

# BIO



James Blue (1930-1980)

1930. Born in Tulsa.

1942. Arrives in Portland.

1953. Graduates University of Oregon.

1958. Graduates L'Institut des hautes études cinématographiques (IDHEC) in Paris. Works on Madison Ave.

1960. James Dormeyer, an IDHEC classmate, recommends him for a job making short films for Les Studios Africa, a French company in wartime Algeria.

1962. In Algeria, Blue directs a French language feature, *The Olive Trees of Justice*. *The Olive Trees Of Justice* is not accepted to Cannes, but Blue brings

it to the festival anyway, where it wins the Critics Prize. George Stevens, Jr. recruits Blue for the United States Information Agency (USIA).

1963. At USIA, Blue makes three short films about US development projects in Colombia and *The March*, documenting Martin Luther King Jr.'s historic speech during the March on Washington.

1965. Begins teaching at UCLA.

1965. Wins the first Ford Foundation grant ever given to a filmmaker. Undertakes an extensive series of interviews with international directors.

1966. Directs the prologue to George Roy Hill's blockbuster epic, *Hawaii*.

1968. Nominated for an Oscar for *A Few Notes On Our Food Problem*, his last USIA film.

1969. Serves on the founding faculty of American Film Institute.

1970. Begins teaching in Houston. With David MacDougall, co-directs Rice Media Center.

1972. Serves on the NEA's first media funding panel. Votes in favor of a network of regional film centers, proposed by fellow Portlander Sheldon Renan. All four centers – in Berkeley, Portland, Detroit and Chicago – exist today.

1977. Founds SWAMP, the Southwest Alternate Media Project. Begins making what he calls "complex urban documentaries", inviting his subjects, the urban poor, to become his co-creators. He distributes video cameras and Super 8 cameras to his subjects, and incorporates their footage into two docs, *Who Killed The Fourth Ward?* and *The Invisible City*. While he is finishing *The Invisible City*, during the last years of his life, he also teaches at SUNY Buffalo and in London.

1980. Dies of a swift moving stomach cancer in Buffalo, at age 49.

Intensely ambitious, James Blue turned his back on a Hollywood career, and focused on democratizing media production. He was fascinated by/haunted by/conflicted about film as an exercise of power. At the same time, he made films of great beauty.

His life cannot be separated from the idea of American empire. Born in the Depression, he came of age during the Cold War. He went to film school in Paris and made films for the US government around the globe.

Because his career took place almost entirely outside Hollywood, few people recognize his name. But he was no shrinking violet. Early films he made at Jefferson High School, which starred members of the Latin Club dressed in togas and saddle shoes, had title cards which read Directed by James Blue.

James Ivory, the second University of Oregon graduate, after Blue, to earn an Oscar nomination, was the first person to tell me about this forgotten Oregon artist.