

modern art does. For purveyors of experimental cinema or wannabe queer historians, Olson's determination to hold scenes or narratives past the point of discomfort is a considerable stylistic choice that reminds us to "wait for it" and trust the filmmaker to take us along with her.

—RHIENNA RENÉE GUEDRY

INSPIRED MIXTAPE: For songs that capture the mood of *The Royal Road*, mix some Calexico, Leonard Cohen's early sad songs, Rae Spoon, a little Elvis, and any song you've ever loved with "California" in the chorus.

Equal parts poem and postcard, history lesson and personal essay, *The Royal Road* evokes the same range of reactions as modern art does.

BLACK GIRL IN SUBURBIA

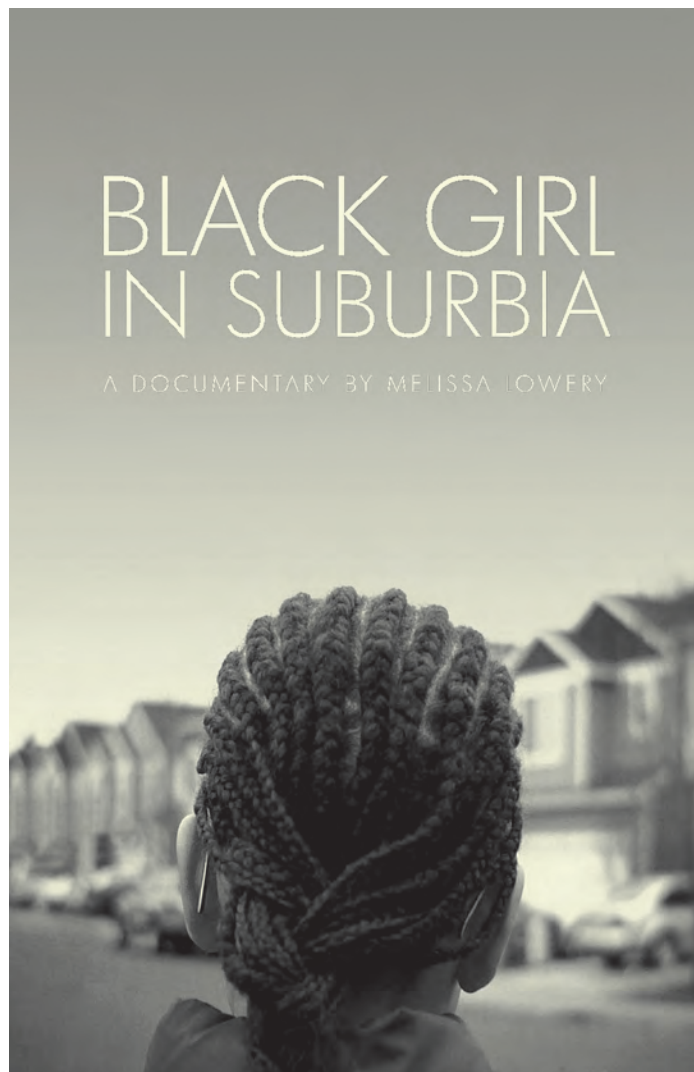
Director: Melissa Lowery
{JAYCHÉ PRODUCTIONS}

Director Melissa Lowery's documentary focuses on the experiences of how Black girls navigate attending schools in majority-white spaces—in this case, Oregon. In a state where African Americans comprise only 2 percent of the population, this film sheds light on how Black girls attempt to thrive in schools where they often feel like the other.

The film begins by making a generational connection between Lowery's own experiences and those of her daughter. Although decades have passed and they attended different schools, both were raised in Oregon and faced similar treatment in school. Lowery remembers when a classmate wouldn't drink water after her at the fountain because he thought her "color would rub off on him." Her daughter has similar experiences and questions why she's the only Black girl in her class.

In interviews with more than a dozen Black girls attending high school, students discuss everything from how embarrassing it feels when white classmates ask to touch their hair to how they continue to face insipid stereotypes about eating watermelon and drinking Kool-Aid. Rhea L. Combs, a professor of media and women's studies, points out that not feeling welcomed makes Black girls feel unsafe in school.

The documentary introduces us to Elaine Forde, a teacher who created a class around peace and justice when her Black students were underperforming in school. The class helped students have tough conversations about race, and it increased educational success for Black students because



they felt more comfortable.

Using interviews to drive the film allows Black girls and women to tell their stories. However, we never see the girls interacting with their white peers, so we don't get a full understanding of their experiences. Another flaw is that it only offers Forde's class as a solution. That question of what else can be done to keep Black girls from being isolated and excluded in schools—say, on a systemic level—remains unanswered.

Despite this, *Black Girl in Suburbia* is worth watching. Lowery unapologetically centers the pain of Black girls—a subject that is seldom tackled—and

highlights the growing need to talk about race in school.

—EVETTE DIONNE

WATCH IF YOU LIKE: *The Souls of Black Girls* (2008).