

BUUF Racial Justice Ministry

Suggested Video of the Month – May 2021

Driving While Black: Race, space, and mobility in America (PBS documentary, aired October 13, 2020, 1:55:23). <https://www.pbs.org/video/driving-while-black-race-space-and-mobility-in-america-achvfr/>

Information about the video – from the PBS website

Discover how the advent of the automobile brought new mobility and freedom for African Americans but also exposed them to discrimination and deadly violence, and how that history resonates today.

Chronicling the riveting history and personal experiences – at once liberating and challenging, harrowing and inspiring, deeply revealing and profoundly transforming – of African Americans on the road from the advent of the automobile through the seismic changes of the 1960s and beyond – "Driving While Black" explores the deep background of a recent phrase rooted in realities that have been an indelible part of the African American experience for hundreds of years – told in large part through the stories of the men, women and children who lived through it.

Drawing on a wealth of recent scholarship – and based on and inspired in large part by Gretchen Sorin's recently published study of the way the automobile and highways transformed African American life across the 20th century ("Driving While Black: African American Travel and the Road to Civil Rights" (W.W. Norton, 2020)) – the film examines the history of African Americans on the road from the depths of the Depression to the height of the Civil Rights movement and beyond, exploring along the way the deeply embedded dynamics of race, space and mobility in America during one of the most turbulent and transformative periods in American history.

Several questions to consider and discuss with others

- What part of the video had the biggest emotional impact on you? Why that part more than other parts of the video?
- In what ways has the video influenced the way you think about recent events involving Black Americans and police officers?
- Can you recall a time you were stopped by police while driving? What was your initial reaction to being stopped? What memories do you have of the experience? How does it compare to what is shown in this video?
- The video begins with the suggestion that we "engage history with brutal honesty." This suggestion is repeated later in the video along with the quote that "when you erase history, you erase identity." What do you think about this? What history have we erased? What are the effects of that erasure?
- In 25 words or less, what does the phrase "driving while Black" mean? This is a deliberate challenge to be brief, with the idea that brevity focuses our thinking.