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Envisioning Freedom: Cinema and the Building of Modern Black Life

Cara Caddoo

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Cara Caddoo : Envisioning Freedom: Cinema and the Building of Modern Black Life before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Envisioning Freedom: Cinema and the Building of Modern Black Life:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Michael A. HernandezExcellent read and enlightening

perspective. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. looks to be an excellent read
By Richard C. Jones just received the book and will read it on bus trip to the south, looks to be an excellent read
1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. This
By Barnard Collier You have no idea how fascinating the pre-Hollywood film scene in America was, nor any notion that it was built and dominated for years by brave, brilliant and adept movie makers who used the building of African-membership churches as the theater for films that drew Sunday-go-to-meetin' crowds and were a platform for African-American envisioning of past and future. Great characters you never dreamed actually existed, brilliantly told with wit and humor and scrupulous history by Cara Caddo, plus fascinating pictures. This is the big film that Spike Lee can embellish his career with. Harvard Press was so smart to publish it.

Viewing turn-of-the-century African American history through the lens of cinema, *Envisioning Freedom* examines the forgotten history of early black film during the era of mass migration and Jim Crow. By embracing the new medium of moving pictures at the turn of the twentieth century, black Americans forged a collective--if fraught--culture of freedom. In Cara Caddoo's perspective-changing study, African Americans emerge as pioneers of cinema from the 1890s to the 1920s. Across the South and Midwest, moving pictures presented in churches, lodges, and schools raised money and created shared social experiences for black urban communities. As migrants moved northward, bound for Chicago and New York, cinema moved with them. Along these routes, ministers and reformers, preaching messages of racial uplift, used moving pictures as an enticement to attract followers. But as it gained popularity, black cinema also became controversial. Facing a losing competition with movie houses, once-supportive ministers denounced the evils of the "colored theater." Onscreen images sparked arguments over black identity and the meaning of freedom. In 1910, when boxing champion Jack Johnson became the world's first black movie star, representation in film vaulted to the center of black concerns about racial progress. Black leaders demanded self-representation and an end to cinematic mischaracterizations which, they charged, violated the civil rights of African Americans. In 1915, these ideas both led to the creation of an industry that produced "race films" by and for black audiences and sparked the first mass black protest movement of the twentieth century.

ENVISIONING FREEDOM: Cinema and the Building of Modern Black Life (Harvard University Press, 2014) is a valiant and insightful rectification of the White-washing of the history of early cinema. With methodical attention to detail and engaging prose that brings the conflicts and the characters of history to life, Caddoo corrects the omission of Black people from the narrative of the early history of cinema. (Andre Seewood, *Shadow and Act*, *Indiewire*)
About the Author
Cara Caddoo is Assistant Professor of History and of Cinema and Media Studies at Indiana University, Bloomington.