The idea [of the book Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films] was to examine those things that had been so important and of such great interest to me during my early formative years—African American movie history and the contributions of African American actors and actresses to Hollywood cinema … In those early decades, there had been no Black writers, no Black directors, and no Black producers. So, what audiences were shown often were these stereotyped images of African Americans, but I felt that there were these messages that were coming through in the performances by African American actors and actresses. So, I wanted to deal with those things that I had seen in a movie like Carmen Jones and really articulate all of that and explore it mainly for myself. Once I started researching the book and learned more about early independent Black cinema—race movies—I also wanted to examine this movement. I was especially fascinated by a race movie like the silent film Scar of Shame and of course, the body of work of Oscar Micheaux. Always, though, I understood the significance of Black actors and actresses in Hollywood. Often working without sensitive scripts or directors, the actors and actresses struggled to create unique characterizations within the stereotyped conceptions of their roles… These things compelled my attention, and I wanted the language I used to articulate these concerns to be direct and
In a way, it was me against the world (or the prevailing opinions) to set the record straight. I had this burning conviction to explore past Black movie history as much as possible. It was challenging and very difficult because I was breaking new ground. Yet ultimately it was very rewarding.

—D. Bogle (personal communication, November 20, 2004)

Introduction

Nationally acclaimed author of three award-winning books, Donald E. Bogle is possibly the nation's most prodigious African American film historian and critic. He is certainly the most cited (Anderson, 1997; Bates & Garner, 2001; Cripps, 1993; Dates & Barlow, 1990; Harris, 1999; Means-Coleman, 2001; 2002; Orbe & Strother, 1996; Toll, 1974). Despite having a modest goal of exploring Black performances just for his own understanding, as the opening quotation suggests, Bogle's work has transcended those ambitions and gained him considerable recognition. He has appeared on such television programs as Good Morning America, The Today Show, Nightline, The Charley Rose Show, Entertainment Tonight, Donahue, and Showtime's It's Black Entertainment; he has lectured across the United States at hundreds of colleges, universities, and civic organizations; and he has written for popular magazines such as Film Comment, Ebony, Essence, and Spin. Bogle was a commentator for the HBO special Mo’ Funny: Black Comedy in America (Bogle, 1990c) and the recent American Movie Classic (AMC) channel documentary on African Americans in the movies: Small Steps, Big Strides (Bogle, 1997b).

Bogle has been a commentator for several televised specials and documentaries while also curating film retrospectives for museums and theaters that pertain to African American film history as diverse as the careers of Sidney Poitier and Dorothy Dandridge to blaxploitation cinema and the images of African American women throughout Hollywood history (Bolden, 1999). He has conducted public interviews of such figures as Sidney Poitier, Cicely Tyson, Spike Lee, and Morgan Freeman. Film director Lee proclaimed, “Mr. Bogle continues to be our most noted Black-cinema historian” (Lee, 1992, p. ix). At Lee’s request, Bogle also wrote the introduction—a look at the depiction of Black jazz musicians in movies—for Lee’s companion book for his film Mo’ Better Blues (Bogle, 1990b).

Although he has a strong background in literature and a host of experiences working in print media (for Ebony and Doubleday Books), from an early age Bogle embarked on a rigorous course of independent study of film history and criticism that led to the publication of his first book. Even as a child, he was no stranger to media, especially print journalism. His father, John D. Bogle, was vice president and advertising director of The Philadelphia Tribune, the nation's oldest continuously published African American newspaper. Growing up in a large family (that included an extended family of aunts, uncles, and cousins in neighboring communities), Bogle and his siblings heard their parents discuss social, political, and cultural issues at the breakfast and dinner table. At large family gatherings, there would be conversations about any number of African American dignitaries—Langston Hughes, Jackie Robinson, Dorothy Dandridge, W. E. B. DuBois, or Billie Holiday, among others. He occasionally accompanied his father to the office on Saturdays to browse through the Tribune's library. He was reared to appreciate the arts, media, African American culture, and ongoing social and political concerns of the Black community.

In some respects, Bogle believed he had a typical childhood. He enjoyed baseball, but never
felt he was as good at it as he wanted to be. His favorite sport was basketball, yet he never had any illusions about being a great basketball star because of his height. Bogle suffered from severe asthma attacks (and later debilitating migraine headaches), so he spent hours in front of the television watching all types of programs. He was particularly fascinated by old films, especially those in which African American performers appeared. In fact, in the late 1950s, he decided “to run away from home and go live at the movies” (Bogle, 2002, p. xx). That day, he saw (in Technicolor) Dorothy Dandridge and a host of other African American stars in Otto Preminger's Black-cast musical Carmen Jones. For the young asthmatic Bogle, moviegoing (whether in theaters or in front of the television) was a journey, perhaps an escape into a different world. Bogle withdrew into another sphere where, as he revealed in a personal interview, “I thought movies were real” (D. Bogle, personal communication, November 20, 2004). Bogle discovered that screen images were not only compelling but also instructive. The movies seemed to be creating a series of narratives about race, culture, and relationships. He decided to see every movie in which Black actors and actresses were shown. He later committed to chronicling and critiquing the vast array of cinematic and televisual depictions of Blacks and has since dedicated his life toward that end.

Bogle's book, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & Bucks* (Bogle, 1973), was named Best Film Book of the Year by the Theatre Library Association, which hosted an intimate literary ceremony at Lincoln Center's Library of the Performing Arts. In 1987, he wrote and executive-produced (with Joerg Klebe of German Education Television) the four-part, four-hour PBS television series *Brown Sugar: Eighty Years of America's Black Female Superstars* (Bogle, 1987), which he adapted from his book of the same title (Bogle, 1980). The series was awarded the American Women in Radio and Television Award of Excellence. In 2001, *Primetime Blues* (Bogle, 2001), was celebrated with the American Library Association Black Caucus' Image Award. Bogle received an honorary doctorate degree from his alma mater, Lincoln University in 1998. To date, Bogle has edited a three-part book series titled *Black Arts Annual: 1989–1990* (Bogle, 1990a) and has authored six books. The sixth and latest one, *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams: The Story of Black Hollywood* (Bogle, 2005), systematically examines the various challenges and issues confronted by Black Hollywood actors and actresses from the early years of the twentieth century through the late 1950s and mid-1960s.

While developing his passion for film history, Bogle worked with one of the nation's premier film directors: Otto Preminger, director of *Carmen Jones* and *Porgy and Bess*. Bogle interviewed scores of Black actors and actresses, including Fredi Washington (an actress featured in *Imitation of Life* and *Emperor Jones*), Mantan Moreland, Eddie Anderson, Vivian Dandridge (Dorothy Dandridge's sister), Cicely Tyson, and Morgan Freeman. Each of these experiences has helped Bogle in his search for knowledge about African American film history.

As a professor at both New York University and the University of Pennsylvania, and as an occasional freelance writer for popular magazines, Bogle has established an impressive interdisciplinary presence in academe and beyond. As a leading authority on Black film and television history, he frequently speaks to varied audiences on the lecture circuit and does media commentary concerning screen representations of Blacks. Although the archetypes of toms, coons, mulattoes, mammies, and bucks were discussed in early studies of Black film history, Bogle's comprehensive examination of these stereotypes has introduced these character profiles to several generations of Americans.

**Biographical Information**
Donald E. Bogle was born in Philadelphia in the early 1950s and grew up in a suburb outside of Philadelphia (D. Bogle, personal communication, November 20, 2004). He is the son of the late John D. Bogle, who was vice president and advertising director of The Philadelphia Tribune, and Roslyn Woods Bogle, who was a homemaker and very active in community affairs. John Bogle was a college-educated, Washington, D.C. native, born of a middle-class background. He attended Virginia Seminary and later earned his bachelor of arts degree in history from Langston College. Shortly thereafter, he began working for the Baltimore Afro American newspaper and later moved to Philadelphia to help run The Philadelphia Tribune, the newspaper of which Donald's older brother Robert Bogle is now publisher. John Bogle was known to be a dynamic speaker and a highly charismatic man determined to fight for the rights of African Americans.

Bogle's mother, Roslyn Woods Bogle, was raised in an upper-class family in Virginia, part of the Black southern elite. Her father, Robert Clisson Woods, was president of Virginia Theological Seminary. Perhaps because of her father's public and community roles, Roslyn Woods Bogle developed a strong appreciation for the arts and high culture at an early age. Conversant in such wide-ranging topics as politics, current events, social issues and concerns, and literature, she also paid close attention to American popular culture, as did her husband. At the same time, she was a down-to-earth, deeply spiritual individual who, although known for her civic activities, was quite a private person who enjoyed reading. In this respect, Bogle feels a similarity to his mother. Although he has been fascinated by the personal histories of so many people he has met over the years, he very rarely feels comfortable discussing his own life.

The youngest of six children of Robert Woods Bogle and his wife Nellie Hunter Woods, Roslyn never knew her mother (she died when Roslyn was only a year old). She was raised by her paternal grandmother and aunt until her father remarried. Her father and his new wife, Nellie Hunter Woods, had three more children. As a child, Roslyn was a voracious reader. She excelled in Latin, mathematics, and literature. Yet because she was a true free spirit, she decided not to pursue a college education—a decision motivated by her elopement with John Bogle while still a teenager. Both wanted a large family. After having children, Roslyn consistently encouraged each of them to pursue an education. She always believed that a solid foundation came from reading as much as possible on any number of subjects and that reading was the beginning of one's personal intellectual growth and the first step in a life of independent study.

At a young age, Bogle was excited to learn that his mother had been well-connected to community leaders and dignitaries of her day, such as the poet/critic Sterling Brown and Alain Locke. In October 2004, Roslyn Woods Bogle's civic contributions and love for literature and the arts were recognized by Lincoln University in Pennsylvania with the establishment of the Roslyn Woods Bogle Reading Room. Bogle's parents were, of course, the most important influences on his formative development and interests in media.

Bogle was born during the post–World War era, when television was a brand new technological innovation and Hollywood movies were in a period of transition. Blacks had been in films since the Black character Mungo appeared in the 1769 production of The Padlock. During the years of silent motion pictures, when Hollywood itself was just taking shape and when Black roles were sometimes played by Whites in blackface, African Americans gradually found a place in the film industry, usually by playing comic servant roles. After the talkie (i.e., talking film) era began in the late 1920s, more African Americans were seen playing actual roles in films—especially during the Depression era, when performers...
such as Stepin Fetchit, Hattie McDaniel, Louise Beavers, Paul Robeson, and Eddie “Rochester” Anderson became well-known to mainstream audiences. Yet, more often than not, Black actors were still saddled with stereotyped roles. In the late 1940s and 1950s, however, films such as *Home of the Brave*, *Pinky*, *Carmen Jones*, and *The Defiant Ones*, which featured performers such as James Edwards, Dorothy Dandridge, and Sidney Poitier, redefined the cinematic landscape with the depiction of controversial themes. Audiences saw more sympathetic portrayals of Black characters than ever before. Indeed, as Bogle posited,

During and after World War II, American films—and American audiences—changed and lost their innocence. A world war had been fought in part against fascism abroad. Now some believed there was a battle to be fought at home. At this time many Americans underwent their first pangs of guilt. Many people experienced a “liberal” urge to right old wrongs. Sometimes in films the Negro was used as a metaphor for social inequities and injustices. With Sidney Poitier, mainstream audiences saw the rise of the Negro as social symbol. Often at the movies old wrongs were corrected in a patronizing or condescending manner. But significant changes did come about … The new opportunities benefited the entertainers while paving the way for the emergence of sympathetic Negro character roles in feature films … these new Negro characters were used for social statements, and they often paid homage to the democratic way of life. (Bogle, 2002, p. 137; D. Bogle, personal communication, January 28, 2005)

The late 1940s and early 1950s signaled a critical juncture, not only for the film industry but also for the United States, which was in the midst of a racial crisis marked by civil unrest and court battles leading to school desegregation (e.g., *Brown v. Board of Education* and James Meredith’s integration of the University of Mississippi). Despite this historical epoch, Bogle had a relatively uneventful childhood, consisting primarily of his undying thirst for knowledge about Blacks in film.

**Academic Background and Experience**

Bogle attended predominately White schools until college, when he enrolled at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. His elementary and secondary school experiences were not memorable, but Bogle distinctly recalls having an excellent elementary English teacher named Ms. Daly and a wonderful high school literature teacher named Ms. O’Neal, who energized his interest in writing. Having teachers who were fair and open-minded was significant for Bogle because although his elementary and high school educators prided themselves on being “liberal,” many of the racial attitudes and perspectives of White teachers were still heavily affected and tempered by the sociopolitical climate of the late 1950s and 1960s. These two teachers facilitated Bogle’s already growing passion for literature. To major in film studies still was not possible at most colleges and universities; therefore, Bogle knew he would major in literature. Although he planned not to go to college at one point, Bogle’s parents insisted that he enroll. It took some coaxing before Bogle could willingly accept the idea of going to college, but after his visit to the Lincoln University campus, he was so enamored with what he saw of campus life that he decided almost instantly to attend. He remembered,

My parents felt that going to a Black school would be very important for my development, and they were right. It was one of the best experiences I have ever had. I was particularly excited about the fact that learning did not stop outside the classroom. We often saw our professors outside of the class. Sometimes we would
have coffee with them in the Student Union Building. Or some professors invited students to their homes for dinners with their families. (D. Bogle, personal communication, November 20, 2004)

Literature professors H. Alfred Farrell and Edward Groff and dramatic literature professor Lou Putnam had a profound impact on Bogle's understanding of dramatic writing. In fact, Groff encouraged Bogle's interest in film history and criticism as an area of study. Because of Groff's vast knowledge of movie history, Bogle consulted with him often while writing his first book, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (Bogle, 1973). Emery Wimbish, Director of Lincoln University's Langston Hughes Memorial Library, was also important to Bogle's development. Wimbish frequently ordered special books from other collections at Bogle's request and kept the library well-stocked with important periodicals. Seemingly casual conversations with these professors—about films, literature, or current events (especially those focusing on the growing civil rights and Black Power movements)—proved meaningful for Bogle.

After graduating with honors from Lincoln University, Bogle decided to pursue his master's degree, with a focus on creative writing, at Indiana University. He received some mentoring from creative writing professor William Wilson and found most of his literature classes stimulating, but he was often the only African American in his classes, especially his writing courses. Bogle found the atmosphere at the university a rather isolating environment in which to study and he yearned to learn more about film history. At Indiana University, he was fortunately able to view a number of old films, and although he formed a number of friendships with other students on campus, he chose not to return after his second year of study. He briefly took time off and then took graduate courses at Columbia University, although he never completed his master's degree.

Bogle chose not to allow graduate school aspirations to dictate the course of his life. Because of his ever-growing interest in Black film history, Bogle briefly worked at *Ebony* magazine and (in New York) for Otto Preminger, the acclaimed director and producer of such films as *Carmen Jones* (Bogle's favorite childhood film) and *Porgy and Bess*. To get the job with Preminger, Bogle sent him a letter describing his interest in and enthusiasm for the film industry. Miraculously, Preminger gave him a chance to work as a story editor, reading books and scripts to help Preminger decide which film projects to pursue. This was late in Preminger's career, and it was an excellent opportunity for Bogle—working alongside such an esteemed and celebrated member of an elite group of movie producers. An added benefit was working in Preminger's executive office suite on Fifth Avenue in New York City. Furthermore, because Preminger had worked with Dorothy Dandridge (whom Bogle had seen on-screen when he was young), Bogle could get detailed responses to questions he had about Dandridge's life and career—answers and insights that only an insider would have. Through Preminger, Bogle also met and interviewed Dorothy Dandridge's older sister Vivian, who proved immensely important to Bogle when he pieced together Dorothy Dandridge's life for his book, *Dorothy Dandridge: A Biography* (Bogle, 1997a).

After working for Preminger, Bogle returned briefly to graduate work. He was dissatisfied with his studies, however, because he still could not study the history and contributions of African Americans in motion pictures. So he embarked on an ambitious and demanding period of independent scholarly research. He recalled,

> When I look back on that time in my life, I still see it as exciting and invigorating. I put myself on a tough, rigorous schedule of reading just about everything I could on
general film history as well as volumes of film criticism and countless biographies and autobiographies. At the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, I began digging through their files and Black periodicals to unearth information on African Americans in films. I did the same at Lincoln Center's Library of the Performing Arts. In time, I drew up extensive lists of old films that I sought to find and view. I would see films wherever possible. I'd check the television listings each week to see what films were scheduled. In this era before the advent of VCR's, I'd sometimes get up at two or three in the morning to view an old film in which an African American appeared. It might be The Mad Miss Manton with Hattie McDaniel or Buck Benny Rides Again with Eddie “Rochester” Anderson or Show Boat with Paul Robeson and Hattie McDaniel. (D. Bogle, personal communication, November 20, 2004)

Bogle went to screenings at the Museum of Modern Art and viewed old films at revival houses in New York. Despite not being able to locate every film in the Library of Congress that he wanted to see, he found himself viewing films from private collections to uncover more information about Black actors and actresses who worked in films. He interviewed performers living in New York who had worked for Oscar Micheaux and eventually traveled to Los Angeles, where he met with and interviewed King Vidor (director of the 1929 Hollywood Black-cast film Hallelujah) and actors Mantan Moreland and Clarence Muse, among others. Bogle became increasingly fascinated by the responses of African American audiences to films, particularly the covert messages they detected in the performances of certain actors and actresses. He interviewed older relatives and friends about films they saw in the past and questioned contemporaries about their reactions to more recent movies. Bogle was influenced by film critics Pauline Kael and Andrew Sarris and read everything Kael wrote. He admitted, “I was stimulated by her clarity, her energy, her extraordinary insights, her knowledge of movie history, her lack of pretentiousness, her honesty, and her humor” (D. Bogle, personal communication, November 20, 2004). Bogle discovered the critical observations of Black critics such as Sterling Brown and L. D. Reddick, who were navigating uncharted waters by taking the images of African Americans in literature or film seriously, long before it was intellectually fashionable to do so. This was an intense period of reading, viewing films, interviewing, and reflecting that was rich and rewarding. In fact, Bogle asserted, “It laid the foundation for my first book, Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films” (D. Bogle, personal communication, January 28, 2005).

Contributions to Communication Research

When contemporary communication scholars think of the nature and scope of communication inquiry, film studies often are assigned to another school, college, or department. Nonetheless, many of the nation's most well-trained film specialists, producers, directors, writers, critics, and performers were educated in mass communication departments comprised of print, radio, television, and film studies. Others came from a host of other disciplines such as English, business, sociology, and political science. Bogle was trained in literature and he now teaches at the University of Pennsylvania and New York University's Tisch School for the Arts. Despite his literature background, Bogle has influenced countless communication scholars intrigued by stereotypical images of Blacks on television and in cinema. To effectively capture the simultaneous breadth and focus of his work, this segment of the chapter accents five of his most pivotal works: Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films (Bogle, 1973), Brown Sugar: Eighty Years of America's Black Female Superstars (Bogle, 1980), Blacks in American Films and Television: An

Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films (1973)

As the epigraph for this chapter suggests, Bogle began his line of research on Black performers’ roles and representations in film as a result of a childhood curiosity about the making of cinema. Although some cinemagoers were entertained by the acting, narrative coherence, or visual effects, Bogle found himself so thoroughly engrossed in the screen images that he felt he was actually “living” the film. He maintained,

As a kid, I felt the movies were really real and I guess a lot of other kids have felt that way. I couldn't understand how people on movie screens got their faces blown up the way they did, and how they got to these Olympian sizes. And I saw afterwards you could go back and meet them. That, I thought was compelling. And when I talk about television [in my work], I would see a lot of old movies on television. That was when I first became interested in African Americans in movies, because the old films you might see on TV were ones like the Shirley Temple movies where you would see Bill Bojangles Robinson or the old Charlie Chan movies with Mantan Moreland and so forth. I began watching them and I couldn't understand why I wasn't seeing more of the Black performers. And, when they were offscreen I would always wonder, “Well, where are they?” (D. Bogle, personal communication, November 20, 2004)

While being drawn to these images, identifying with the Black performers, and having these interrogations, Bogle pursued the answers to his own questions. When asking his elementary schoolteachers and peers about Black thespians, he noticed their constantly dismissive responses. After completing high school and then college at an early age, he decided to investigate the careers and lives of these “larger-than-life” actors and actresses.

In the fourth edition of Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & Bucks (2002), Bogle uncovered more than 90 years of film history in 10 chapters and a little more than 450 pages filled with cast posters, still shots, and portraits. Each chapter, beginning with the early 1900s, represents a decade of films. The book ends with a discussion of films of the 1990s and into the new millennium. The idea was to chronicle and critically explain the development and perpetuation of stock minstrel characters presented as meek and kowtowing uncle toms; groveling, bulging-eyed coons; light-skinned, tragic mulattoes; nurturing mammies; and brutal, maniacal bucks.

Bogle poured all his energies into the research for this book. As he recalled,

When I received the final copy of this book, it looked like it had shrunk tremendously. I had imagined it to be a manuscript that was at least ten feet high, because my first draft was very, very long. It was very difficult to write because there was virtually nothing else available at the time [to use as a resource]. I had to make a place for myself, because no one was really talking about Black popular culture. Now, there is plenty. (D. Bogle, personal communication, November 20, 2004)

After the release of this book, Bogle received many invitations for speaking engagements and was pleased to know that he had a receptive audience despite being steadfast in completing the project primarily as a way to satisfy his own interests. Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies...

It is the first volume of its kind to assemble an interpretive history of facts, films, performers, and performances. (In this context, interpretive refers to both Bogle's method and critical-reflective writing process.) As with most of his books, Bogle not only viewed films but also interviewed as many people as possible. No one was really talking about Black popular culture and the effects of its images on audiences, although much more is being written today. Nonetheless, Bogle felt he had to make a place for himself. It is evident via the content, approach, and style of his writing that Bogle did that by viewing every film he could and taking copious notes about the total production of the films, including plot lines, climaxes, genres, behaviors, and quirks. His underlying philosophic approach was that of a critical film ethnographer interested in exploring the unspoken and unwritten nuances in the films. Critical ethnography is about identifying experiences, exploring semantic changes in meaning over time, and implicitly advocating social change.

Initially, Bogle hoped to provide some documentation (at least a mention) and interpretation of every film in which an African American appeared in a significant role. As he toured the United States for book signings and speaking engagements, Bogle was often asked about African American women in popular culture—not only those women who appeared in films but also women such as Josephine Baker, Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Ethel Waters. These women made occasional or one-time-only film appearances, but they were known primarily for their successful careers in music or on the stage. Bogle became interested in focusing on images of African American women in popular entertainment: films, theatre, music, and television. This research led to the writing of Brown Sugar: Eighty Years of America’s Black Female Superstars (Bogle, 1980).

Brown Sugar: Eighty Years of America’s Black Female Superstars (1980)

Brown Sugar: Eighty Years of America's Black Female Superstars was an extension of Bogle's cartography of Blacks in films to include other areas of popular culture. He wanted to explore the unique challenges and issues facing African American female entertainers and to reveal the particular achievements of those women who challenged the male-dominated (usually white male-dominated) world of show business. In fact, as the title of Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & Bucks implies, even the roles of women in film were different. No matter whether the roles were played by Ethel Waters, Fredi Washington, Josephine Baker, Marian Anderson, Billie “Lady Day” Holliday, or Dorothy Dandridge—they were different from the roles of male actors. Black female performers in films expected to be typecast as either a mulatto or a mammy. But what intrigued Bogle most, as he recounted, was the following:

At hundreds of college campuses across the country, I spoke on Black film history … What always impressed and sometimes surprised me most were the great number of questions asked about Black female entertainers—in movies and out. The questions were endless. How did Josephine Baker's career begin? Why had Baker never been as great a sensation in the States as she was in Europe? … What did Ethel Waters do before she became the prototypical Black matriarch in films? … Why hadn’t Dorothy Dandridge made more movies? Who were Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey? (Bogle, 1980, p. 11)

Bogle realized that African American women in music and nightclubs had far more control over their images than film actresses who had to work with a script. He became fascinated by
the way female musical performers created their own personae. This interest sparked another line of inquiry that was still aligned with his writing trajectory because he had always been enthralled by Dorothy Dandridge in particular. When Bogle embarked on the project, he discovered an endless well of information about the films and the personal lives of the performers. In some cases, he had to be selective about how much to say about their public and/or private lives. The first draft of the book ended up being a gigantic manuscript that had to be cut in half before going to press. In keeping with the first book, the result was an illustrative chronology of Black female superstars (not only in film but also in other areas of popular entertainment) from 1900 to the late 1970s. He explicated their personal backgrounds, the sociopolitical climate of the entertainment industry, their performer personae, and any industry challenges they encountered. Each decade was introduced as an era. For example, the second chapter, which covers 1900 to 1920, was titled “Beginnings,” the fourth chapter, which covers the 1930s, was titled “Pop Myths,” and the final chapter, which examines the 1970s, was titled “Survivors.” Bogle addressed three motifs of Black female representations: sex symbol, social symbol, and political symbol. (These motifs were also true for Black male performers.) Bogle's exploration of entertainers as divas was varied as he explained that divas were not just well-fit and curvaceous women; they were overweight. Despite depictions of divas as nonmaternal, Bogle contended that even a youthful and shapely Ethel Waters was billed as Sweet Mama Stringbean. Black female entertainers of the 1920s and 1930s were superstars, not only because of what they endured but also because they possessed other talents besides acting. They had to be quintessential performers. The film profiles of early blues-singing artists such as Josephine Baker, Ethel Waters, Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Ida Cox, Alberta Hunter, and many others proved that these women known for their lucrative “race records” were exceptional. These women, almost all of whom grew up in the lower class, were entertainers who were stylistically innovative, had uncompromising talent, and knew how to move audiences emotionally. Black actresses were appropriately known more broadly as entertainers who were dancers, singers, instrumentalists, comedians, and socialites. They had to be more than sex symbols and entertainers; they were social and political symbols as well. As social symbols, their celebrity was an amenity few other Blacks enjoyed and despite the challenges with racism, sexism, racial segregation, and exclusion, Black female entertainers were more privileged than most Blacks. Their high-profile status placed heavy demands on them from their local and cultural communities. Much like today's entertainers, they were expected to be role models and (more importantly) political symbols who would without hesitation stand up and fight for social justice, racial progress, and cultural parity.

Bogle confronted a serious problem (that he rarely discussed) while writing Brown Sugar. He suffered from debilitating migraine headaches that could last for four or five days, during which time he could not work. He remembered,

I couldn’t have any lights on. Nor could I have loud music. Just nothing. With migraines, you usually just stay in a dark room, hoping the darn things will pass. For a time, too, I could not commit to social engagements because I never knew when a migraine might put me out of commission. I learned to work my way around the headaches as much as I could. (D. Bogle, personal communication, January 28, 2005)

Despite the headaches, Bogle persevered and continued his long hours of work on the book. Upon completing Brown Sugar, Bogle had hoped to write a companion volume on African American male images in popular culture, which would include an examination of images of Black athletes and music stars. But literary agents and publishers expressed little interest in
the subject, and Bogle felt those reactions were very telling. *Brown Sugar* has been celebrated as a book and as a PBS television series. While developing the show, Bogle spent an inordinate amount of time researching and gaining access to film footage (in addition to traveling back and forth from New York to Los Angeles to do interviews). It was a labor of love that was a culmination of his years of activities engaged in the film industry. The four-part, four-hour series that aired in 1987 was executive-produced by Bogle and Joerg Klebe of German Education Television. The series instantly won rave reviews, and Bogle was honored that year with a special award from the American Women in Radio & Television for the series.

*Blacks in American Films and Television: An Illustrated Encyclopedia (1988)*

While Bogle was completing *Brown Sugar: Eighty Years of America's Black Female Superstars*, he was invited to do an encyclopedia about Blacks in American films by Jeff Conrad, a friend and previous colleague from Doubleday Books (who had moved to Garland Publishing). Although not part of his future writing plans, Bogle was flattered by the offer and decided to pursue the project. He had to immediately begin working on it after he completed production of the television series *Brown Sugar: Eighty Years of America's Black Female Superstars*, which was difficult because he was used to taking breaks between projects.

The encyclopedia was an all-consuming project that required numerous screenings of films that Bogle had never seen or films that he wanted to screen again. As he had done with *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks*, he screened old films at the Library of Congress as well as on television, at film festivals, at movie revival theatres, and through private collectors. Bogle saw the book as a very important contribution to the literature concerning Blacks in film and television. In fact, his encyclopedia would be the first of its kind.

Bogle's tasks included cataloguing and offering a critique of the films and television shows plus discussing their origins (if from a book or theatrical play), production, directing, scriptwriting, casting, release dates, and storyline. With films and then television shows presented in alphabetical order, the book permitted Bogle to tie his various works together in one place as a resource for film and television enthusiasts. Rather than end the book with descriptions of the television shows, Bogle added bonus materials that featured brief biographies of nearly 125 performers, including Bill Bojangles Robinson, Mantan Moreland, Oscar Micheaux, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dandridge, Hattie McDaniel, Cicely Tyson, and Pam Grier.

*Dorothy Dandridge: A Biography (1997)*

After reviewers heralded the book and award-winning television series *Brown Sugar: Eighty Years of America's Black Female Superstars*, Bogle was surprised that publishers were so dismissive of his prospectus for a book on Dorothy Dandridge. Because most editors at major publishing houses were not familiar with Dandridge (who was remembered primarily only within the African American community), they did not understand the importance of her life and career. Several major publishing houses passed on Bogle's book proposal before a small, Black-owned publishing house, Amistad Press, expressed interest in the project. Not only was Bogle excited that Amistad was supportive of the biography but was even more impressed by the staff's awareness of Dandridge's then unacknowledged icon status in movie/cultural history. Bogle had waited a very long time to do this book, and it proved not only challenging to write but became a favorite writing project as well. He noted in an interview, “There was never a moment I did not want to go to the computer to write about
The writing of *Dorothy Dandridge: A Biography* began long before any words were written. It began the day Otto Preminger spoke at length with a young Donald Bogle about Dorothy Dandridge as an entertainer, as a woman, and as an actress in *Carmen Jones*. It continued when Bogle interviewed Dorothy Dandridge's sister, Vivian Dandridge, and when he worked hard to gain access to old newspaper clippings, memorabilia, and even to the homes Dandridge owned. During a period of five years, Bogle, with the assistance of an excellent researcher Phil Bertelsen (now a film director), meticulously researched the book. Bogle traveled back and forth from his home in Manhattan to his “second home” in Los Angeles. Years were spent interviewing Dandridge's friends, acquaintances, and professional associates. Years were also spent going through microfilm of old newspapers and magazines at various libraries on the east and west coasts. Of great importance was material Bogle found at the Academy of Arts and Sciences Library in Los Angeles. He also did research at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at New York Public Library and at Lincoln Center's Library of the Performing Arts. Bogle also searched everywhere for photographs of Dandridge. Today, he has an excellent and extensive personal archive of photos and print material on Blacks in films and television and, of course, an extensive collection of material on Dandridge. Bogle's complete collection is one of the best in the country and he hopes that someday it will go to a university or museum.

Dorothy Dandridge, a Cleveland, Ohio native, was described as having a “razor-sharp intensity,” “haughty glamour,” and “breathtaking beauty” (Bogle, 1988, p. 375). Her performances in *Carmen Jones* and *Porgy and Bess* were testimony to all these characteristics. Dandridge was talented, bright, witty, and humorous both on-screen and offscreen, which made her death all the more disturbing. Bogle explains that with 32 movies and short films to her credit, Dandridge died of a drug overdose at the young age of 42, eclipsing a career that was prolific but still in its beginning stages. She had already reached stardom and was an icon to young Blacks all over the United States. Bogle remembers,

> My parents spoke of Dandridge much as they did Jackie Robinson: as someone distinct and pioneering; someone who was altering mainstream conceptions of what Black Americans could or could not do. From what I gathered, Dandridge was an altogether unique and unprecedented cultural phenomenon: a successful Black dramatic actress in Hollywood and perhaps Black America's first bonafide movie star, already a glowing figure of legend and glamour. (Bogle, 1997a, p. XIII)

*Dorothy Dandridge: A Biography* is an amazing, 613-page fitting tribute to the Dandridge family. The book explores Dorothy Dandridge's life from before her birth, through the day of her untimely death, and to the weeks and months after as news-reporting agencies scrambled to make sense of her overdose. Bogle takes time to offer painstaking details about Dorothy being born into a “broken” family and what that meant for her life and her search for identity. Indeed, after reading the book, it is difficult not to see Dandridge as a phenomenon who overcame many obstacles throughout her life. She will always be remembered as the first Black woman to be nominated for the Best Actress Award by the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences for her performance as self-titled character in the film *Carmen Jones*.

*Dorothy Dandridge: A Biography* is segmented into three parts that cover her childhood, early career, and height of stardom, respectively. It is a highly sensitive treatment of her family life, love life, and professional proclivities—even examining the intricacies of her experience in nightclubs, and of course Hollywood, as places very unwelcoming to Blacks during her
lifetime. Bogle was careful to present readers with a comprehensive snapshot of her personality, whims, attitudes, and perspectives via sundry correspondences, photographs, movie stills, interview excerpts, newspaper articles, and personal conversations with her family. Although Bogle's other books provided compendia filled with trivia about Black film history, this biography was also an important contribution to communication studies (along with Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammys & Bucks) as a narrative exemplar.


The writing of Prime Time Blues came on the heels of Bogle's completion of Dorothy Dandridge: A Biography. Bogle had just finished composing an introduction for a book titled A Separate Cinema: Fifty Years of Black Cast Posters (Bogle, 1992), which put the spotlight on John Kisch and Edward Mapp's (Kisch & Mapp, 1992) movie posters. Bogle was approached by the publishers of Kisch and Mapp's book (Farrar, Straus, & Giroux) to do a volume about Black representations on television. Bogle already wrote several books chronicling Blacks in film and created an encyclopedia that included Blacks in television, but he had never treated television as a totally separate topic for a book. This was his opportunity. He signed the contract and began writing immediately, but it was a different writing experience because he was still a bit exhausted from having just completed Dorothy Dandridge: A Biography (a manuscript that was more than 1000 pages long in draft form).

Nonetheless, Bogle was enchanted with the idea of doing a book about Blacks on network television. Because the decade-by-decade chronological approach worked well in previous books, Bogle maintained that same organizing structure. Primetime Blues offers an impressive array of descriptions and critiques of Black televisual images. As one critic notes,

Taken simply as a catalogue of appearances by African Americans on television over the past sixty years ... Bogle seems to have watched every episode of every TV show that ever featured Blacks, from Beulah and Amos n' Andy in the early days, to the slew of UPN shows now, with stops along the way for hits like Julia, Sanford and Son, and The Cosby Show and the many all too brief series like Get Christie Love. He discusses all of them, not just the shows in general, but individual episodes, plus TV movies and Black themed episodes of White shows. (http://BrothersJudd.com, 2004)

Primetime Blues was somewhat risky for Bogle because his forte has always been primarily film. He arduously worked to bring film and television texts to bear with a critical, scholarly lens. It has never been an easy task, but it has been a rewarding one. In 2001, Bogle received the American Library Association's Black Caucus Distinguished Book Award for this book. Although Bogle has been criticized for not bringing enough scholarly interpretation and analysis to his examination of Blacks in film history, he is indisputably America's most significant film historian chronicling screen images of Blacks. Primetime Blues is another piece of evidence that proves his importance to this area of inquiry.

Conclusion

Donald Bogle has always been unafraid to delve into the affective domain of everyday living rather than having a purely scientized and detached way of thinking about life. His worldview has been influenced by what he has understood over the years to be the principal function of cinema—to cause people to emote and to reconsider how they live. Bogle passionately
believes that scholars should avoid allowing the scientific to inhibit and interfere with the emotive habitat in which human beings find themselves most often. He also remains committed to observing the responses and needs of African American audiences as to what they see on the big and little screens. So in all of his books, Bogle attempts to strike a balance between an objective critical examination and a more personal biographical look at cinematic and televisual performances. The significance of this is its experiential return to a basic understanding that we are all citizens who live in a world with people who maintain competing identities and contradictory impulses. These inner tensions and social ambiguities are hard to capture purely via empirical studies or personal biographies alone.

Bogle's latest book, *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams: The Story of Black Hollywood* (Bogle, 2005) gives more evidence of Bogle's point of view: It offers a behind-the-scenes, critical exploration of Black Hollywood actors and actresses of the 1910s through the mid-1960s, describing the way they lived and socialized. He notes what their lives were like onscreen and off-screen, paying attention to the intricacies of their everyday lives and how that affected their careers. The period between 1910 and the late 1950s is what Bogle identifies as the “old Black Hollywood,” a time when Black performers still struggled to get positive roles and still lived in segregated enclaves in the exurbs of Los Angeles. The book also provides a portrait of Los Angeles itself, which in some respects was a segregated city. Nonetheless, *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams* points out that a vibrant, exciting social scene flourished in Black Los Angeles, with Black nightclubs, theatres, and grand hotels such as the Dunbar on Central Avenue (the great Black thoroughfare).

It was a time when stereotypes were broken and more Black independent filmmakers began to emerge. It was also a time of economic and racial strife. During the beginning of the Great Depression and after the stock market crash, Black actors and actresses had a hard time getting work and could hardly be selective about the parts they received if they chose to maintain theatrical performance as their primary occupation.

The end of the “old Black Hollywood” era was also the beginning of widespread television viewing in American homes (shows such as *Beulah* began to make it on the air). It was also an era that saw Black stars—such as Nat “King” Cole, Sammy Davis Jr., and Dorothy Dandridge—function in a more integrated movie capital, live in areas previously closed to African Americans, and socialize more with the larger Hollywood community. In a review, *Library Journal* wrote this about *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams*: “[I]t's the story behind the camera, the tales of nightclubs, agents, and the social scene, that makes this work stand out ... no other work is as encompassing of the social scene” (*Library Journal*, 2004). And *Entertainment Weekly* selected the book as its Editor's Choice, writing that it is “meticulously researched” and “engrossing.” “Shameful, funny, enlightening, and sobering, this tale of movieland's dark side is a must-read for any student of film history” (Sinclair, 2005).

With the addition of this latest book, Bogle continues to be the nation's leading Black film and television historian. He has tirelessly chronicled the appearance, roles, and dispositions of Blacks in film and on television. He has offered an exhaustive range of interpretations and perspectives on the images of Blacks, and as one book critic who reviewed *Primetime Blues* put it, “[E]very snippet of TV history is held up and examined like an important fossil in the hands of a paleontologist” (http://BrothersJudd.com, 2001). Recently, Bogle served as a consultant and the author of the chapter on film history in the *Creative Fire* volume of Time-Life's ambitious and lauded three-volume set on African American history and culture, *African Americans: Voices of Triumph* (Bogle, 1993).
Bogle has also curated a number of important film series in New York, including a major retrospective on the career of Sidney Poitier at the American Museum of the Moving Image. He interviewed Poitier as part of that series. He conducted a similar public interview with Spike Lee for the Museum's retrospective on the filmmaker's career. Bogle has also both curated and co-curated major series at New York's Film Forum: *Black Women in the Movies: Actresses, Images, Films; Blacks in the Movies: Breakthroughs, Landmarks, Milestones*; the successful *Blaxploitation, Baby!* in the summer of 1995; and the highly publicized Dorothy Dandridge retrospective.

Bogle's pioneering historical work concerning Blacks in film and television is unparalleled and his contributions as a film and television historian-critic and a chronographer have been indispensable to communication research. He has toiled to leave to posterity a comprehensive history, complete with photos, exploration of scenes and episodes, and informed criticism.

References


Further Reading


Donald E. Bogle
Earl y 195 0s Grew up in a suburb of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Late 195 0s First viewed director/producer Otto Preminger's *Carmen Jones* and saw Dorothy Dandridge in the title role. He immediately became fascinated with the lives and filmic images of Black entertainers.

196 0s Received a bachelor's degree in literature from Lincoln University before pursuing a master's degree in creative writing at Indiana University and taking additional graduate courses at Columbia University.

Earl y 197 0s Worked at *Ebony* magazine before taking a job as story editor for famed director/producer Otto Preminger.

197 3 Published popular work, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks.*
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Published <em>Brown Sugar: Eighty Years of America’s Black Female Superstars.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1987–1990</td>
<td>Edited three volumes of the <em>Black Arts Annual.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Published <em>Blacks in American Films and Television: An Illustrated Encyclopedia.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>Began teaching at New York University's Tisch School for the Arts in its dramatic writing program. Later accepted a faculty position as lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Served as expert commentator for the HBO documentary <em>Mo’ Funny,</em> a chronicling of Black humor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Wrote the introduction to the autobiography of Ethel Waters, <em>His Eye is On the Sparrow.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Published <em>Dorothy Dandridge: A Biography.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
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