American Slavery on Film highlights historical and contemporary depictions in film of the resistance, rebellion, and resilience of enslaved African Americans in the United States from the Antebellum period to Emancipation. In her study of such films as Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1914), a silent movie adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel; the groundbreaking and successful television miniseries Roots (1977); and the Harriet Tubman biopic Harriet (2019), Caron Knauer analyzes how African American slavery has been and continues to be portrayed in major studio blockbusters and independent films alike. Separating the romanticized and unrealistic depictions of slavery from the more accurate but often unflinching portrayals of its horrors, Knauer covers a wide range of topics, including the impact of slavery on popular culture, the Underground Railroad, Maroon communities, and the Los Angeles Film Rebellion of the 1960s. As a result, this book delivers a comprehensive, readable, and timely examination of enslaved African Americans and slavery in America’s film history.

“Each chapter contains an exploration of issues raised by the film being analyzed, including looking at the legacy of slavery in America which continues to plague the nation to this day. Knauer engages both the works and issues they raise in a contemporary context, while also giving the reader a greater understanding of the history (or in the case of Tarantino’s Django Unchained, historical fantasy) tackled in each film.”

–Jennifer Dean, film scholar

Available February 2023
Each chapter of American Slavery on Film: Hollywood History reveals the historical accuracy or distortion of slavery from the enslaved's point of view. Several of the films were written by Black writers, and five films, Sankofa, Nightjohn, 12 Years a Slave, The Birth of a Nation, and Harriet, were helmed by Black directors.

Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1914)  
Mandingo (1975)  
Roots (1977 and 2016)  
Sankofa (1993)  
Nightjohn (1996)  
Amistad (1997)  
Django Unchained (2012)  
12 Years a Slave (2013)  
The Birth of a Nation (2016)  
Harriet (2019)  

Caron Knauer teaches English and film at LaGuardia Community College. She was the associate producer of Waiting to Exhale (20th Century Fox, 1995).