PREFACE

I began researching this book in the spring of 1997, but from summer 1998 to winter 1999 I set aside the project to write, coproduce, and direct a short film, entitled *A Room without Doors*. Given my desire to be a filmmaker, it was an opportunity that I could not walk away from, and with the extensive help and support of professionals in front of and behind the camera, I was able to complete my first film. The film went on to be screened at nine film festivals during the following year, and it was selected for inclusion in Showtime Network's Black Filmmakers Showcase in February 1999.

Among the many valuable lessons learned while making the film, I was forced to deal with the realities of filmmaking that often go unnoticed or without assessment by most film critics and scholars. My hope is that in shaping this book, I have been able to bring some of that experience to bear on my evaluations of the directing process, thus avoiding a mocking or arrogant posture.

As a professor who teaches film studies and popular culture, I know too well how scholars rush to find a haven in theory and academic jargon that sometimes become ends in themselves rather than the means to illuminating a film. My concern was to avoid that entrapment with this book because I wanted to reach that same wide audience that the directors themselves have been seeking to reach. Therefore, I have not adopted a critical framework or a central thesis by which to analyze the directors, nor have I utilized an academic lexicon to render the text.

In the introduction to his book *Am I Black Enough for You: Popular Culture from the 'Hood and Beyond* (1997), scholar Todd Boyd writes about the emergence of black cultural critics, such as Cornel West, bell hooks, Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Michael Eric Dyson, who have revealed complex areas of African American culture to audiences that are both academic and popular; these intellectuals have worked to move away from an elitist, disconnected scholarship toward an accessible connection with black culture and a mainstream audience. Although I am not placing myself by any means within that circle of distinctive black intellectuals, I am embracing the spirit of their scholarship that acknowledges that all black cultural expressions war-

rant serious study, and deserve a wide audience. Consequently, *Black Directors in Hollywood* is designed to serve as a useful tool in undergraduate film, popular culture, and/or ethnic studies classes. At the same time, it has a practical appeal to any reader who inquires about the aspects and dimensions of ethnic directors in the Hollywood system. In researching the book, discrepancies about the release dates of films, the box-office grosses, the names of characters, and the spelling of actors' names occurred. My editors and I sought to find agreement among several sources in order to confirm details and facts. It remains possible, therefore, that some of the data in *Black Directors in Hollywood* may contradict information in other film books.

Finally, between the end of my research in 1999 and the numerous stages in the process of writing, editing, and completing the final published book in 2003, a number of new black directors and films have appeared. The absence of those filmmakers and works has been unavoidable given the scope of this book and the meticulous demands of publication. Even as I bemoan the fact that those black filmmakers and works are not included in my book, their contributions are an added cause for celebration.

Melvin Donalson
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