Greetings!

I would like to share my experience and role in the film production of Marlon Riggs’s *Black Is...Black Ain’t*. As the end credits of the documentary show, I was one of three field producers who worked on this film; this was a tremendous opportunity and a great amount of work that involved lots of mileage and movement throughout communities of rural Black people. I worked closely with Marlon and the entire filming crew to help capture the kind of rural essence presented in the film. Marlon needed someone who had expertise in rural Black America; he chose me to help him and the other producers and researchers with this part of the film.

I was a researcher and field producer for *Black Is...Black Ain’t*. As a researcher, I had to develop reading and content materials that helped the crew understand southern rural African American culture and Life. Within this context, I functioned also as a teacher. As a field producer, my work and contribution can be seen in the ruralness you see in the documentary from the juke joint scene, to the rural church scenes, the interview with the elderly black woman fishing, conversations with rural youth, and all the rural landscapes in the Mississippi Delta, etc. We tried to capture message and meaning about so many different things, including such seemingly unimportant as turn roads, backwoods, and certain kinds of rural materialism. The rural country store and land were major symbols of representation of power, race, identity, and even notions of citizenship. For this film, I, with Carol Blue, the other field producer for the film, visited and interviewed over 270 rural people/families to create a story on film concerning rural Black America. Some of these people's images made it to the film and others did not. The outtakes that did not make it to screen are dynamic. So was the still photographic work we did.

There is much I could share about working with Marlon Riggs, which was a great pleasure and an unforgettable moment in my scholarly and creative career. When Marlon and I worked together, he was quite ill. He informed me know up front of the extent of his illness. I will never forget the way he
explained to me how to work with him intellectually and physically. Our conversations about his health also helped to frame general discussions of various forms of rural health needs, evident, sometimes, in the way some people responded to us as outsiders. My perspective as both an insider/outsider was useful to Marlon in helping him determine how to speak with people and the kind of language we needed to use. This work framed for me a way of thinking about the diversity that lies among rural people and it raised questions concerning the disconnections that exist between and within the diversity of rural black culture. We constructed a dialogue around this and similar issues, and some strains of it appear throughout his words.

I hope everyone enjoys and engages with the film and can hear many different messages from Marlon's words.

V. Grim, Chairperson, Department of African American and African Diaspora Studies, 3/10/11