

MARLON RIGGS

b. February 3, 1957

d. April 5, 1994

FILMMAKER

In 1987, he released his first television film, “Ethnic Notions,” for which he received an Emmy Award.

“Black men loving black men is THE revolutionary act.”

Marlon Riggs was a filmmaker, educator, poet and gay rights activist. He examined race and sexuality in his documentaries for which he received an Emmy Award and a Peabody Award.

Born to a military family, Riggs spent most of his childhood living on different bases. At 11, his family moved to West Germany. Riggs remained there until graduating from high school as student-body president.

Riggs attended Harvard, graduating magna cum laude with a bachelor’s degree in history. He earned a master’s degree in journalism from the University of California, Berkeley. After graduating, he joined the faculty.

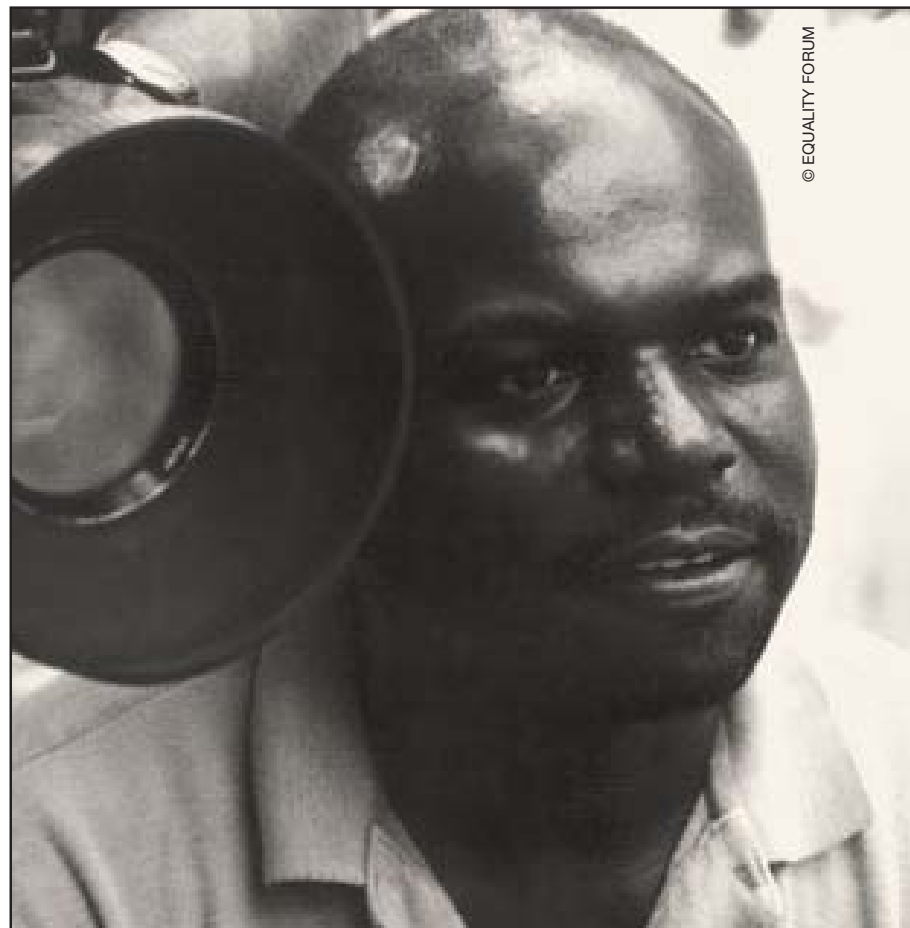
In 1987, he released his first television film, “Ethnic Notions,” for which he received an Emmy Award. He followed this with “Tongues Tied,” the first televised documentary focusing on the black gay experience. During production, Riggs was diagnosed with HIV. Many of his poems about HIV were included in the documentary.

The critically acclaimed film sparked controversy. The religious right objected to the content of the movie and used it to protest public funding of sexually explicit art. Riggs became a leading advocate for independent television that would support controversial topics.

Riggs’s next project, “Color Adjustment,” focused on 40 years of prime-time representations of African-Americans. In 1991, the film received television’s highest honor, the Peabody Award. That same year, Riggs was recognized with the American Film Institute’s Lifetime Achievement Award.

In 1994, Riggs began working on his last film, “Black Is ... Black Ain’t.” During production, his health deteriorated. In the documentary, Riggs appears on screen from his hospital bed saying, “As long as I have work then I’m not going to die, ‘cause work is a living spirit in me.”

Riggs died from AIDS-related complications. He is survived by his life partner, Jack Vincent. “Black Is ... Black Ain’t” was completed posthumously by the co-producer and released in 1995.



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