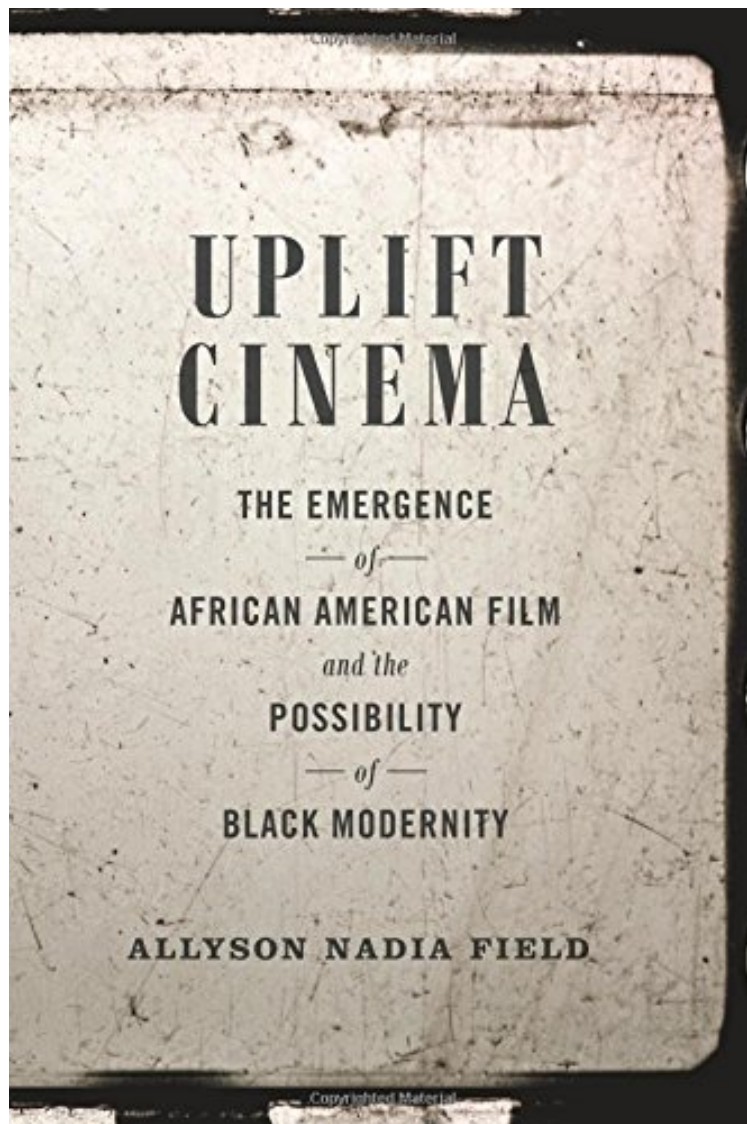


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Uplift Cinema: The Emergence of African American Film and the Possibility of Black Modernity

Allyson Nadia Field

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3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Scholarship as creative adventureBy Kevin McMahonLike an

archaeologist, more precisely, a philologist Allyson Field has sought out and examined all the extant evidence of the very earliest African American films most of which have been lost. The book is a detective story as much as a work of scholarship. But the legwork and industry wouldnt amount to much without judgment, critical acuity and imagination. Field brings a lost body of work back into focus.

In *Uplift Cinema*, Allyson Nadia Field recovers the significant yet forgotten legacy of African American filmmaking in the 1910s. Like the racial uplift project, this cinema emphasized economic self-sufficiency, education, and respectability as the keys to African American progress. Field discusses films made at the Tuskegee and Hampton Institutes to promote education, as well as the controversial *The New Era*, which was an antiracist response to D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*. She also shows how Black filmmakers in New York and Chicago engaged with uplift through the promotion of Black modernity. Uplift cinema developed not just as a response to onscreen racism, but constituted an original engagement with the new medium that has had a deep and lasting significance for African American cinema. Although none of these films survived, Field's examination of archival film ephemera presents a method for studying lost films that opens up new frontiers for exploring early film culture.

"Even before *The Birth of a Nation*, African American filmmakers envisioned cinema as a means of presenting a new image of black culture in the USA. With peerless archaeological research, Allyson Nadia Field excavates the roots of African American film within a rhetoric of social uplift. Offering more than a prologue to later black filmmaking, Field reveals the origins of an alternative film culture based in ideological address and political rhetoric, as cinema forged an effective political voice."