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We Demand

Claudrena N. Harold, Kevin Jerome Everson

2016, DCP, color, 10 min., English. **Producer** Madeleine Molyneux, Claudrena N. Harold. **Production company** Picture Palace Pictures (New York, USA), **Written and directed by** Claudrena N. Harold, Kevin Jerome Everson. **Director of photography** Kevin Jerome Everson. **Costumes** Claudrena N. Harold, Robert Holden. **Sound** Jack Doener, Varin Melkan, Phyllis Li, Jordan Stuyger, Mary Davis, LNZ. **Music** Courtney Bryan. **Editor** Kevin Jerome Everson. **World sales** Picture Palace Pictures. **With** Ricky Goldman (James Roebuck), Richard Warner (Edgar Shannon, Präsident), Ryan Leach (Tommy Steele).

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We Demand tells the story of the Anti-Vietnam War Movement from the perspective of James R. Roebuck, a northern-born African American who studied at the University of Virginia during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Over a ten-day period of unprecedented student upheaval at the University, Roebuck, the first African-American president of UVA's Student Council, confronted a series of political challenges and existential dilemmas. This budding activist and future US representative was the quintessential militant insider whose cool temperament and ideological flexibility proved quite useful as UVA appeared on the verge of imploding from within.

The film is the third in a series of collaborative investigations of the political history of the University of Virginia by Claudrena N. Harold and Kevin Jerome Everson.

On May 4, 1970 at approximately 10:30 p.m., fifteen hundred students at the University of Virginia (UVA) assembled to protest the brutal slaying of four coeds at Kent State University. Earlier that day, Kent State activists had launched another round of demonstrations against President Richard Nixon's invasion of Cambodia. Their protest turned deadly when Ohio National Guardsmen fired into the large crowd, wounding nine students and killing four others. Outrage gripped students across the nation as hundreds of universities suspended classes.

If administrators at UVA expected only an episodic outburst of dissent from their students, they were in for a major disappointment. The next week witnessed an upsurge in antiwar protest as students refused to attend classes, occupied buildings, collided with the National Guard and state police, and pushed the University's president, Edgar Shannon, into a heated confrontation with state legislators in Richmond.

My journey into the complex yet largely untold story of antiwar activism at UVA commenced in the archives, digging through primary materials ranging from audio recordings of rallies to position papers to surveillance film of student activists. When sorting through the archival material, my thoughts frequently turned to James Roebuck, a Philadelphia-born graduate student who arrived to the University in 1966. Several weeks before the May protest of 1970, Roebuck had been elected president of the Student Council, the first African American to hold that position. Why his peers placed such confidence in his abilities became very apparent during student upheavals surrounding Kent State and the invasion of Cambodia. Conceived by Kevin Jerome Everson as a road film, *We Demand* provides a snapshot of not only Roebuck's political activism, but his political becoming as well.

Claudrena N. Harold, December 2015

With a sense of place and historical research, my films combine scripted and documentary elements with rich elements of formalism. The subject matter is the gestures or tasks caused by certain conditions in the lives of working class African Americans and other people of African descent. The conditions are usually physical, social-economic circumstances or weather. Instead of standard realism I favor a strategy that abstracts everyday actions and statements into theatrical gestures, in which archival footage is re-edited or re-staged, real people perform fictional scenarios based on their own lives, and historical observations intermesh with contemporary narratives. The films suggest the relentlessness of everyday life – along with its beauty – but also present oblique metaphors for art-making.

The new work still embraces the similar condition but I am increasingly interested in interrupting documentary scenes with abstract, formal scenes, those situations where necessity collides with coincidence. The coincidence is the scene that looks as if it was culled from archival footage, an accident or mistake in the actual film material, while necessity is the plot or character that drives the film. I am pleased when these qualities collide in terms of form, because it plays with this ambivalent relationship between art and narrative, fact and fiction. Eventually, I trust that by working in this manner, years from now, I will see my work as achieving pure form. My work must project and reveal the materials, procedure, and process. This approach comes from my undergraduate art instruction and influences. My professors, educated at Iowa University and Yale in the 1970s, taught from this standpoint in the 1980s

when I was in college. It was a post-Smithson approach. I believe that this approach is not necessarily important to be noticeable to the viewer; it merely explains how I continue to approach the craft of art making. I firmly believe that the materials (film, video) of the work must be noticeable. A light flare, overexposed film, color flares, distorted sounds and even prolonged taping enhances my notion of materiality. Procedure is the formal quality I am exploring with the work. The process is the execution of the formal quality. Once I have a grasp of procedure, the process becomes a discipline.

Kevin Jerome Everson, 2011

Claudrena N. Harold, born in 1976 in Jacksonville, Florida, lives and works in Charlottesville, USA. She is associate professor of African American Studies and History at the University of Virginia. Her specific research areas and interests include Black Nationalism, African American intellectual history, student activism, and labor history. As a part of her ongoing work on the history of black student activism at UVA, she collaborated with UVA colleague Kevin Jerome Everson on two short films. In 2007, she published her first book, *The Rise and Fall of the Garvey Movement in the Urban South, 1918–1942*, and in 2013, *The Punitive Turn: Race, Prisons, Justice, and Inequality* (as co-editor). Her forthcoming book, *New Negro Politics in the Jim Crow South*, will be published in 2016.

Films

2013: *U of Virginia Charlottesville, VA 1976* (co-directed by Kevin Everson). 2014: *Sugarcoated Arsenic* (co-directed by Kevin Everson). 2016: *We Demand*.

Kevin Jerome Everson, born in 1965 in Mansfield, Ohio, is currently based in Charlottesville, USA. He has an MFA from Ohio University and a BFA from the University of Akron and is Professor of Art at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville. Everson was awarded the 2012 Alpert Award for Film/Video. He has received fellowships from the Guggenheim, NEA, NEH, Ohio Arts Council, and the Virginia Museum, an American Academy Rome Prize, grants from Creative Capital and the Mid-Atlantic, residencies at Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, Yaddo, and MacDowell Colony, and numerous university fellowships. His work encompasses paintings, sculptures, photographs, and films, including eight features and over 125 short form works. His work has been exhibited in international festivals and exhibitions.

Films, selection (from 2015)

2015: *Production Material Handler, A Saturday Night in Mansfield Ohio 2* (2 min.), *Grand Finale* (5 min.), *Three Quarters* (Forum Expanded, 5 min.), *Regal Unlimited* (3 min.), *Smooth Surface* (3 min.), *Three Items a Shelf* (4 min.), *Park Lanes* (480 min.), *It Seems to Hang On* (20 min.). 2016: *Oscar at 8903 Empire* (2 min.), *8903 Empire* (480 min.), *Auditioning for Nathaniel* (14 min.), *Lost Nothing* (4 min.), *Threshold Spondee/Discrimination N66#1* (5 min.), *Shadeena* (5 min.), *Ears, Nose and Throat* (11 min.). 2016: *We Demand*.