is.

Julie Dash:

And they have a very, very myopic view, and they don't travel.

Lindsay Law:

Very. Of their own experience only.

Julie Dash:

They don't travel outside of their own Hollywood community, and that's why I call them the gatekeepers, the Hollywood Casignati, because it's just like an in group thing, a click.

Lindsay Law:

I saw Anna Deavere Smith's piece last night in Los Angeles. She does a piece where she interviewed an enormous number of people who are witness to, participants in the riots in Los Angeles of a year ago, and she interviews these people, and she takes their words verbatim. She edits it, but it's verbatim, their words, and she performs it on stage, and she got to a talent agent, and it was a talent agent's point of view of the Los Angeles riots.

Julie Dash:

Very interesting.

Lindsay Law:

Let me tell you, it was something to behold. Frightening. New Line Cinema, for example, it's as if suddenly people woke up one morning, and I don't know which film experience it was, which audience suddenly showed up that suddenly decided. They call it niche marketing, but that realized that suddenly there was an enormous audience in this country that was not necessarily white and that stories that spoke to those audiences, be they Asian, Latino, black, gay, wanted to see movies about themselves, which has to some degree increased the degree of vitality on our screens. But, still in a minor way.

Lindsay Law:

Julie and I were trying before we came out here, one of the great difficulties can be you think, and we all have heard in the press writes about the stories about how you get your first film made, and we've all heard the many, many stories of charging it all on your American Express card or borrowing from mom and dad or Matty Rich who we're going to talk a little bit about later going on a black radio station and just getting strangers to put up money. Whatever. The story that is not told so often is how do you make your second film and does it get any easier. Julie is probably tripping across the answer to this now. I was shocked by the answer, only because I thought after we made our first three or four it would become easy for us, and I find it from our point of view to be every bit if not more difficult.

Julie Dash:

Exactly.

Lindsay Law:

Each time, and I wondered how your, since *Daughters*, and obviously you've gotten a good deal of attention, but what your experience is like now?

Julie Dash:

Well, I'm invited to lunch now. Everyone wants to take a meeting with me because they want to meet me, and after they've met me they call my agent and say, "Oh we just love, love, love her, but can she tell a story?" Because they don't see *Daughters of the Dust* as a story because frankly they don't understand it or it's not about their concerns, and so still even though it did very well at the box office-

Lindsay Law:

Can she tell our story?

Julie Dash:

Can she tell our story? Yes, and Charles Burnett who did *To Sleep With Anger*, he was having pretty much the same problem. We talk regularly about it. They would love to take him, take his talent, and get him to write their stories. On one story, he had to tell the producers, "Well, this was done in 1972. The blacksploitation. Why should I do it now?"

Lindsay Law:

Is there also a difference though because you... For example, Matty Rich, who we're going to talk a bit about his film *Straight out of Brooklyn* in a minute, but has just started filming, which is why he couldn't be with us here this evening, but he's just started filming a new film, but after again for him nearly two years of, I guess, bursting on the scene with the same kind of promotion and publicity and excitement on the part of the press and the critics about his work, but is it easier? I suppose this is a naïve question, but I'll ask it. Is it easier for the men?

Julie Dash:

I think it is. I think not just for men but young men because right now the media likes the profile, young, urban, African-American men, so that's why it's harder for Charles Burnett, Robert Garner, Charles Lane after he's done his film with Disney he can't get another film, myself.

Lindsay Law:

It's an aspect-

Julie Dash:

We don't fit the profile.

Lindsay Law:

Yeah. It's an aspect of Hollywood. It's one of the few that crosses all color lines, actually, that particular one. I mean it's an industry that wants that which is brand new right now.

Julie Dash:

Trendy.

Lindsay Law:

When your film is opened... Trendy. When your film is opened, and you're being written about right then and there they want you. If you don't have a script that they want then and there, a year later you're not quite today's news. *The New York Times Magazine*, for example, the year that *Straight out of Brooklyn* opened was also the same year that *Boyz n the Hood* opened, and it was the same year as Spike's-

Julie Dash:

Jungle Fever?

Lindsay Law:

Jungle Fever opened, and the cover-

Julie Dash:

And *Daughters* too.

Lindsay Law:

And *Daughters* also, and the cover story of *The New York Times Magazine* was African American Filmmakers.

Julie Dash:

Hollywood's got to have them.

Lindsay Law:

And it was eight, male directors, but it was also eight male directors under the age of whatever, thirty something because they were also that year, there were films by Michael Sholtz had a feature film, but Michael Sholtz is 48 or thereabouts. That aspect of it works against everybody.

Julie Dash:

Charles Burnett was not on the cover either.

Lindsay Law:

It's the guys look after the guys I find so often too though, and I wonder whose looking out for you in those studios. Matty Rich came to film making out of necessity, which can be certainly one way of finding your career. He lived for a period of time in the Red Hook section of Brooklyn, which is an extremely violent and poverty stricken area. He was fortunate in that his mother was able to move the family out of that project, but when he lived there and while he lived there he witnessed things that stayed with him forever and wanted to tell what he saw. Went to NYU Film School for, I must say, a very brief period of time. I noticed on his resume it just mentions that he attended NYU Film School. It doesn't mention that he left shortly thereafter because like so many film schools have not yet grown accustomed to the really interesting people or the ones who don't follow all the rules.

Lindsay Law:

You don't want a filmmaker to be following rules, so Matty wasn't following rules, so he left shortly thereafter. He went on a black owned radio station in New York City for an hour, talked about his script, talked about the story he wanted

to tell. It was about family, but it's certainly the other side of *Daughters of the Dust*. It's a contemporary family living in extreme poverty. It's a picture of a family much more familiar through news coverage, late night exploitation news for the most part, and he went on this radio station, said he wanted to tell a film about his experiences about his people, and would the audience listening to that program help him.

Lindsay Law:

If they would help him could they come to such and such an address on such and such a date, and they did, and they met him, and he raised about 75 thousand dollars that way and started filming. He got through a good deal of the filming, and many of these people saw that this young man really was following through on what he had said to them. I forgot to mention, I think, that he was 19. He was able to, for the most part, finish shooting the film. He was editing in, there's a building in New York, the Brill Building, which was famous at one time in the 30's and 40's as the center for all of pop music. It's not where most film editing and post production facilities in New York are available, and it's one of the great buildings to go to when you go to work on a movie because you run into everybody. Every New Yorker making a movie is in that building.

Lindsay Law:

Matty just happened to get a deal because he had a producer friend who was able to get him in at nights, and there was a little corner janitor's closet, and they had an editing room, and he started putting it together. Down the hall a rather nice person came up and introduced himself and wanted to see what he was doing, and he showed him a bit of it, and the guy introduced himself, and said his name was Jonathan Demy, and Matty said, "Thank you. Good to meet you." And sent him on his way. Luckily the producer later informed Matty who Jonathan Demy was. He was editing *Silence of the Lambs* down the hall. He quickly invited him back, and said, "Help. Help. I need help."

Lindsay Law:

Jonathan had worked with us on a television project a number of years ago, and said, "Well I suggest you call the folks at *American Playhouse*." And showed us a, I guess, about 100 minute film that he wanted to lock. Meaning he wanted that to be the finished movie other than he needed money to complete post production. Meaning adding the sound effects, the score, things like that. We met at length, and I didn't want to interfere with what he wanted to do. At the same time, I wanted to know might he shoot additional scenes and might he want to have a conversation about the film or did he really just want the money. I'm not particularly fond of being just a bank. I like to have a partnership with the filmmakers that we're working with, and yet Matty also had been brought up in such a way he later told me that being in a room with what he considered to be a white business man was one of the most uncomfortable moments of his entire life.

Lindsay Law:

Over a period of time, we became enormously comfortable with one another, and he shot for about an additional week and had a good long time to finish editing his film, and we took that film also to Sundance where the Goldman Company ended up in a bidding war with a variety of other companies on this film. It's a family film also. I must say it is, for those of you who have seen it, it is devastating as opposed to inspiring. Although I suppose out of devastation it can inspire you to action, but it leaves you I think numb, and that shock value was its strength in terms of bringing home to a great many people who want to pretend this isn't going on. That these stories are out there, and these are real, and what he was able to do was to tell it in a very small, spare style. It is not sophisticated in its filmmaking or its camera techniques or in its editing.

Lindsay Law:

It's only sophisticated in how bold and bald the truthfulness of his story is. In the clip we're going to show, the story revolves around a family. There's a father who had dreamt of being a musician and now pumps gas, drinks too much, and beats his wife, which he understands, and he has two children. He has a son and a daughter who again dream of more. From the Red Hook section of Brooklyn you can look across the East River and see the great big buildings of Manhattan, and in the movie the young man says, "You don't really think all of them did it the right way, do you?" And, what he decides to do to get his family out of Brooklyn, unfortunately, is to rob a drug dealer, which of course brings down devastation and death on his family.

Lindsay Law:

In the clip we're going to show it's the father having come home late at night having had too much to drink, railing at the universe for the situation he's in. This wasn't well trended I suppose you'd say at the moment. For the past several years, actually, and I at times wonder at it's derivation and all the more so how much more of a miracle it becomes that *Daughters of the Dust* not just got made, but that it got out there. In the past two weeks, two young filmmakers, twins, the Hughes brothers have a film out that is evidently, I have not seen.

Julie Dash:

Menace to Society.

Lindsay Law:

Menace to Society, which has been enormously successful and extremely well reviewed in which they've been led-

Julie Dash:

It's an incredible film. Yes.

Lindsay Law:

They've been led to, the interviews is all I've read in terms of trying to basically preach against violence in which they have a film that doesn't celebrate violence, but nonetheless is extremely violent.

Julie Dash:

Yes, it's very realistic and it does not in any way glorify the shootings and the deaths. In fact, it's very horrible. It shows it in a very, very almost documentary fashion. It's depressing as hell, but it's reality as it is.

Lindsay Law:

Again, it was a lot budget film so perhaps there are people more willing to gamble on low budget work, and yet I find at the moment that some of the most striking and most original films have been coming both from either the black community of filmmakers or the gay community of filmmakers in terms of people either angry or who have been kept out of this particular system and yet have a richness of stories to tell, and suddenly in ways more diverse than other film makers have been demonstrating a talent that frankly in many ways is way above all the other films out there. Not just that the stories are necessarily richer, but that the methods of telling the stories are breaking conventions that people of much greater reputation, meaning people who can get any movie made if they just say, "I want to do X

or Y." And yet are making them in such traditional methods. Is that just from being kept out of the ballgame for so long, do you suppose?

Julie Dash:

Partially. I just think it's the independent spirit. It's partial frustration and rage, but it's also independent filmmakers have an original voice. We have something to say. We're not trying to just make money. We're trying to change the world in some small way, answer some questions, what have you. It's not just a thing about making a blockbuster with a lot of stars in it and having a soundtrack album that comes out to accompany it. There's much more to it. It's a whole way of life. It's art plus it's education plus it's a way to do good and to do well. It's very satisfying.

Lindsay Law:

In many other countries actually most other countries there are enormous amounts of film subsidy money available to that particular country's filmmakers. These film subsidies have been set up because American films cover about 80% of the movie screens in all of those countries and they're trying to protect their native film making. They're trying to protect their indigenous filmmakers. In this country, since we are the capital of movie making, we make more movies than any other country in the world. Of course our government doesn't see any need to subsidize films. Why should we? It's the second largest export in the United States is filmed entertainment. As a result, unfortunately, other than a handful of tiny grants, which occasionally come from the National Endowment of Humanities and the National Endowment of the Arts, this is not a country that has necessarily embraced on a national level the independent film movement much less any groups within that independent film movement or any individual voices.

Julie Dash:

I think that's partially do to, in this country, it's seen as an industry-

Lindsay Law:

And not an art.

Julie Dash:

Rather than an art form or a vehicle to express different views. It's very much an industry like out of Detroit motor works, and it's about making a profit by any means necessary.

Lindsay Law:

So do you for your second film say take what you learn and adjust or do you just put your head down and keep struggling?

Julie Dash:

Well, there are small adjustments that I will make, and one of those would be that I will get a name actor, and that will make it easier for a distributor to pick it up. I will get someone to walk through that has a name. Pretty much, I think I have more of an advantage than perhaps a Hollywood producer or directors because I know how to make a film like *Daughters of the Dust*. It looks like 5 million whatever for 800 thousand.

Lindsay Law:

Right. Right.

Julie Dash:

And, they keep asking, "How did you do that? How did you do that?" It wasn't easy, but it's possible.

Lindsay Law:

One is indeed fighting with a community that not only wants to make movies of stories that they're familiar with, but unlike almost any other industry in the world the people who run this industry have no idea how to make movies, which becomes a rather tricky thing when you're suddenly out in the field making a movie, and a bunch of people are sending you notes saying, "We want more coverage. Give us more close ups." It is interesting in that way in terms of the challenges that face any filmmaker no matter what kind of story you're telling. Can you talk at all about what is on your mind next in terms of stories you want to tell or the next one you want to tell?

Julie Dash:

Oh yeah, I have a whole notebook full of them. There's one that's called-

Lindsay Law:

Good. Thank God.

Julie Dash:

My blockbuster, *Enemy of the Sun*. It's a love story, a black love story. A cross between David Mamet's *House of Games* and *Body Heat*. That's the way you have to describe it when you're pitching the story. It takes place in Atlanta and the Caribbean. That's one, starring Denzel Washington. Right? There's a smaller piece, and actually it would be a remake of a French film *La Lectrice*, *The Reader*, about a young woman with a marvelous singing voice who is tired of dancing as a girl in hip hop music videos, and she decides to use her angelic voice in a very creative, innovative way. She hires herself out as a reader of fine literature, and then that way she can read passages from Tony Morrison, Terry McMillan, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, and while she's doing so she's also learning the power of words.

Lindsay Law:

The stories, obviously, that are attracting you and that you want to go ahead with are black stories.

Julie Dash:

Oh yeah. About black women specifically yeah.

Lindsay Law:

There are, indeed, filmmakers who suddenly think, "Well, I just want to make movies. Why should I be kept within a particular area of knowledge of expertise or desire."

Julie Dash:

I've gotten a lot of letters, and people are saying, "Why are you confining yourself to making films about just focusing on black women and black women's issues." It's like confining. It's wide open.

Lindsay Law:

There's so many other people in the field trying to do the same, right?

Julie Dash:

Right. There's so many stories to be told. So many issues to explore. I always say I want to see a story about a black woman on a trapeze artist. Things that you don't even think about. People say, "Well black women can't fly on a trapeze." And it's like, "Why not?" You know? Things like that. I want to see us in a rocket ship going to the moon. I want to see us doing everything and dealing with our own problems and our desires and our hopes and dreams. All that.

Lindsay Law:

One of the Watershed family pieces was written by Lorraine Hansberry. Watershed I should say in the theater. Moving again to another piece again about a very different kind of story, but again a family story. One that many people in this day think is an old fashioned play, but we revived it with director Bill Duke. Lorraine Hansberry wrote *A Raisin in the Sun*, I believe I'm going to get the exact dates wrong, but it was in the mid 1950's, and again in terms of... Sorry? 58, thank you. And, again in that particular time, it was the first play on Broadway, not just by a woman. Sorry. I'm getting it backwards. Not only the first Broadway play by an African-American artist but a female also.

Lindsay Law:

It ran for a number of years. It brought Diana Sands, Sidney Poitier, any number of performers to everyone else's attention. It was a piece in which a mother, a family, the father has just died, and the one gift he's left behind in his family is an insurance check. The son in the family, which was originally played by Sidney Poitier, Danny Glover plays it in this production. The son wants to take that money and become a partner in a liqueur store. The daughter in this family wants to take that money and go to medical college. The mother, played by Esther Rolle, instead takes that check and goes and puts a down payment down on a house in an all white neighborhood, and the conflicts that arise in this decision is what fuels that play and what teaches that young man his manhood, and in it's day and age was a rail rocker I must say.

Lindsay Law:

The movie was a good deal tamer frankly than the play. The movie, I'm forgetting who directed it, was a white director, very famous at the time. They took out a great many, actually before it opened on Broadway, Lorraine was asked to take out many of the African influences in it. There had been a dance in it in which the brother and sister put a record on. It was very subtle things that were removed, none the less that were very real and strong, and I must say shocking reasons when you look back on it now. The movie only went farther in that direction. It tried just to take out all those very specific details, and again try and put just one face on this black family, so that we could think of everyone as just this one family.

Lindsay Law:

Bill Duke directed this for television. I'm trying to think what year it was. I believe we did a 1988 or 89. Sorry, I don't have the exact date. It was a great joy, I must say, watching Esther Rolle and Danny Glover approach these two extremely famous parts. The clip here is Esther Rolle and Danny Glover arguing over this money and the importance of money. I'll just go ahead and roll that. It's interesting when we were first deciding to revive that, many people thought it was very old fashioned since it was from the 50's, and it's interesting to look at it again, to look at all of

these projects again. One of the great advantages on public television is fulfilling that role where, that many theaters in this country also do, which is to revive the classic works of our literature from generation to generation.

Lindsay Law:

Oh, and this is Bill Duke. I was just stalling. Hello? Bill, how are you? I have to do technology here. I hope I don't blow it. I have to hit switches to get you to talk to this audience here, but we just indeed finished watching Esther and Danny. It was the scene where Danny is holding the check and explaining to his mother what he could do with that money, and she's saying, "It once used to be about freedom, and now I see you're equating life with money." It's a great scene. We were just talking about the value of reviving these works, and how actually much that has to say today although some people have said that that was an old fashioned play. Yeah.

Lindsay Law:

For you to talk to this group here, for them to hear you I should say, I have to switch buttons, so it's going to be like over and out, roger, and things like that. Okay? So, bear with me. We're at the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis, and I'd say there's 200 people here. We've been sitting with Julie Dash watching *Daughters of the Dust*, and we've just watched a bit of Matty Rich's *Straight Out Of Brooklyn*, and we've explained that you're on the set with Whoopi Goldberg making your new movie, but I'm going to switch you over and just ask you to talk a bit about what attracted you to this particular revival, and opposed to my constantly interrupting you with this switch to go back and forth, and then you might talk a bit about because what Julie and I have been talking about are the opportunities today for African-American filmmakers, and you've seen a great deal of change through time first as an actor and now as an actor and director. How those are different today than when you first started out as an actor and how your career has evolved through these enormous changes.

Lindsay Law:

Let me switch you over so that you can talk because all they're hearing is me at the moment. They're not hearing you at all. So let's first talk about *Raisin* and why you'd wanted to do that and the importance of that today, actually. So, here we go. Now can you... I think we can hear you if you speak. Are you there, Bill? Are you there? Okay, when I switch it you just start talking because I can't talk to you while I switch it over evidently. Just in terms of talking about *Raisin* and what exactly. They're hearing this very one sided. Sorry. Mostly I think about the changing opportunities in terms of you're just working all the time now, and we were talking a bit about the Hughes brothers and their new films and in terms of the new opportunities out there for African-American directors. I will when you stop talking, in other words. It's not a sophisticated technology here. So, when I switch it on, and when you stop talking, I'll switch and talk to you again. Okay? So, just keep going actually. Go on a roll. Here we go. Okay, go ahead.

Bill Duke:

Well, so much for modern technology. First of all I want to say I want to thank you for allowing me and having me with you this evening. It's still evening, it's still light out here in California, but thank you. I want to say a couple of things. First of all *American Playhouse* and PBS general, I sincerely feel that if it was not for Lindsay Law and *American Playhouse* and PBS that the opportunities that I am being afforded now I would not have been afforded, and I'm very thankful that I got an opportunity to work on material which I never would have been able to work on network television. Because of the depth of the material and the quality of actors that I was able to work with. *A Raisin in the Sun*, Danny Glover and Esther Rolle and Scarletta DuPois, and people like that. Also, working on a classic, which *Raisin in the Sun* most certainly is.

Bill Duke:

I know that many people feel that it is a dated play, and when I directed it people felt that also. I very strongly disagree with that because I think the universal principles that run through the play and the writing in general is classic, and I think that it's going to be a piece that lasts much longer than any of us that exist here now are going to be around.

Lindsay Law:

Do you think, oh sorry I cut you off. I didn't know if you wanted me to cut you off for a sec. I'm telling them this the same time as the audience because we hadn't gotten to discussing this yet, but Bill had also directed with us *The Meeting*, which was a fictional supposition of a meeting between Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, which we actually reran this past year when Malcolm X opened in theaters. In addition to that he had directed *The Killing Floor* for us earlier. With the success at the moment with a wide variety of male and female African-American directors, do you see the range of work and material that you might be able to take on or get people to finance? Do you see that increasing in terms of our theaters having a wider diversity of experience and characters stories and lives being illuminated on our screens? I'm going to switch you on now to talk. Go ahead.

Bill Duke:

I quite honestly, I think, that there is some degree of improvement in terms of the diversity of topics that minority or black directors are allowed to deal with, but unfortunately my feeling is that there are far too few. What must always be remembered is that this is a very, very much a business, and those factors are studios basically in terms of it being a business are not going to take very many risks. If they think that the subject matter is not palatable to a large cross section of audience, which means that if you are not offending anyone they have a greater opportunity to recoup the investments that they've made in the film because more people will come and see it.

Bill Duke:

There's certain limitations in terms of what they will produce and distribute, and as long as that exists I think that black and minority filmmakers are going to still be under the auspices of an industry that really thinks of the box office rather than diversity in terms of subject matter in film.

Lindsay Law:

Do you suppose has there ever been, much the same way back in the 20's when three actors, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks and I'm forgetting who the third one was, but to fight the industry as they saw it and what they didn't like in those days, they formed their own film company. Has there ever been or have you ever been a part of conversations in which, I mean there's an enormous number of writers, directors, actors, many with enormous clout, from the African-American community in Los Angeles, has there ever been a thought of trying to pool resources and form a group that literally specifically focused in on African-American work? I'm going to switch you back on now. Go ahead.

Bill Duke:

Yes. I think that those conversations have existed long before I or any of the contemporary filmmakers that are colleagues of mine were ever on the scene. I'm sure that those things were talked about in the 20's and 30s, the 50s, the 60s, the 70s, the 80s, the 90s. The issue fundamentally is this that it's not a problem in terms of the creation of

the product. I think that money can be found to create product, to get the actors together, to get the directors together, the staff, the crew to actually create and sell products. The fundamental issue in terms of being problems is in the area of distribution and exhibition.

Bill Duke:

There are a number of films that have been made and completed projects that have not had the opportunity of distribution. Not only minorities and black films but films that distributors feel will not get them their investment back from the box office quickly enough or sufficiently enough to their judgment of how efficiently or quickly it should be done. It's not enough simply to have a great idea and have the ability to create a film product. You have to understand that marketing, distribution, and exhibition, exhibition being the actual ownership of theaters where these films are shown. You have to have some understanding of that also.

Lindsay Law:

Julie and I, she was saying the same thing to me, which was that basically that the fundamental problem in this country is that filmmaking is seen as an industry and not as an art, an art that has the possibility of teaching and healing and all that. I suppose we've blown it somehow, haven't we? Sorry, let me switch you back on. Sorry. I was suddenly listening to you fascinated. I forgot to switch the switch. Just a sec.

Bill Duke:

Hello? My belief is that we have to be multi-talented in this sense although I think many of us, including myself, would like to do nothing other than to create film ideas and to execute them to the best of our abilities. Today it does not seem to be enough because if you do not have a good business head, a good sense of business and understand the new technologies that are existing and how they impact us both positively and negatively. If we don't understand, truly, what the new arenas of distribution are, if we do not understand what the 50 new or now they're talking about 1500 new channels that are going to be available for television in the next couple of years and what it means in terms of product that we can create and opportunities and distribution of product then we're not going to be able to survive because that information is essential to our survival.

Bill Duke:

There was a time, I think, if you were a great filmmaker, as an artist there's the possibility for our survival to be based upon that, but we have to be as astute in business and the changing of the business as we are in terms of the creation of our film product.

Lindsay Law:

Yeah.

Julie Dash:

He's talking about the Pay Per View.

Lindsay Law:

The scale that you thought we'd be required to be successful, what you're doing clearly I guess then you're constantly in the learning mode of acquiring additional skills, business skills, to be able to even play on this field to make it an even playing field I suppose. Is that true?

Bill Duke:

What's that last part? I didn't hear you.

Lindsay Law:

In terms of a director today who perhaps wants to just have to worry about being able to hone a good idea and bring together a good cast and have the ability to direct those actors truthfully, nowadays that director needs not only all those skills how to make a good film and tell a good story but also how to maneuver his or her career through the shoals of an extremely complicated financial situation.

Bill Duke:

Well there's no doubt about it. You have to be a very astute business person. You can not depend upon your attorney or your agent or your lawyer to help you through this labyrinth of complexities in terms of the business of it. It's like an on the job training. It is an extremely difficult process to understand and to learn, and as a result you make mistakes, and you learn from those mistakes hopefully, and you go on to make new mistakes. One of the things that I think is essential for us to begin to understand as minority or black filmmakers is that we, although, black films and black subject matter is certainly something we should be focusing on, at the same time we have to expand our awareness, and I'm not saying this is fair or correct, but I'm saying is what I would hate to see happen is the same thing that happened to us in the 70s. We had those so called blacksploitation films, and what happened essentially that fundamentally we when those films, so called blacksploitation films, no longer were needed black filmmakers, black producers, black writers, black actors disappeared from the scene.

Bill Duke:

Then there was those among us separating from that industry and creating our own. I personally don't think that that's necessary. I think that minorities contribute a great percentage of the national box office gross in terms of the studios, and therefore we have a right to participate fully on the business level in terms of this industry, and I think we simply have to understand the name of the game and how it's played, and we have to begin to understand more fully how we can participate and be a part of this industry rather than being separate from it and utilize it for our benefit as well for the benefit of the industry and for the entire nation.

Lindsay Law:

I know you're on long shooting days there, so we wanted to thank you for joining us tonight and bringing your view of this entire situation in terms of filmmaking today and the opportunities available.

Bill Duke:

Yeah. First of all I want to thank you for the opportunity that you gave me in terms of if it wasn't for *American Playhouse* giving me a shot at more quality level of production I would not have gotten my first feature film, so I want to thank you for that. I just wanted to say Julie, I continue to be an admirer of yours and God bless you and best of luck and looking forward to your next project as well. Thank you all for having me here.

Lindsay Law:

Thanks very much.

Julie Dash:
Thank you.

Lindsay Law:
Good luck to you. Bye bye.

Julie Dash:
Well.

Lindsay Law:
Technology. That really was going back 20 years. We thought maybe we might, although it's hard to see you. We thought we might open it up a bit here. That there it is.

Julie Dash:
That's better.

Lindsay Law:
A whole group of people. To questions from all of you addressed to Julie or to myself, but mostly to Julie I would think. I guess just raise your hand.

Julie Dash:
There's someone right there.

Lindsay Law:
Right here.

Julie Dash:
Up close.

Lindsay Law:
Oh and speak loudly too. That'd be great.

Speaker 8:
[inaudible 01:13:14]filmmakers in this country have decided to remain independent and have decided to pursue their own agenda. I'm thinking of Jim Jarmusch, have had to go to foreign funders. Have you thought of going to foreign funders?

Julie Dash:
Oh absolutely. In fact there was a foreign funder who came in with *Playhouse* as a partner, WMG, a German company on *Daughters of the Dust*, and some other friends of mine like Charles Burnett, he just recently just received funding from a

Lindsay Law:
French company.

Julie Dash:
French company, yes, and I will probably have to go to a foreign funder for my next film also.

Lindsay Law:
There's an enormous appreciation in the European marketplace for independent American films. Their curiosity about this country I must say an enormous, it is enormously greater than our curiosity about them since we'll hardly put up with foreign subtitled films, but I must say they have an enormous appetite, and someone like a Jim Jarmusch is actually more well known outside the United States than he is here. Other questions? Oh no don't be shy. I think there was someone back there a moment ago. Yeah, there you are.

Speaker 9:
In terms of the duration of the project, it took how many years?

Julie Dash:
For *Daughters of the Dust*?

Speaker 9:
Yes.

Julie Dash:
It took 15 years from the time that I first, no 15 years from the time that I first started writing it and seeking funding, and from the time that *Playhouse* came in maybe one year and 28 days to shoot it. But, by the time that you came in-

Lindsay Law:
It was about two because it was almost a year of -

Julie Dash:
A year of posting.

Lindsay Law:
A year in the editing room.

Julie Dash:
Yeah. About two years. One year developing and shooting and one year posting and looking for a distributor.

Lindsay Law:
And an additional 10 months, which we never really thought would take place, an additional ten months-

Julie Dash:

To find a distributor.

Lindsay Law:

To get it into movie theaters. Yes, here.

Speaker 10:

I have a specific question about the Gullah dialect in your film. How did the actors work with that or did you have folks who were multi from James Island?

Julie Dash:

Oh, no. I hired Ron Days, who's an expert on Gullah, and he was born in the region, and he's also part of a project that's translating the Bible into Gullah. He came on board and translated the entire script phonetically into Gullah, and then he worked with the actors doing rehearsals, and he coached them in the Gullah dialect.

Speaker 10:

I haven't seen the film yet, but the older woman who was weaving the basket and stuff.

Julie Dash:

Oh, she's from Los Angeles.

Lindsay Law:

They did a remarkable job with the accent. There was enormous resistance, as Julie was saying, to keeping it that way. I suppose we've all become for one enormously lazy in terms of how we receive entertainment. We just want to be able a passive audience, and what Julie came up with which I thought was ingenious was to subtitle the first few moments of the film so that you didn't feel like you were going to be lost, and then frankly your ear just adjusts and suddenly you're not aware, but it's not subtitled anymore, and you adjust. Yes, here.

Speaker 11:

I just want to say something to you Julie. Just thank you so much for your rich images. I feel like I can't use any words that you might not have already heard, and I guess what I want to hear because it gave me so much hope as a young artist, your images. What I was wondering is what for you was the most hopeful part or the most inspiring or the thing that just enriched your life, which part?

Julie Dash:

Which part of the movie?

Speaker 11:

The whole process whether it's meeting people or selecting people. I just wanted to hear from you.

Julie Dash:

I think it's the writing. The writing is the part that I like. Well, there's segments of all of the writing. Sometimes the shooting would be just magical like those sunrises with them all chanting. Honestly some of the crew members would start weeping because we were on the actual land where the slave ships would land and drop off the African

captives, and some of those sunrises out there would just bring people to tears. Both white and black. It was just a very, very powerful type of experience, and then of course I always like editing too because then I'm back in control again.

Lindsay Law:

There was an amazing moment, I remember it was almost a full year since the movie had been shot, and you had spent a full year looking at these images again and again and again. I hadn't. I had flown in every now and then to see a different cut or a different version, but you think it's all familiar to you again because you've seen it so often, and then John Barnes who is the composer. Is that?

Julie Dash:

John Barnes, yes.

Lindsay Law:

Enters the picture, and drawing on just about every musical source that there is-

Julie Dash:

John Barnes, we decided to create kind of a new world music. Music that some of the African captives would have heard and retained while they were being marched across the savannas towards the...

Julie Dash:

...so it's remarkable and as another thing, no one in this country would, no recording studio would buy the rights to do the music as CDs or as a cassette, but they will be doing it in Japan.

Lindsay Law:

And audiences, you can perceive this though you may not know the reason how or why, but what distinguishes one movie from another movie. Why does one movie last and another not? There isn't a single unintentional element in this movie. To the point of exactly what you were just saying in terms of John, for example as a small point, but indeed he picked astrological signs for these characters and then found a key that matched that.

Lindsay Law:

Everything in this movie, although audiences may not pick up on every little detail, but the accumulation of those details and that going back to research that Julie had done, or going back to just emotions, or stories, or whatever that she had known or experienced. All of that is what indeed enriches a movie and enriches your experience while making that movie and the people around you and it affects them.

Lindsay Law:

And that's what becomes special in terms of making an independent film. That's what becomes special when you're making that movie, cause you've got to make that movie. Not because "Gee, isn't movie-making fun and they're paying me a lot of money", and sometimes when you're not sure which, why does that movie feel so different than the other movies I'm seeing. More often than not, that's the reason why. Yes, here.

Audience:

Yes, the movie was obviously an artistic success. I'm wondering how do you measure its commercial success if you can do that.

Julie Dash:
Well I always...

Audience:
At home and abroad, I mean what would be successful?

Julie Dash:
I always say the box office tells you whether it was a commercial success or not. And this particular film ran nine months straight in New York and it broke all house records in the theater that it played in, was it DC?

Lindsay Law:
In DC.

Julie Dash:
Yeah, in DC. And it did very well in Philly. So it was just,

Lindsay Law:
It generated a couple of million dollars in this country.

Julie Dash:
Well it's just opening there.

Lindsay Law:
It's just starting to open there.

Julie Dash:
This'll start in September in the United Kingdom and in Japan.

Lindsay Law:
And you're going to Rio, I hear, with this film. They had to torture her to get her to agree to go to Rio.

Audience:
I was going to just state to the commercial part. When you're making a film and you're thinking about the artistic part, do you have any idea how you're going to sort of make it a box office success commercially.

Julie Dash:
I don't really think in terms of audience that much.

Julie Dash:

Like I said earlier, I'm kind of a selfish filmmaker, since I'm an independent filmmaker. I'm making a film that I want to see. I'm addressing my needs. Then I think about the audience a little bit and I say what do African American women want to see, things like that, but I don't sit down and say, okay, I'm going to do this because this is when the audience is going to really hoot.

Julie Dash:

Or let me throw this in because it's artsy and it'll go well in the arts community. I don't think you can make a film like that, kind of piecemeal. I just think you just have to make the film that's inside of you. You just have to tell a story in a very different way. And what I always try to do is kind of rupture reality a little bit. Try to shake people up and see the world in a whole new way. See the same type of situation or story that you perhaps have seen before or heard before, the folktale or whatever dialogue, but to see it in a new way.

Audience:

You said you were familiar with the rules prior to breaking the rules. And then the gentleman on the phone, he was simply saying, so that you will not have a repeating second. For those out there who want to start to make film, how do they, let's put it this way. After you listened to all the people who objected to the film, what would you say one has to do in order to get to that point where they can become independent? To make what they want rather than just say "Am I going to be my only customer?"

Julie Dash:

I think on a certain level you do have to be willing to say, I might be my only customer.

Lindsay Law:

I think what you were calling earlier, well it's an accurate word but at first I was misunderstanding it. But the arrogance of a filmmaker is, to me, completely necessary. I mean there's a certain selfishness required to just go ahead and make it because frankly, nobody knows what elements can be put together to make a successful movie. Now, a lot of people think they know and they try to tell you what elements to put in your movie to make it successful. But since they don't know any better than you know, you might as well do what you want to do because when they're wrong and you fail on their terms, then what did you just spend two years doing? Nothing. Yes?

Audience:

I'm curious, was there a curriculum developed for the film? You mentioned earlier that some of your films were shown at-

Julie Dash:

Well, I think it's the individual instructors included in their curriculums. For instance, sometimes it's history, sometimes it's women's studies, sometimes it's African American studies, and sometimes it's linguistics, anthropology, folklore. It fits into so many different categories to be studied.

Audience:

I just wanted to thank you for the film. I know that when I saw it, there was a sigh of relief and I said, "Oh thank God here's someone who I thought understood me and my history and the black women I have in my family. I appreciated the fact that my existence as an African American woman was not totally defined by anger or by men. Even though-

Julie Dash:
Or by being a victim.

Audience:
Or a victim. So terrible parts of our existence and they were in the film in very subtle ways. So the film for the first time, I went to a film that I felt that I was understood and celebrated. And being a native New Yorker I know the back to Brooklyn, I know that. That's a story I know. Historically-

Julie Dash:
Yeah, I grew up in a project too, in New York.

Audience:
Historically my people are from John and James Island but I don't know a lot about the Gullah and all that. He was a new area of exploration for African Americans, for all people, that we need to continue to explore.

Julie Dash:
There's so many stories yet untold, yeah.

Audience:
So I appreciate it, just your interest and willingness to celebrate us. Thank you.

Audience:
Have you been able to screen your film in any African film festivals, such as Ouagadougou?

Julie Dash:
I believe it may have screened in Ouagadougou but it'll just start. It's going to be distributed in Africa at some time in 94. It's been picked up for a distribution there by a company.

Audience:
One of Phil Duke's last statements concerned not working outside of Hollywood or eventually working within the film industry structure. My question is if that structure is basically flawed and if it isn't set up or the intention there is not to work with you and to work with people who do film, quality film like *Daughters of the Dust* then I personally don't see anything wrong in going outside of that industry and doing what you have to do to get it done.

Audience:
And one of the other gentlemen raised the point about getting investors from other countries. To me it sounds like if that's what you have to do then that's what you have to do and eventually, perhaps, people in Los Angeles will wake up but if they don't, they don't. I'm surprised to hear that, considering that your film has been successful financially and just period, that you haven't been able to get a lot of backers and to get a lot of support from the film industry. I have tons of questions but I won't ask them.

Audience:

And the other thing is, when you mentioned jokingly that you would have Denzel Washington walk across the stage or do something just to get people in the audience. Do the known actors, or have any of the known actors in the industry come to help you or assist you?

Julie Dash:

Denzel Washington called. He and his wife loved the film. He took his family to see it. Wesley Snipes, he and Wesley Snipes and so many other people. They've called and said anytime you want to do anything, I'm here for you. Yes.

Lindsay Law:

There is again a handful of actors who can get movies made and the responsibility sometimes on them is enormous. I only remember learning that because Whoopi Goldberg has been somebody who, she has one kind of a career in which you know, the movies that she continues making, but meanwhile her name is enormously valuable and she attaches it to a wide variety of material, some of which, I mean most of which has just not gotten made. But with the hope that by virtue of attaching her name to it, that would be sufficient to get it made and in many cases it still hasn't been as successful as we think she is. Yes, back there in the blue shirt, I think.

Audience:

Yeah, I was curious about the talent. [inaudible] Did you use people who were indigenous to those islands? [inaudible] Particularly the older folks.

Julie Dash:

Okay. Most of the speaking actors were professional actors and I had worked with them before or I had either directing them or working as a crew member with them on other independent films. I wanted, in this particular film, I wanted to use a lot of the actors who had supported the whole new wave of African American independent films, like Charles Burnett film, Spike Lee's films, if you're familiar with them and Charles Lane's and Robert Gardener's, et cetera, you'll see the same actors in *Daughters of the Dust*. They were trained. We had to train them to use the Gullah dialect. Now a lot of the children, all of the children and a lot of the elders were locals. And they were from the region.

Audience:

What filmmakers and or films have influenced you when you were growing up? Even though you didn't intend to be a filmmaker when you were younger but for when you were in college as well.

Julie Dash:

Oh it varies. You'd like to know what films influenced me? I would, across the board, just say films that ruptured my reality, films that confused me. And most of those were foreign films. Those are the films that I remember. Those are the films that had made the most impression on me.

Julie Dash:

For instance, *Black Orpheus*. I saw that as a child on the late show. It was dubbed, but I knew they weren't speaking English, something was up. I didn't know what it was, but something was up. But you know, my mother got us up because so rarely did, see this was in the fifties, so rarely did you see black people on television. She woke us up. So we could see *Black Orpheus*. It's a Brazilian film. Fellini's *Eight and a Half*. I didn't know what the hell was going on.

So I remembered it. Films that confused me, disturbed me, provoked me, whatever, were the ones that inspired me the most.

Lindsay Law:

One last question, here.

Audience:

As someone who works in the public television system I'm extremely proud that we're embracing this type of creative richness. But in a time when you turn on network and all you see are movies of the week that reflect the news of last week tells me that we have to begin to nurture our young people. Develop outreach systems, inreach systems, so that we can keep this movement rich and vibrant with talent, so that we can begin to see movies of the week reflect our richness. I mean we just have to do it.

Audience:

So I would like to ask Mr. Law, as far as *American Playhouse* which was great, are there any formal outreach, career development, training, embracing young talent so that we can keep this movement very strong. And before you answer that question I'd like to say, I love Denzel. I love that you introduce a variety of our talent and a variety of black women's beauty and that we come in many shades. That's what was just exciting for me. But Mr. Law, what are some, are there any formal types of programs within American Playwright?

Lindsay Law:

There are two different kinds of outreach that maybe you're referring to. There's one that we've become involved in recently. It was not in place when *Daughters of the Dust* was broadcast, which is basically a company we work with and that has been financed by a variety of different companies and corporations to do outreach so that when our programs go on the air they don't go unnoticed.

Lindsay Law:

And so the children in schools, so that teachers, depending on the film, are aware of the subject matters and how it might relate to their classrooms. *Fires in the Mirror* for example, which was dealing with the riots in Crown Heights in Brooklyn, but also dealt with language, also dealt with oral history, also dealt with conflict resolution. Those areas of subject matter. Preparing materials, sending it out to schools in the hundreds of thousands, and libraries.

Lindsay Law:

In terms of career development? No, I must say we don't. The corporation for public broadcasting has had, I don't know if they presently have, it was I must say enormously limited, but they did have a limited number of internships. It was a paid internship and a variety of different people who were chosen. You applied, were placed within the public television system and the public radio system across the country.

Lindsay Law:

And I remember we had two different people come and work at our company. I must say it was minorities and female interestingly. And I ended up thinking that to a large extent, actually, it wasn't women per se that were having trouble getting a job in the industry, it was women of color who were having trouble. And asked them actually to focus only on that, but I didn't win.

Lindsay Law:

So of course one of the interns we got was actually a very talented and skillful white woman who I thought, well, this is great, but I don't know why she was going to have any trouble getting a job. But anyway, we had two different interns over a period of three years. I'm sorry to say, I don't know if that program still does exist.

Lindsay Law:

Public television has been concerned that it's developed a variety of talents within its system and once they get to a certain level of expertise, of course they go and work elsewhere. And to a large degree we kept saying, well that's fine. The job is to keep, continue the ability for turnover, for every year there to be new exciting people coming in, until they get to a level where they can choose any job that they want. And I suppose my only, I'm not involved in this particular area. I can only assume that due to the enormously and rather boringly familiar area but public television being completely under financed, this has not been a program that has been continued on a very large scale. Well, thank you all for being with us this evening.