Marlon Riggs

October 26, 2013 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

Born: 1957
Died: 1994

"America needs to realize the value of having a communicative institution designed to challenge us and upset us. There is value in doing something more than making culture answerable to the marketplace."
- Marlon Riggs

Marlon Riggs is an official honoree today for LGBT History Month 2013, which this year has several HIV-positive honorees.

Marlon Riggs was an African-American filmmaker, educator, poet and gay rights activist who produced, wrote and directed several TV documentaries on race and sexuality in the United States. His most famous films include the Emmy Award-winning *Ethnic Notions*, *Tongues Untied*, *Color Adjustment* and *Black is...Black Ain't*.

Riggs studied the history of American racism and homophobia at Harvard University, graduating magna cum laude in 1978, before moving on to pursue a master's degree in journalism with a specialization in documentary film from the University of California at Berkeley, where he later became a tenured professor of cinema studies.

While he was also teaching and advocating for African-American and LGBT causes, his films won several top festival awards and are now core audio-visual "texts" in many college history and film courses.

In 1988, Riggs spoke before a U.S. Senate Committee to create the Independent Television Service (ITVS), which supported controversial, independent voices on public television. He was later granted the Maya Daren Lifetime Achievement Award by the American Film Institute for his professional and advocacy work.

While Riggs shot his final film, *Black is ... Black Ain't*, in the early 1990s, HIV was affecting his body. He continued to direct despite kidney failures and other ailments that led to his hospitalization, and even appeared on camera in his hospital bed to show his own personal account of life and death with the virus. While shooting the film in 1994, Riggs died from AIDS-related complications.

Go to lgbthistorymonth.com for more information about Riggs and the other honorees.

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