

Document Citation

Title	Killer of sheep
Author(s)	Paul Taylor
Source	<i>London Film Festival</i>
Date	2007
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Killer of sheep, Burnett, Charles, 1977

Killer of Sheep – BFI 51st London Film Festival

2007

Episodic and poetic portrait of mid 70s LA ghetto life

"If Killer of Sheep were an Italian film from 1953, we would have every scene memorised." Screenwriter Michael Tolkin's comment isn't far from the mark, apropos the movie's classic status, its elusiveness (at least in the States) or its essential neorealist impulse. Charles Burnett's episodic, almost poetic portrait of the lumpen grind - and its dogged survivors - in the LA ghetto of Watts in the mid 70s was shot on 16mm on next-to-no-budget over a series of weekends while its director was still at film school at UCLA. Every nuance bespeaks maturity, though, as the film gets under the skin of the working urban poor - specifically slaughterhouse toiler Stan and his family, discovering their own privileged moments of beauty, humour and love within a bleak context of numbing exhaustion and frustration. The Library of Congress named Killer of Sheep a national treasure, even though it has been a difficult film to actually see in the US: ironically the film has (until this 35mm restoration) received fuller distribution in the UK than at home, simply because the music rights were too expensive to clear. And this movie without its music would be truly impoverished: Burnett's selection of black-catalogue glories - from Elmore James to Dinah Washington - is totally on the money.

Paul Taylor

Directed by:

Charles Burnett

Cast:

Henry Gayle Sanders, Kaycee Moore, Angela Burnett

Distributor:

BFI

Country:

USA

Year:

1977

Running time:

87 mins