

Black Folk Don't: An Interview With Series Creator Angela Tucker



“People are hungry for media that is more challenging and that will allow people to think about their harder issues”

Angela Tucker is the director and producer of the web series *Black Folk Don't*. The show is an entertaining dissection of so-called Black customs by everyday people and cultural critics like Toure and Melissa Harris-Perry. Tucker delves into identity frequently in her work including the recent documentary, [Asexual](#), about people who experience attraction to no one. *Black Folk Don't* is in its second season of sorting out various aspects of what is and is not natural about Black culture. A fusion of humor and insight takes apart certain assumptions and exposes their social origins, which are always co-anchored in racism. The series will run through the summer and the timing of it is especially favorable since the Obamas have become a magnet for racist typing.

Did Marlon Riggs' *Ethnic Notions* inspire the creation of *Black Folk Don't*? If not, what did?

I'm familiar with that work but no. I do a lot of projects that are about identity politics and I've been influenced by different things over the years. But when Black Public Media did a call for web series and they were looking for a documentary web series. I wanted to come up with something that was sort of provocative and literally the idea just popped into my head. I wanted an open-ended idea with a question people could answer, something every week that people would come back to see what the topics would be. I also think that I'm someone who is Black and has sort of spent their lives doing things that Black people quote unquote don't typically do it's something I've heard and I thought it was an interesting idea. I sent an email out to a bunch of friends and they all came up with the written responses. It was one of those crazy email chains some people said "This idea is crazy" and some people said "These are things Black folk don't do." And I just knew from that there was something there.

Do you feel that reality television has contributed to the need for a series like *Black Folk Don't*?

I think that's why web series are becoming more and more prevalent. People are hungry for media that is more challenging and that will allow people to think about their harder issues and I think that's harder to find on broadcast television now. So I think a series like *Black Folk Don't* allow people not just to engage in more provocative ideas but also to be able to share the media with their friends and sort of provide the context they want to provide around each episode.

What have you found to be the biggest stereotype about Black people so far?

The first topic that got the most comments is "Black Folk Don't Tip." And I think a lot of that has to do with it being the first one we ever did in the first season. We put

that up on PBS.org and that was sort of an experiment for them to feature the series in that way and they got a ton of comments and they were really surprised. I think what happens with these topics you do get people who have very sort of racist ideas about Black people and they comment in that space and that's what kind of throws you. I respond and say this is why I created the series this is what it's about but at the end of the day there are some people who do have some very stereotypical racist ideas about Black people. They get in that space as well and the hope is that people like that see the episode and understand that when we're talking about these issues we're talking about why these stereotypes exist we're talking about how a lot of these ideas are not based in truth. I think the first episode was probably the most provocative but I think it was because it was a new idea. The second season has a lot of serious topics coming up further down the line so it will be interesting to see how people respond.

[youtube]7Dp4EtScG2c[/youtube]

As a person who is always exploring identity and cultural perceptions in your work, why do you think stereotypes exist at all?

In some ways it's kind of lazy thinking people just decide that "I know a few people of a certain ethnicity who do this thing and it's truth." It's kind of a lazy way to think and I think a lot of it is tied to that. I also contend that a lot of stereotypes are based in truth in what we try to talk about with the different topics. For example, with 'Swim' there is a stereotype that Black people don't swim. A lot of Black people don't swim but the reasons why a lot of Black people don't swim aren't just like we don't feel like it. We haven't had access we haven't been able to swim in pools we don't have this legacy of knowing how to swim. Your family shows you how to swim and you learn how to swim. Some of these stereotypes, there are truth to them but the goal of

the series is just to show the complexity of the Black experience.

How do you pick and decide upon which stereotype to explore?

For the first season I just went back to that email exchange with friends. I really just looked at the ones people suggested, ones that people had the strongest reactions to and then I had a few. The two that I really wanted to do in the first season, "Black Folk Don't Tip" and "Black Folk Don't Go To The Doctor" I knew I wanted to do those because they were topics I heard a lot history played a role in those stereotypes. Why I try to do is not just say here is a stereotype it isn't true, it is true but I will talk about the historical background around the stereotype. Like most of them there's something historically in the US that explains why this idea exists. But the second season we actually did a poll with the people who watched the first season. We did a Facebook poll we said what are topics you want us to do and people wrote in and we chose the topics from that poll. This season is completely viewer selected.

How many episodes are coming up and can you tell me some of the topics?

Yes there will be six topics it's "Swim," "Camp," "Atheism," "Commit Suicide" have eating disorders and get married.

What's next for Angela Tucker?

I am co-producing a feature-length documentary called *The New Black* which is about the Black church and the LGBT community. It's going to be on public television in 2013. We're doing interviews in Maryland primarily looking at the whole gay marriage debate there. It's going to be very provocative.

Black Folk Don't airs every Tuesday and can be viewed on the series [site](#) and the [Black Public Media](#) site. Follow ***Black Folk Don't*** [@blackfolkdont](#) and Angela Tucker [@tuckergurl](#) on Twitter.