

## Document Citation

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# SOUTH

(SUD)

(DOCU — FRENCH - BELGIAN)

An AMIP/Paradise Films/Chemah I.S. production in association with Carre Noir, RTBF Liege, La Sept Arte, INA, YLE TV2. (International sales: Doc & Co., Paris.) Produced by Xavier Carniaux.

Directed, written by Chantal Akerman. Camera (color), Raymond Fromont; editor, Claire Atherton; sound, Thierry de Halleux. Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (Directors Fortnight), May 15, 1999. Running time: 71 MIN.

(English dialogue)

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By DAVID ROONEY

In "South," Chantal Akerman conjures the ghosts of the hate crimes and lynchings that have plagued that part of the U.S. for decades. Originally planned as a broadly focused view inspired by the literature of William Faulkner and James Baldwin, the documentary was modified following a brutal racial slaying that took place during its development. While the director's customarily spare style is not going to give Errol Morris any sleepless nights, her measured approach makes its sorrowful points succinctly. Public TV appears the most suitable outlet for this no-frills, video-shot production.

Filmed in the rural township of Jasper, Texas, "South" examines the impact on the community of the murder of James Byrd Jr., a black family man severely beaten by three white men, then chained to their truck and

dragged three miles. But while Akerman weighs different responses to the crime, her interest in the investigative course is minimal.

The need to find some positive outcome in the community's raised consciousness is underlined at a memorial service in a black church, while the white town sheriff is intent on pointing out that the locality's main problems are economic ones.

Going beyond the Byrd murder, Akerman talks to locals who recall harsh racial incidents from the past and discuss attitudes before and after the Civil Rights Movement. The film also touches on the rise of the White Supremacist and Aryan Nation movements masked as Christian organizations. But the documentary is far more concerned with impressions than information.

As in her features, the director holds static shots for inordinate lengths of time. Her trademark slow-crawl camerawork also is much in evidence, here cruising the silent countryside and streets of dilapidated housing. The film culminates effectively in a protracted, funereal tour of the long stretch of road over which Byrd was dragged to his death.

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**TEXAS TRAGEDY:** The brutal murder of black Texan James Byrd Jr. by three whites is the topic of the French-Belgian docu "South."