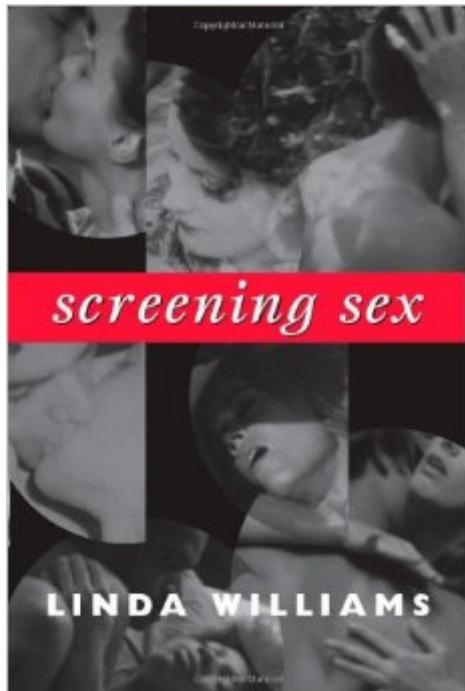


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# Screening Sex (a John Hope Franklin Center Book)



## Synopsis

For many years, kisses were the only sexual acts to be seen in mainstream American movies. Then, in the 1960s and 1970s, American cinema grew up • in response to the sexual revolution, and movie audiences came to expect more knowledge about what happened between the sheets. In *Screening Sex*, the renowned film scholar Linda Williams investigates how sex acts have been represented on screen for more than a century and, just as important, how we have watched and experienced those representations. Whether examining the arch artistry of *Last Tango in Paris*, the on-screen orgasms of Jane Fonda, or the anal sex of two cowboys in *Brokeback Mountain*, Williams illuminates the forms of pleasure and vicarious knowledge derived from screening sex. Combining stories of her own coming of age as a moviegoer with film history, cultural history, and readings of significant films, Williams presents a fascinating history of the on-screen kiss, a look at the shift from adolescent kisses to more grown-up displays of sex, and a comparison of the à œtastefulà • Hollywood sexual interlude with sexuality as represented in sexploitation, Blaxploitation, and avant-garde films. She considers *Last Tango in Paris* and *Deep Throat*, two 1972 films unapologetically all about sex; *In the Realm of the Senses*, the only work of 1970s international cinema that combined hard-core sex with erotic art; and the sexual provocations of the mainstream movies *Blue Velvet* and *Brokeback Mountain*. She describes art films since the 1990s, in which the sex is aggressive, loveless, or alienated. Finally, Williams reflects on the experience of screening sex on small screens at home rather than on large screens in public. By understanding screening sex as both revelation and concealment, Williams has written the definitive study of sex at the movies. Linda Williams is Professor of Film Studies and Rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley. Her books include *Porn Studies*, also published by Duke University Press; *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson*; *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*; and *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the à œFrenzy of the Visible.*•A John Hope Franklin Center BookNovember424 pages129 illustrations6x9 trim sizeISBN 0-8223-0-8223-4285-5paper, \$24.95ISBN 0-8223-0-8223-4263-4library cloth edition, \$89.95ISBN 978-0-8223-4285-4paper, \$24.95ISBN 978-0-8223-4263-2library cloth edition, \$89.95

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## Customer Reviews

In 1896, actor John Rice lifted and smoothed his extensive moustache and planted kisses on the mouth of actress May Irwin, and Thomas Alva Edison filmed it. The fifteen second *The Kiss* was a bit of a scandal. "The idea of a kinetoscopic kiss has unlimited possibilities," gushed the *New York World*, which had used the film as a publicity stunt. It was supposed to depict part of a musical play that was then in New York, but the kiss was the only thing in the movie. In other words, the film was of a sex act purely for the sake of a sex act, a particularity with which those interested in films would become familiar over the next decades. The movie became the most popular of the projected short films of the time, although a literary magazine protested that a kiss so monstrously enlarged and shown repeatedly became "positively disgusting." No one had made such an objection about the original kiss in the musical play itself. The Kiss is the first film discussed in *Screening Sex* (Duke University Press) by Linda Williams, who teaches film studies and who in 1989 wrote *Hard Core*, a book that took pornographic films seriously and showed there was no reason to avoid an academic study of pornography any more than any other field of human activity. In some ways, *Screening Sex* continues the themes of the previous book, although the world of sexual activity on screens is far different from what it was twenty years ago. The book is serious (and completely referenced) but not solemn, and Williams tackles some dense theorizing with gusto and an appealing sense of humor that nicely fits her subject. Kisses were the limit of movie sex, at least officially, for decades, but there is much Williams has to say about them. The best parts of her book are analyses of specific films.

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