



**SNAPSHOT PRESS RELEASE**

# To Be Seen

MILWAUKEE FILM FESTIVAL 2023





LEXI ACTING LIKE SHE WASN'T JUST CRYING  
AFTER THE SCREENING OF BAD PRESS



We love the Milwaukee Film Festival, not just because it's the one time of year we can do our job while sitting around eating popcorn [yes, we will mention popcorn every year because we trying to get a popcorn stipend too lol]. But because every year it gets better. More films we love, more screenings of things we are interested in, and more programming that makes us feel **SEEN**. Being seen is something that is undervalued. But we know that representation changes how the world engages with differences. It is how we find understanding in the unknown and clarity in a vision that is not our own. CopyWrite explored the 2023 Milwaukee Film Fest through the joy of being seen, and here is what we found.

### **BAD PRESS [Directors: Rebecca Landsberry-Baker & Joe Peeler]**

We take our profession seriously!

Where it is in CopyWrite's nature to bend the rules, redefine tradition, and grapple with the culture of "Media" we do so with care [& strategy], that is thoroughly directed by research, transparency, grappling with the woes of disenfranchisement, and engrained with the responsibility of Free Press. So when these ideologies were at risk of being dismantled in Directors Rebecca Landsberry-Baker and Joe Peeler, "Bad Press", my soul jumped out of my chest and I felt that my own livelihood was on the line.

If you look up the saying, "If you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything", a picture of Angel Ellis should be attached. Her controversial approach to defending Muscogee Nation against press censorship is GAWDS WORK, okay! To not only go against a political institution, but also the corruption that is unnerved by the historical rhetoric of Native American need for sovereignty, had everyone I saw in the film screening break into mass hysteria [or was it just me?].

With this feverish concept that the press is a unneeded, sh\*t show of falsity in today's society, running at an all time high, to note that my freedoms as a "media maker" are seldom called into question, had me in tears for Angel

and her other "native" press counterparts. How dare anyone try to put their hyperbolic feet on the necks of truth [just because it's not always pretty]. How dare you use the tactics of your oppressors on your own people [my Choctaw, Blackfoot, and Cherokee blood was boiling]. How can you not see that the historical lack of information to these people has left them all traumatized by genocide and the true ills of treason.

Every time Angel's anxiety shot her into a frenzy that sent her running to the door to spark a cigarette, [I don't smoke] but I felt the need to light one up with her. The attempt to get protection of the Free Press as an amendment to their nation's constitution was unprecedented in "Indian" Country but with Angel, and the true staff of Mvskoke Media, the fight was on. I think "Bad Press" should be a reminder to all that what is privileged in your reality is not inherent in all futures, cultures, and lands.

Just know at CopyWrite, if we have to fight for our rights, we absolutely will. They will never take our voice!

Lexi for /CW



Somebody clap for this year's Black Lens Programmers, because THEY - DID- THAT!

You don't even know how good it feels to be SEEN. Not that fake "lets hit this quota" monotony most institutions try to pass off as diversity & inclusion [Y'all are shamefully fake] but the real attempt to dig into culture as a reflection of its genius as nuanced as a day in the life of some, not all, and more, not less. The Black Lens shorts at Milwaukee Film Fest 2023, did that for me.

**Eye for an I [Director: James Grison]:** To be seen Vulnerable. This short is a music note of the burden of Blackness & the beauty that straddles that space. If you love hard it may mean death comes with vengeance. If you forgive easily, that puts you at risk. It is a trauma we did not create but a lexicon that gathers a dark cloud above our legacy. The rules of engagement simply mean we never win.

**By Water [Director: Iyabo Kwayana]:** To Create a sense of seeing. This short had me like, "What in the Black art school?". And that tickled me. It tickled me because in my life that was the space I felt the most unseen. Where representation is not only willed by those inhabiting the space, it is disregarded by the work that they make. The characters seen in "By Water" of curly fro like beards and fluffy naturals on well groomed women are not common. Nor do they ever allow for the Black image to be whirled into the figurative where nature is as natural as the city and black memory is championed by Black creation of new or different worlds. I like that space of little clarity and big exploration.

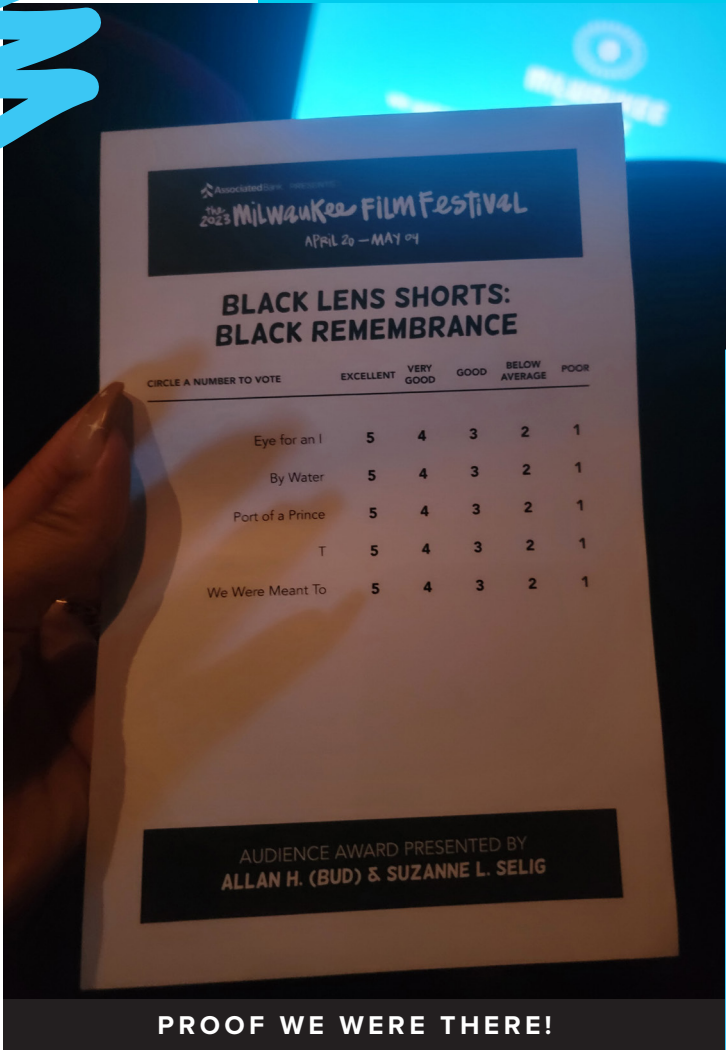
**Port of a Prince [Director: JR Aristide]:** To never Unsee. This short is the moment when you finally can stomach that you too are desensitized. Desensitized by violence, corruption, and the

ills of capitalism. You can't unsee the first death, and somehow every death of innocence, youth, friendship, family. . .it all just becomes a thing you live with. This is the untold truth of the African Diaspora, we have suffered so now we still suffer, at the hands of many and even our own. Don't you ever put a gun in the hands of a child, for that is the moment they will unsee what joy life can bring.

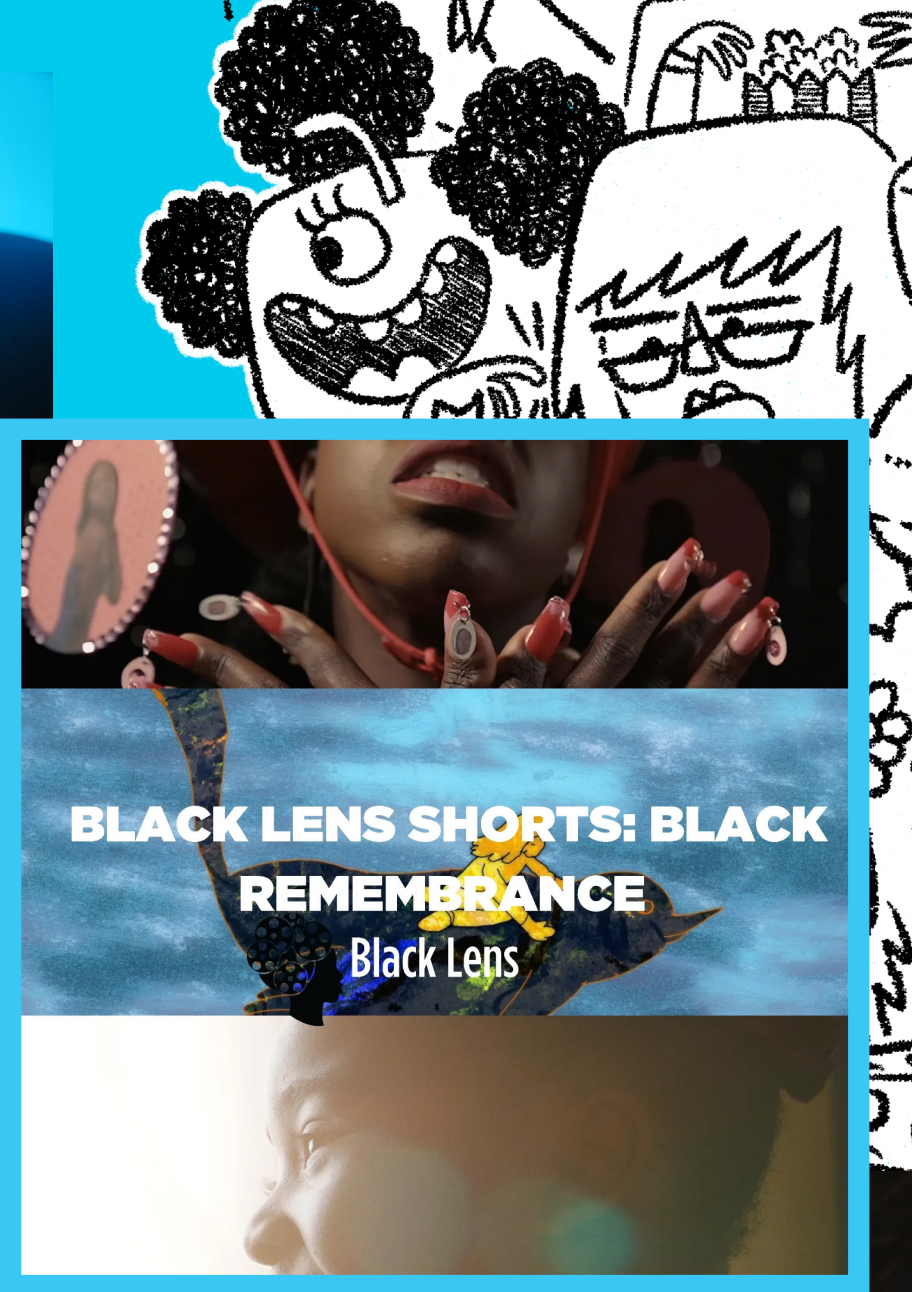
**T [Director: Keisha Rae Witherspoon]:** To be seen Vividly: It is the cadence of art. It is culture and freedom. It is neon lights and innsense. It is memorial tee's and talking spirits. It is to live beyond the time you are alive. Now without context you probably have no idea what this movie is about, but everything in me said this was for homegoings and healing. This is for my people and after looking at the shorts description, everything in me was right.

**We Were Meant To [Director: Tari Wariebi]:** To be seen in Flight. Why are we great like that? The metaphorical thought of rite of passage for Black men as the first time he takes flight sent me! It was clever in its social commentary, "The No Fly Zone", is everywhere you are Black man. To have your wings clipped is a way to keep you down, without, undervalued. And the production was clean! It was thoughtful and nuanced beyond need [the Vitruvian man with wings] but because it was I bought into it like it was a thread of reality that was beyond plausible. It had me grappling with the surveillance of Black bodies [is this body not my own?]. It had me checking for my own super pours [& as a Black woman I know I have many]. This was by far one of the best films I have seen in my life because I know what it feels like to fly without wings.

Lexi for /CW



PROOF WE WERE THERE!





## DEAR THIRTEEN [Director: Alexis Neophytides]

The world has changed a hell of a lot since I was thirteen. That was circa \*cough cough\* LOL, social media was in its infancy, my mother was still trying to hide our working class poverty from me, and there was no wifi [first world problems]. So to see life through the eyes of today's thirteen year old is an unsavory pill to swallow, yet it comes with a glimmer of hope that this generation is not lost, but very much misunderstood.

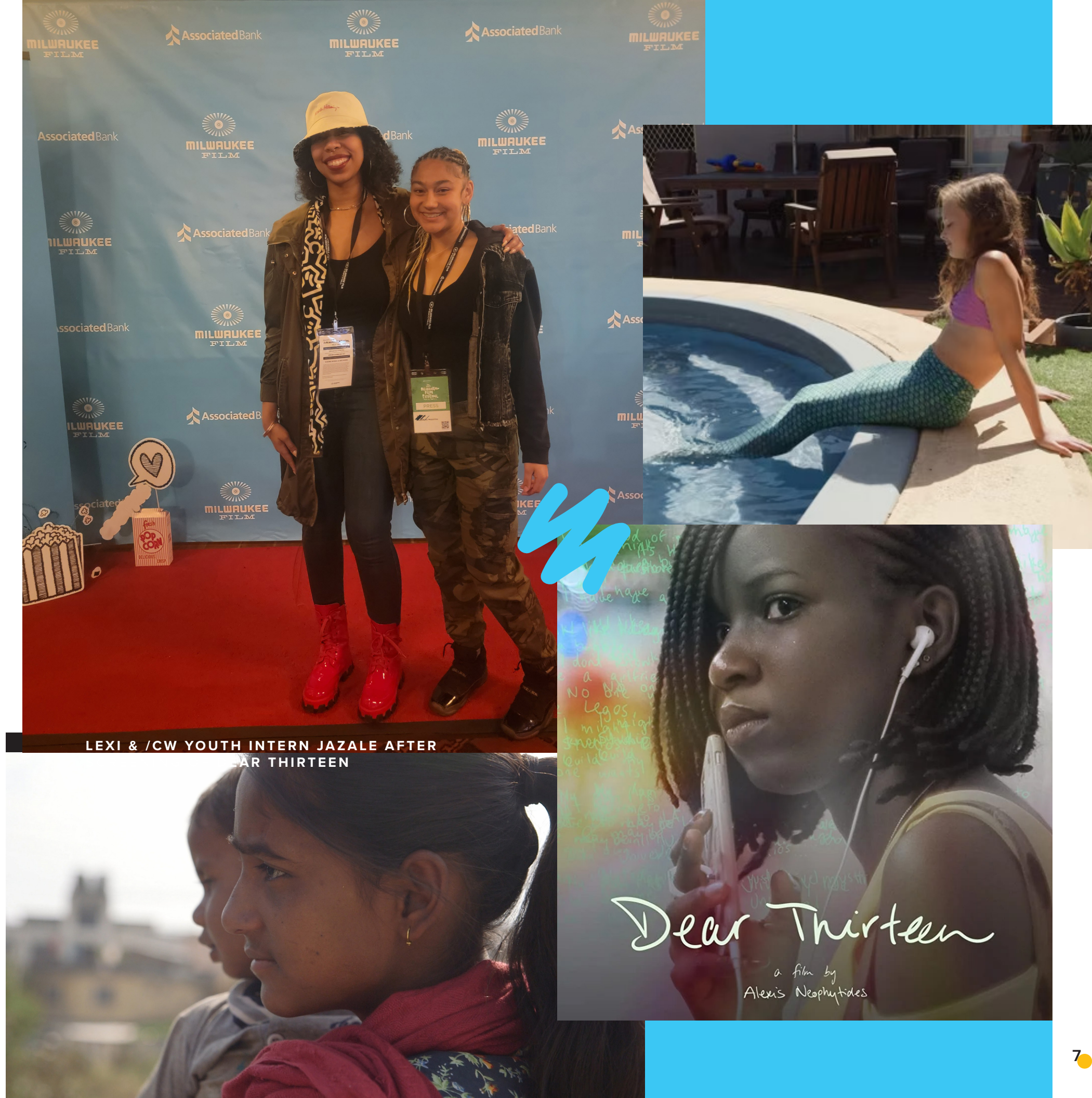
Being Thirteen is weird!

You're in this inbetween space where you're not a little kid anymore but you still don't have the full blown privileges of a teenager. It's like being in limbo and that purgatory at minimum lasts a full calendar year [Yikes!]. But the issues of the world are noticeable at that age. The fears of the future strike you and thus it is a period of grounding oneself, as depicted by the film, that gets lost in translation. Who narrates for this age? Only someone in the thick of it can. So the lack of adult commentary [besides editing] was vital to noting, thirteen year olds have something profound to say!

We brought our fifteen year old "intern" to see the film and she too had to reflect on who she is and why she is in this space in time. Too see that reckoning kindled by a global perspective of young reality, she murmured, "That was good to see", which is more than enough in our book.

"Dear Thirteen" is something that everyone, but especially everyone who has a child should watch. Often, adults tend to feel like teenagers don't have problems. There is this belief that since a child is free from the burden of finances and large responsibilities like mortgages and car notes, that they live a worry and stress free life. But on the contrary, "Dear Thirteen" narrates how society impacts the lives of children in the same ways they do for adults. Each of those 9 children, whether they were a gun-toting American boy or an Australian trans girl starting her first day of puberty blockers, will all experience things that will transcend race, gender, socio-economic class, or geographical location. I appreciate the lengths Alexis Neophytides went to to establish diversity. I believe it really helps the claim that although we all come from different places, there are life experiences we all share. Australia, America, India, Europe, no matter where you are, adolescent years come with similar trials and tribulations. This film wasn't a tearjerker, it wasn't a comedy or a horror, it was the reality of adolescence and a voice for the unheard 13 year olds around the world.

Lexi & Peazy for /CW





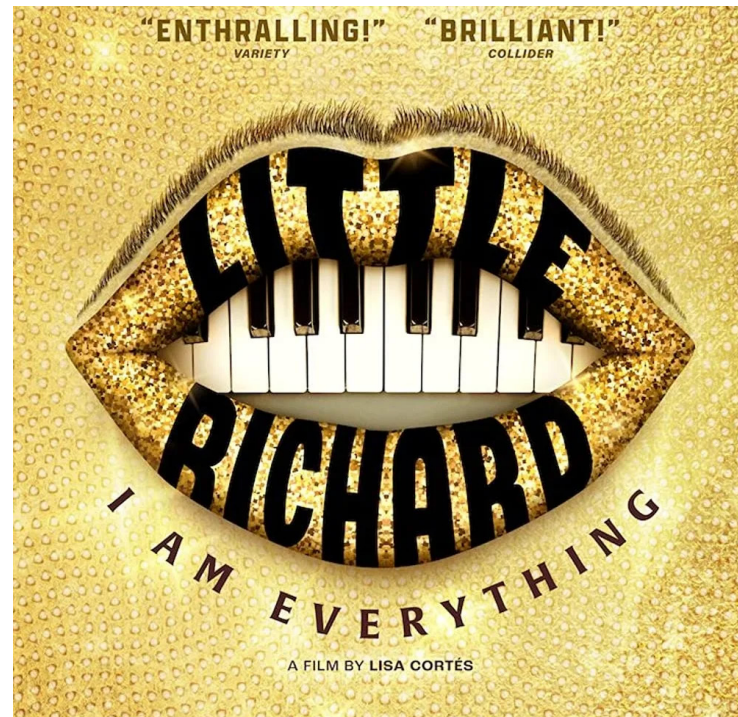
## LITTLE RICHARD: I AM EVERYTHING

[Director: Lisa Cortés]

“Tooty Fruity” was the first song that I ever heard by Little Richard before I knew who he was. It was considered “grown folks music”, the stuff you can’t listen to because it has too many foul words or because they’re talking about some that isn’t appropriate for your age. But that only increased my fascination which ignited the interest to find out who Little Richard was.

Lisa Cortes’ documentary puts to bed everything you THINK you know about the true King of Rock and Roll. Richard was labeled as “the one of a kind icon that shaped the world of music” and throughout the story that claim has been supported a thousand times over. But she also focuses on the imbalance Little Richard faced, which truly intrigued me because I think this a battle we’ve all faced: the battle between secular and sacred. On one hand, Little Richard is a worldly icon, doused in glitter and gold from his wardrobe to his makeup, he is the king of a people yearning for soulful music. On the other hand, in his heart he knows he should not conform to the desires of this world because he’s called to be a servant of God and create a new foundation not built on sex and fame but the love and obedience to God. I think it’s these details that fans don’t know that allow them to create the idea that celebrities aren’t human. Some of the most notable names recalled the best and worst times with Richard: Billy Porter, Tom Jones, Paul McCartney, John Waters, Pat Boone, amongst others.

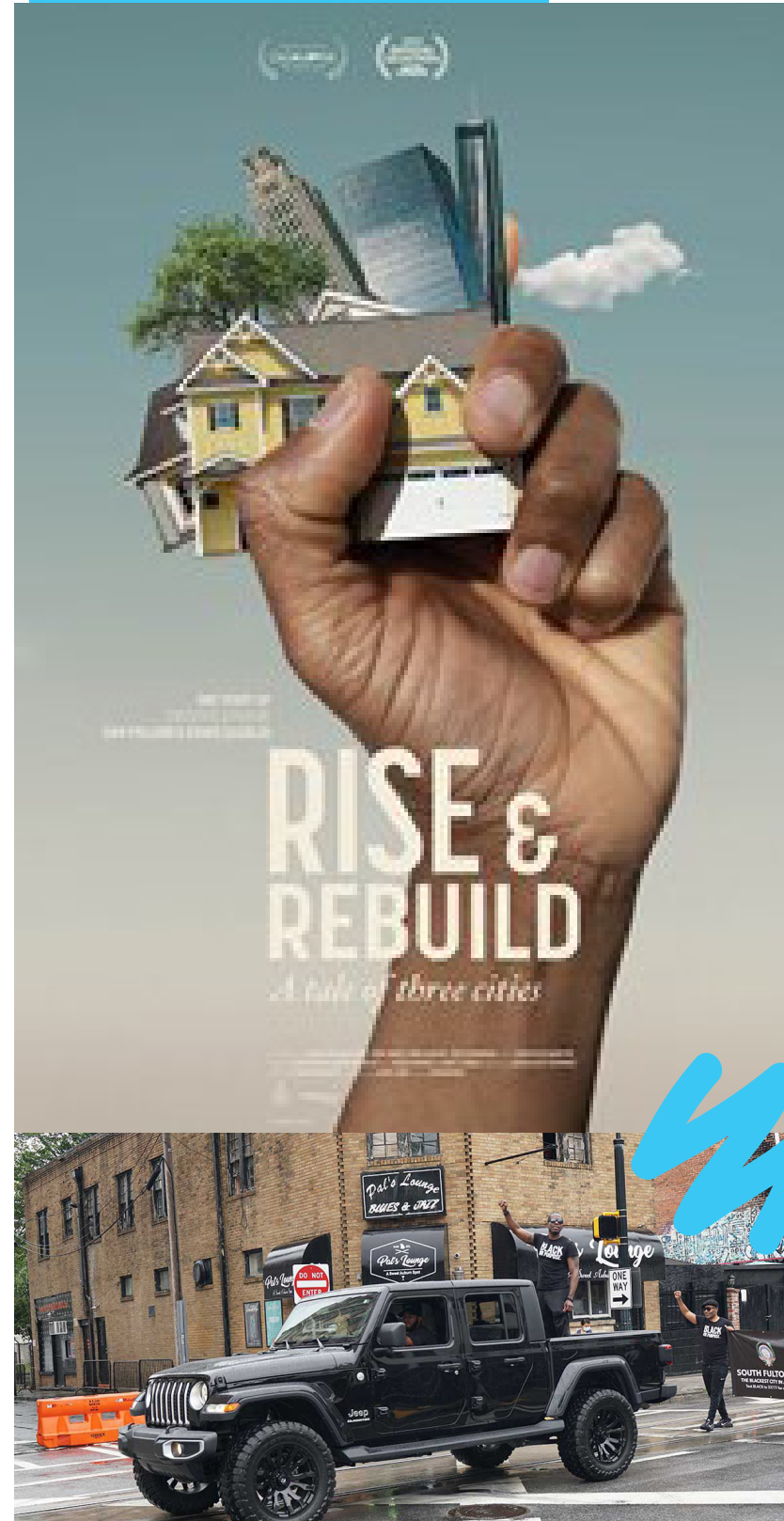
Richard Wayne Penniman is not unlike many other queer or trans people who’ve been outed by the ones that they love and forced to create a new family through a talent like music or art. He is one of the blueprints to androgyny



and queerness, one that has even now, in 2023 remained relevant because so many people can now be comfortable in their identity because of artists like Little Richard. Lisa Cortes accurately depicted each phase of Richard’s life. In the church where it all started, to the stage where he grew into an icon, back to the church where he renewed his faith and restored his relationship with God, and then the end of his story.

I appreciate Cortes’ understanding of representation in music, not only do I believe this greatly directed documentary re-established that Richard was the true originator of rock but it gave space for his intersectionality. Richard Wayne Penniman was a queer, black, Christian, rock and roll artist and creator. He walked so our generation could run, and “Little Richard: I Am Everything” depicts that in the most notorious way.

/Peazy from CW



## RISE AND REBUILD: A TALE OF THREE CITIES

[Directors: Asako Gladsjo & Sam Pollard]

We chose, “Rise and Rebuild: A Tale of Three Cities” as our community partnership film because when the world see’s Black America it often sees what we don’t have and not what we have had that has generationally been taken from us. Where the film captures Wilmington’s Brooklyn, Atlanta’s Sweet Auburn, and Chicago’s Bronzeville, those localities might as well be Tulsa’s Black Wall Street, Detroit’s Black Bottom [Lafayette], and Milwaukee’s original Bronzeville. But with Tulsa being a trendy storyline Directors Asako Gladsjo and Sam Pollard thought it best to highlight these other narratives that hold just as much weight. The pivot to black communities that once prospered, were harmed, and now are looking to reinvigorate their communities as they rebuild are stories that should be cautionary [as gentrification is at an all time high] and inspiring as now more than ever before the Black dollar, the Black education, and the Black voice has leverage.

The quote, “It’s not about politics. It’s about people”, that Mayor khalid kamau of South Fulton said during the film, was one of those notes I don’t think enough people comprehend. At the end of the day the value of our quality of life is not determined by the parlor tricks of politics but the people who enforce politics as a tool in which one secures the value of that quality of life.

I saw my city in that film. I saw our hardships like a mirror. I know what is at risk if we don’t carve out the infrastructure and let “them” take the wheel. We don’t want a repeat. We want ground breaking change. This film shows us exactly what that can look like.

Lexi for /CW



**THE ANGRY BLACK GIRL AND HER MONSTER**  
[Director: Bomani J. Story]

Viewing “The Angry Black Girl and Her Monster”, a top-tier thriller/suspense film that in my opinion personified the pain of a Black child’s trauma surrounding death, was a pleasure. Although inspired by Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein”, this film provokes deep thought about the trauma of experiencing death at a young age and how death is disproportionately in closer proximity to Black children more than it provokes goosebumps. Vicaria, the main character, is almost stalked with gun violence as it has plagued her family, killing her mother and her big brother. Meanwhile, on the opposite end her father is still alive but fighting the battle of addiction that will ultimately lead to an untimely demise. Life hasn’t always been like this for Vicaria, we see this through Bomani J. Story’s allusion to better times during the intro of the film. Evidence that Vicaria has a loving relationship with her father and a pretty normal life outside of her mad science lab is pretty clear; the only thing that is truly wrong with this seemingly normal teenager is her perception of death.

Because of the randomness and aggressiveness of her mother and brother’s death, Vicaria is convinced that death is a disease, one that can be cured through science. Through the doors of her abandoned science lab, Vicaria takes the body of her slain brother and attempts to revive him to prove that death can be cured. She connects every source of power to his lifeless body, hits a switch, and after a citywide power outage, the monster awakens. But things start to get out of hand quickly, “Frankenstein” has no concept of life, he only knows death and to destroy.

As the plot thickens, Vicaria’s invention has taken his place as a true monster, [& here is the part where I am tempted to give the full story away]. In the end, she has no brother, no mother, father, family or even Kango and his henchmen, which in



my opinion validated her hypothesis that death is in fact a disease. Once it claims someone close to you, the cycle continues until there is no one left to kill. I wouldn’t categorize this as horror, this film falls more on the suspense spectrum but the suspense kept us at the edge of our seats at every turn. Bomani took a classic horror story and turned it into an attempt to fix and cure what we have all deemed as incurable, and it worked. The ending scene shows a scientific genius grin into the camera as she brings her sister in law back to life using the same tactics she used before only this time... they WORK! I loved this film and I truly believe Bomani J. Story has earned his flowers.

/Peazy for CW

**BLACK LENS PRESENTS WRITING IN COLOR**  
[Event]

I love to write, but I’m not sure if writing a movie is the best place for my skills. However, after attending, Writing In Color, I might just change my mind. Because the word from the judges is me [& my random collaborative team] are pretty good at it. Well, at least that little trophy sitting on my desk says so.



SANTANA COLEMAN, PAULINA LULE, DEREK JAY GARLINGTON DURING WRITING IN COLOR PANEL

Being at Radio Milwaukee [my media home away from home] for an event that showcases film through the writer’s lens was fascinating. Did you know that there are local & Black filmmakers accessible to you in Milwaukee? I Stan [as the kids say Lol]. The panel to bless us with insight about the film industry at a micro and macro level included Milwaukee’s very own Emmy Award winner, Santana Coleman, the amazing Paulina Lule, and Pitch It To Me, game designer Derek Jay Garlington. They told us their perspectives of the tumultuous realm we call Hollywood, the glory of having Milwaukee [a non permit film city], and the nuance of being Black in the world of film. When creatives get to speak no holds bar, I live. You can always learn something worth holding on to.

But it was the game for me! Pitch It To Me, is a fun way to get those gears turning in your head. The game is noted to be “your chance to pitch the next hit film or tv show! Pitch It To Me is an

entertaining card game that builds collaboration and creativity through the journey of storytelling”. And it did just that. My team won the pitch competition by putting together a new era story of Isis and Osiris set in dystopia Milwaukee. We named it, Gods of The Eastside. We set Tyana Taylor as Isis and Damson Idris as Osiris and it was a rap!

“If you’re scared just say that!”, was my snark at the competition [but I don’t talk sh\*t unless I can back it up].

Like I said, the trophy is sitting on my desk.

Lexi for /CW

**To be SEEN in film is to be seen in mediated reality. We love it. Please keep it going!**

**Love & All Things Urban,  
/CW Fam**



