



DOC NYC Friday Fix

Transcript: Episode 8

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Thom Powers: [00:05:29](#) Hello, everybody. Welcome to Friday Fix. I'm DOC NYC's artistic director Thom Powers. Today's episode is going to cover three documentaries that are available at online film festivals this weekend. The first project is NATIONTIME - GARY, that's an extraordinary document of the national black political convention that took place in Gary Indiana. In 1972, the film was directed by William Greaves, a pioneering documentary maker who died six years ago. NATION TIME - GARY is being shown online for free this weekend, courtesy of the AFI Docs festival, and we'll put a link into the chat window so you can get more information. The second project we're going to discuss is a new four part series called City So Real about the Chicago mayoral elections last year. The filmmaker is Steve James who's made a career out of covering Chicago in films like Hoop Dreams, the interrupters and his series America to Me. City So Real premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. It doesn't have distribution yet, but this weekend you can buy a ticket to watch it also at AFI Docs online. And the third and final project we'll discuss is called When Liberty Burns. It's a timely documentary about police violence that took place in Miami in 1980. The film is showing online for a one day sneak preview just today presented by the Miami Film Festival. And I'll be joined later by the film's director, Dudley Alexis. I want to remind you that on Fridays after Friday Fix our friends at Firelight Media are now in the third week of their series called Beyond Resilience. That show goes live at four o'clock and you have up until 3:30 to RSVP for it. And we'll put a link in the chat window. So in a minute, I'm going to bring up our first guest Shola Lynch.

Thom Powers: [00:07:46](#) Let me share a bit about her. You know her films. They include a Chisholm '72: Unbought and Unbossed that was released in 2004 about the presidential candidate, Shirley Chisholm. Shola's second film was Free Angela And All Political Prisoners that premiered the 2012 Toronto Film Festival. In addition to being a



filmmaker, Shola holds another key job as a curator of moving images at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem. I invited her today to talk about the legacy of William Greaves. Some viewers might know his 1970s experimental film, Symbiopsychotaxiplasm that you can watch on the Criterion Channel, but Greaves has a deep catalog of films that are harder to find. And one of them is NATION TIME - GARY. In 1972, he captured the gathering of the country's political activists, black political activists and politicians, including Jesse Jackson, Betty Shabazz, Amiri Baraka, Bobby Seal, and entertainers like Harry Belafonte and Isaac Hayes who all gathered for a political convention in Gary Indiana city chosen because it was one of the few major cities that had a Black mayor, Richard Hatcher. So the reason I asked Shola to come on and talk about this is she has a couple of different credentials to bring perspective on this film. The first is her position at the Schomburg center where William Greaves's archives are stored. And second, her work as a filmmaker has paid a lot of attention to 1972 when NATION TIME - GARY takes place. That was the year of course, that Shirley Chisholm ran to be president. So before I bring on Shola let's take a look at a one minute trailer for NATION TIME - GARY.

Trailer:	00:10:01	Trailer
Thom Powers:	00:12:17	Alright. Now we're going to bring up Shola like she's un-muted and we'll get her video. Hey!
Shola Lynch:	00:12:27	Hi Thom!
Thom Powers:	00:12:28	Hi, welcome. Thank you for being here. So Shola, William Greaves was born in 1926. He started making films in the 1950s, and he was active up until his death six years ago, for people who don't really know William Greaves, his work. Can you just give a, you know, a summary of his significance?
Shola Lynch:	00:12:51	Sure. So Greaves himself actually said that he grew up in the shadow of the Harlem Renaissance. So, you know, when he talks about his life as a cultural creator and filmmaker, it starts with seeing Oscar Micheaux walking across the street, near, near the Schomburg with suitcases that he thinks are films. He gets involved in acting, he's a kid at Stuyvesant. He goes to city college. He becomes enamored with the power of storytelling. And that really is what gets him while he's in college into



filmmaking. And then his first job was at the national film board in Canada. And I think that's a really important point that that happens in the fifties and it's important because there he had training and he could, he could practice being a filmmaker, whereas in the United States, because of segregation, he couldn't get his foot in the door in the unions, right? So without training, we cannot be our best filmmaking selves.

Thom Powers: [00:13:51](#)

I mean, something else I want to say about his work at the national film board, he made a film in the late fifties called emergency ward. So, which is a, it's a verite film. I mean, to the extent that you can say that at the time it's an observational film, he's out with ambulances in the street, you know, a few years before. What many of us think of as the real, you know, birth of American observational film, you know, with Primary in 1960. So, you know, it's significant to note that Greaves was ahead of that.

Shola Lynch: [00:14:27](#)

No Greaves was completely ahead of that and should be considered as part of our founding filmmakers when we, when we talk about very American verite and it was actually Shirley Clark who saw that film and drafted him in with her, some of her cohort to create films for the UN, this brought him back to the US. This is, you know, in the middle of the civil rights movement, and he's ready to use filmmaking as a tool for storytelling. And so it's from there that I mean, he made, it goes on to make something like 200 films that are collected and now at the Schomburg Center in the archives. And so Gary... NATION TIME - GARY is one of them and it is a film of this moment, Thom.

Thom Powers: [00:15:15](#)

Very much so, so I mean, let me talk about the way it's been lost and recovered. I, I interviewed Greaves 17 years ago and did a tribute to him at IFC Center in 2009. And this film wasn't on any list of things that we had access to at the time. Now it's been brought back through Sandra Schulberg's organization Indie Collects that's been doing remarkable work bringing back all kinds of lost films. You were making Chisholm '72 you know, film came out 16 years ago, but you're making it for a long time before that. Were you aware of NATION TIME - GARY?

Shola Lynch: [00:16:02](#)

Yeah. Oh, completely, completely, completely aware of NATION TIME - GARY. I mean, so one of the things is the, the standard



media organizations were not so great about covering black focused moments in history and so Greaves. And if you look at the opening credit, so I encourage everybody to watch this film. And if you look at the opening credits, obviously it's a list of who's who that are there. And Greaves is there because coming out of Black Journal and all the filmmaking that he had done previously, he's a known entity and his lens is really important. The portraiture, you see the way you get to know the audience, the way it's edited together is all part of his point of view. I would also say that it's one of the cool things is that he worked with his son David Greaves, who's still around still making et cetera. And of course, Louise Greaves, who is his wife and also producing partner and keeper of the legacy. She may actually be tuning in today.

Thom Powers: [00:17:10](#)

I think also his brother, Donald is... Has a credit in the film. So it's a real family affair.

Shola Lynch: [00:17:17](#)

It, it, it's a real family affair. And what he brings to the table is not just his craft as a filmmaker, but also his knowledge of black history and culture. And he's able to capture all of these moments. I mean, everybody who was anybody, not anybody because Shirley Chisholm wasn't there. She was campaigning in Florida, but you know, Amiri Baraka, you have Isaac Hayes, Dick Gregory. You have of course, Queen Mother Moore, Richard Roundtree, that piece narrated by Sidney Poitier and poems by Langston Hughes are read by Harry Belafonte. You don't get that kind of mashup of lens and history without somebody, somebody like Greaves. And so the film still can resonate with us today. That is a mark of a true filmmaker. Right. But it's not it's of the moment, but then it also last (phone rings) Oh, sorry. Yeah, it's live. Yeah. Hopefully there'll be no kid and partner sightings. (phone rings) There we go. Phone's ringing.

Thom Powers: [00:18:30](#)

So so I wonder if I can give you a little soap box as a, as an archivist. You know, maybe when people heard me say that William Greaves, his archives are stored the Schomburg Center they could allow themselves a relaxation moment, like "Oh, good. That's taken care of" But I mean, can you talk about the, you know, the real need or attention, not only for things that are in an institution, you know, a great but underfunded institution like Schomburg but for all the things that, that don't have that protection.



- Shola Lynch: [00:19:07](#) Yes. So to go back and answer the Chisholm question, we knew about the film and we wanted to find it and we couldn't find it. We could only find you know, clips of it. And in fact we use some of them and license them from other places, not realizing they were part of NATIONTIME. So his collection came to the Schomburg in the late eighties and it was kept safely, but it wasn't completely processed. So one of the joys, the reason I'm there is history is important and our historical voices are important. You know, it is like where the place where black lives matter, 20, 24/7, 365 days a year. And black history is not just one month and these voices were literally bound cause they're just boxed up. And so the administrative work to raise the money to get buy in to unearth.
- Shola Lynch: [00:20:03](#) All of that was really an impetus set by discovering Greaves' collection there, I mean 500 boxes of his life's work. And, you know, we were able to get downtown and et cetera, to, to help with the fundraising and raise the money for the entire collection to be processed. And so we're in the midst of that. So we're halfway through that process, but to your point, it requires money and it requires attention and it's slow, but the impact is so great. So when we talk about black voices today, we have to have an understanding of nothing that is being said today is new, right? That there is nuance change, of course, but that need to express yourself has been around and as up for us to go back and kind of like is, this is what I feel my mission is to go back and unearth, those voices to connect us together.
- Shola Lynch: [00:21:01](#) So what does that mean? As a black filmmaker, I want to understand black filmography, right? I want to understand how that fits into a American documentary filmography and always be in conversation with all of those elements. And William Greaves is central to that because he's trained before so many other people, and then he goes on to help employ and in train...train other people. So I would say like through Black Journal you know Saint Clairborne, Madeline Anderson, Julie Dash, also Stan Letham, they're all part of his core group. And so it's exciting to see the baton pass over and over again.
- Thom Powers: [00:21:46](#) I mean, one example, I think of the power of telling history is what you did with Chisholm '72. And you know, I think when it came out in 2004, it was a real revelation to people. And I remember you and I showed the film in 2008, the night Barack



Obama was elected and - at IFC Center - and it still felt like a an underappreciated chapter of history today. The name Shirley Chisholm, you know, comes up more often than than I was aware that I heard it 20 years ago. Just recently there was the fictionalized based on true events series Mrs. America, where Rose Byrne is playing Gloria Steinem and Uzo Aduba is playing Shirley Chisholm and Shirley Chisholm's campaign, it's a big part of that fiction film. I wonder how you've observed since your film came out, the ways in which telling that story helped bring it more into a public conversation.

Shola Lynch:

[00:22:49](#)

Oh, absolutely. I mean, I think when it comes to American history and people of color and women, we, we lack imagination. So what the responsibility of a storyteller and a filmmaker is to expand your idea of, of, of that past those people and those possibilities. So I can tell you, Shirley Chisholm is the first black woman to run for president in 1972. You can be like great, snooze, you know, file it away. But if I show you this woman who comes out and says, I am Shirley Chisholm, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, and I'm running for the presidency of the United States of America, split the screen and go bananas with imagery, then you're like, Oh, you feel it? And that's what's. So that's what I love about our business. And that's what I love about our craft is we bring history, historians, the work that they do, and also journalists, and we bring it together and we mash it up and we bring the public in, in a way.

Shola Lynch:

[00:23:50](#)

So they feel something. And I think that's, what's really critical for stories like that. So Chisholm's legacy is discussed now. I only wish she had lived longer because I, you know, wanted that great biography. And I've, you've been actually looking over the research and saying, you know, we've got so much information here, but you know, maybe I'll do that. But the, yes. So the point is it draws people in to the emotional core of what these stories are. And, you know, one of the things in Gary Indiana that is so striking in that film is that everybody's talking about the nation to recognize black humanity, right? And so the work of telling a story about Shirley Chisholm or to, to in a real way, tell the story about Gary Indiana is to acknowledge black humanity and that, and that fight.

Thom Powers:

[00:24:45](#)

That's great. So before I wrap up with you, can you just share with with us what you're working on now?



- Shola Lynch: [00:24:52](#) Sure, sure, sure. I'll always the work at the Schomburg people come by. Talk to me post COVID cause we're closed. Now I'm working on an art piece for the armory to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of suffrage, celebrating a hundred women artists. Ha-ha. And I'm also, I finished a piece on Flo Joe, the sprinter from the eighties for ESPN. And if we can get past some legal issues with her estates, I hope we can present that. Soon that's a really important story as well. She is still the world record holder.
- Thom Powers: [00:25:25](#) Ah, that's fantastic. And you were a a runner yourself, right?
- Shola Lynch: [00:25:29](#) Yes, I was. I was a middle distance runner broke my first record at the age of 14 national record in the, the half mile. It may still stand. I'm not sure, but yeah, so sharp elbows trained to throw them. Right. Isn't that what we need in this entrepreneurial business. That's where I get my training.
- Thom Powers: [00:25:51](#) I'm really grateful to today of all days on Juneteenth to come on and talk about William Greaves.
- Shola Lynch: [00:25:59](#) Yes. National liberation day. I mean, I probably part of why I came is because Greaves is an important voice and we're talking about making clear and listening to the black voices from the past and the present and his work really helps do that. There is a forthcoming book actually I want to mention that was edited by Scott McDonald and Jacqueline Stewart. I got to write an essay in it. I'm very excited that is coming out on him. He is an under-recognized voice in the history of independent black filmmaking.
- Thom Powers: [00:26:30](#) That's great. I know Firelight Media has a some fellowship in his honor these days. So that's
- Shola Lynch: [00:26:38](#) Yes. And what, so, you know, Greaves was one of those that touched many lives. I mean, I remember when he came to my Chisholm screening and he made a point of coming after me back at Schomburg and he shook my hand, you know, Stanley Nelson has Greaves stories too. He touched so many of us that, you know, we, we felt it in our hearts and we carry, we, we helped carry on that legacy. So the William Greaves fellowship is something to look into, particularly for younger filmmakers out there.



- Thom Powers: [00:27:07](#) Yeah. Shola thanks so much. I look forward to having more opportunities to bring you back. It's it's been too long since I've gotten to see you, so it's great to do it now.
- Shola Lynch: [00:27:19](#) Thank you. Yes. Always eager to talk about filmmaking and of course always making
- Thom Powers: [00:27:24](#) All right. Okay. So we're going to say goodbye to Shola and in a minute bring up our next guest Steve James. Yeah. Okay. So we said goodbye to Shola. So as I said, my intro, Steve has a long history of telling stories about Chicago and films like Hoop Dream and The Interrupters and his 10 part series America to Me about a high school. And for the last a year or more, he's been working on this four part series about Chicago's mayoral elections. They took place last year. It was an unusual field of candidates. You know, I think more than 20 people were buying at at different times of all backgrounds, black, white, Latinx maybe other kinds of politicians representing other demographics. This was taking place. The mayoral campaign was taking place against the backdrop of a Chicago police shooting of Laquan McDonald.
- Thom Powers: [00:28:30](#) He was shot 16 times, but the case was largely covered up for many months until the body cam footage of police officers finally reach the public. And after the public could see the killing with their own eyes, the uproar caused Mayor Rahm Emanuel to withdraw from seeking another term. So in City so Real Steve and his crew are using the mayor's race to explore many different Chicago neighborhoods. We're gonna watch a clip right now Mmm. Of this is this is one minute clip from from episode one. And it has as its backdrop, it really invokes what was going on in Chicago around police shootings. So let me actually let me change my powerpoint Nope. Okay, here we go.
- Thom Powers: [00:33:10](#) Okay so. Bringing up Steve, now you can unmute yourself. Hey Steve, good to see you.
- Steve James: [00:33:21](#) Good to see you, Thom.
- Thom Powers: [00:33:23](#) So that clip we just saw, you know, is maybe it's hard to reduce your your filmmaking to just clips. Maybe it's an unfair way. You know, you deliberately have taken an expansive approach in a, in a four part series with this, you know, can you describe, you



know, what you were trying to do and telling the story and, and thinking and using the mayoral election as a, as a landscape?

Steve James: [00:33:52](#)

Sure. so for a long time, I've wanted to do a kind of portrait of Chicago and Gordon Quinn. And I made a stab at it some years ago, but couldn't kind of get it to go anywhere. But you know, when with this mayoral election rolling around, I thought this was the perfect time to try and do it because this was the most wide open mayoral election in a long time, especially once Rahm drops out, which happens while we were filming. And then that coupled with the Laquan McDonald trial, it just seemed like Chicago was added at a crucial crossroads, if you will. And I've always thought of Chicago, you know, I'm not alone in this. It's, it's even been kind of known as the great American city, the most American of cities. And so I think that what's going on in Chicago is going on everywhere and it's certainly not, never been more true and evident than right in this moment, but I want it to have a kind of mosaic portrait that that was about the election and about the trial. But wasn't just about those things that was also a kind of serendipitous, if you will, portrait of the city. So that's how I got to four episodes.

Thom Powers: [00:35:10](#)

Yeah. So I wanna remind people they're playing right now at AFI docs. You can watch them online through this weekend, I think through June 20th. That's tomorrow, maybe long, maybe, maybe it's still Sunday. I don't know, but go to AFI Docs. There's still time to watch the series. Well, you know, can you talk to me about some of your favorite moments in the series, you know, things were where you, what you were trying to do really clicked?

Steve James: [00:35:43](#)

Yeah. well, I, I, I really there's a moment in the first episode or, or two scenes in the first episode that played back to back that that are special to me. One is, is, is actually a result of that clip. We just saw that clip was about a barber named Harith Augustus, who was killed by the police.

Steve James: [00:36:04](#)

And so we went back to his barbershop about a month later, cause I was just curious to know more about who Harith was because the news media had kind of moved on at that point to the next thing. And so we went back to the barbershop and the idea was to you know, was to, was to get a sense of who this man was that had been killed from the barbers and people that



frequent the shop. It.. That happened but that wasn't the real story of the scene. And in the movie, what happens is, is that this, this postal worker walked in a black postal worker who had never been in that barbershop and to get his hair cut. And it, what led was this really for me this sort of incredible conversation about privilege, but as it related to being black for the, for the postal worker who was an ex military guy and the guys in the shop who feel like they had no, they had not had any advantages at all in life.

Steve James: [00:37:04](#)

And you know, of course, to me, as a white guy, I'm looking at the postal worker, he's a totally self made man, right? I mean, he's, he's a heroic individual in his own. Right. But it just, it was a really revealing conversation. And then we pair that, that inspired us. And this was part of the idea of the film was we, we use things that happen to drive us to the next thing I'm inspired in many ways by Chris Marker film Le Joli Mai that I saw many, many years ago and was really taken with. And so that inspired us to go to us to a white barbershop in Bridgeport. And that scene plays out on the heels of it. And it's quite humorous for awhile there, old retired guys, mostly giving each other a lot of crap. But towards the end, it's revealed that they're actually ex police officers and they have some pretty strong opinions about what's going on now. So that's one example.

Thom Powers: [00:38:00](#)

I want to ask you in light of all the recent events this month you know, I should say speaking for myself as someone who grew up in Detroit, so felt like I had went to high school in Detroit and had been, been thinking a lot about race throughout my life. You know, I find myself this month you know, recognizing real shortcomings in my own perceptions and certainly my own actions and in not doing more and thinking harder about this I wonder what you've been going through because you're certainly someone who's you know, been involved, you know, covering a lot of black lives in films, going back to Hoop Dreams. And you know, w what have been, what have been your personal reflections?

Steve James: [00:38:55](#)

Well, I, I mean, I, I probably have gone through some of the same things you have. I mean, no matter how much...how many films one may make and that focus on issues of race in America there's always plenty more to learn and plenty more to do. And you know so I, I'm still on that same journey that for me started



in high school, I think going to you know, living in a community that was very much divided by race, although not violently, so thank God, in Virginia. And and so I, I'm really excited about the moment we're living in. I I've been out filming what will may very well be an episode five for this series. You know, that that's going to deal with the pandemic and also the upheaval in Chicago, which has been profound and significant and you know, so it's been really amazing for me to be out filming in this moment too.

Steve James:

[00:39:58](#)

Cause I'm not that, I mean, we've got footage of, you know, police violence and against protesters and, and the loot, you know, there's all that stuff that's everyone has seen on the internet. And, and certainly we might feature that. But the thing that has really been really good for me is to really try to dig in and reconnect with people from the series and find out how their lives have been impacted by this. And one of the things I've been asking people is, do you, do you think that, you know, what I've encountered is a lot of people, a lot of black people saying that they really do greatly appreciate the white support that's been going on in this, in this time, the protesters, people stepping up, speaking up. So there's great appreciation for that. I think, you know, a question is will that sustain, will that, will that be there? Let's say if we're fortunate enough to push Trump out of office or will people feel like they did their part and go back to their lives as they were. And I think for a lot of, for a lot of people that I've encountered in the African American community, that's a kind of very fundamental question, but there's no doubt that there's a feeling and I feel it. And I think a lot of people feel that this time it's different than, than it's been for a long time.

Thom Powers:

[00:41:24](#)

Hmm. So you you've been filming with with mayor Lori Lightfoot. Hope I'm not a spoiler for people who are gonna watch your film, but you could, you could Google that. But mayor Lightfoot you know, has, I know in Chicago you know been, you know, very visible during the time of the pandemic, you know, there was some funny memes about her scolding people from being on the, on the Lake shore during the pandemic and, and so forth. You know, what, if, you know, it's one, lots of times we make documentaries about elections and I always feel like a real shortcoming of those films is that they end kind of right when the most interesting part begins when someone actually has to go in office and now make good on



their campaign promises. In, In your filming, post-election, you know, what have you witnessed about the struggles of mayor Lightfoot was ran on a progressive platform and now she has to live up to the things that she promised.

Steve James: [00:42:44](#)

Yeah. And, and before I answer that, I just want to say for those who might be thinking about watching this series, even though this political campaign is sort of the central spine of it. I like to think that what we've made here is not a typical political film, because we're not, we're not really about the horse race so much. I mean, we, we tell you what happens and you, you see it happen, but just because, you know, Lori Lightfoot won the mayor race doesn't mean, Oh, it's not going to, you know, I don't need to watch that because it's, it's really, you know, it's, I think it's a different kind of political engagement that we tried to achieve with this film and looking at an election and with, and so in the subsequent shooting that I've done, I mean, one of the things that people felt who are Chicago based particularly, and who are much more activists, was that you know, Lori Lightfoot was a candidate who literally came out of nowhere.

Steve James: [00:43:40](#)

She, she was polling at 2.8% with a month to go for the first round of the election. And she won that. She came from way back and won, which was a surprise, but she was also very much an unknown to most people as a result of that. She wasn't part of the democratic political machine, although she was someone who had held positions of prominence in, in government and in Chicago. And so I think she's had a, this has been a tough one. I mean, I think the pandemic, when the pandemic hit, she, she kind of hit her stride. After having gone through, when she first got elected a protracted teacher strike that that was, that was not good for anybody. And certainly not good for her as a, as a mayor, I think. And she, when the pandemic hits, I think she kind of hit her stride in the memes and things you were talking about were kind of a way of saying that she was being that tough love mother to the city and looking out for our best interest, but with the upheaval that has happened in the wake of George Floyd, it's it's really exposed some real fissures within the progressive community in Chicago, not just between progressive than more conservative people.

Steve James: [00:44:59](#)

And there, this is a tough time to be mayor of Chicago, I guess I'll just say that. And, but I think what this episode will do is



what you're asking for is that we will be able to sort of take stock of someone who's never been a politician before trying to run a major American city at a very difficult moment.

- Thom Powers: [00:45:19](#) Hmm. Well, I'm I'm really glad that you're doing that continuing work. You know, I haven't yet gotten to watch all four hours, but the, the two hours that I have seen were a really rewarding viewing, especially as someone who has a deep feeling for Chicago, my brother and sister lived there of course.
- Steve James: [00:45:40](#) I know.
- Thom Powers: [00:45:40](#) And and as a Detroit or Chicago was always the big city to go to. So I hope people get to chance to see it this weekend and at, at AFI Docs and Steve, I really appreciate you taking the time and to speak with us today.
- Steve James: [00:45:57](#) Yeah. Thanks for, thanks for having me on the show, Thom, always great to see you.
- Thom Powers: [00:46:01](#) Okay. now I will, we'll let Steve go. And I will set up our third guest Dudley, Alexis. He is based in Miami. He directed the documentary Liberty in a Soup about a Haitian new year's day tradition. And his new film is called When Liberty burns. It looks at an uprising that occurred in 1980 when four Miami police officers were acquitted in the case of the death of Arthur McDuffie. The film had its premiere at the Miami Film Festival in March. And that was the last week that any film festivals were taking place still in person, but it's having the additional special screening online today as a special for Juneteenth. And in about an hour at four o'clock Eastern time, Dudley is going to be doing a Facebook live with Miami Film Festival with several key people in in the film. Dudley, welcome. Thank you for being here.
- Dudley Alexis: [00:47:09](#) Thank you for having me.
- Thom Powers: [00:47:11](#) Before I get into our interview Dudley, I'm going to share a trailer of the film. Give me a second to bring that up. So let's look at that trailer.
- Trailer: [00:47:27](#) Trailer



- Thom Powers: [00:48:55](#) So you know, obviously very timely, it feels like that could be happening today. Dudley what was it that made you want to tell this story from from 1980?
- Dudley Alexis: [00:49:09](#) Well, what what happened on right before I started doing this documentary, I was working, I just finished my first feature documentary and I was driving to work and a friend of mine that I grew up with went to high school together, got an altercation with the police and, and and that day it happened on I-95 in Miami. So they had blocked I-95 and I was complaining the whole day about traffic. And when I got to, when I got to work and, and I learned about my friend and, and what happened, and I started researching about Miami police department and the history of Miami police department and their relationship with the black community here. And, and I, and I find out about the story of Arthur Lee McDuffie growing up in Miami not... You know, that was a surprise to me because no one talks about it. No one knows that much about, especially from my generation. So from there, I started doing the research and the more research I do, the more I felt like this is a story that needed to be told
- Thom Powers: [00:50:22](#) Liberty in this title refers to Liberty City, a black community in Miami that were, were during this time of uprising in 1980, really suffered badly. As you dug into the story, you know, the film, well, let me say this. You told me about this film a couple of years ago, you came to a class that I was giving in Miami and said that you were working on this. And and you know, I didn't really know what it would be. Lots of people come up to me at these classes, and it's hard to know what it's what's going to come up that, but I was so impressed when I got to see the film at the... how many people you interviewed, the depth of research that that you found, and really, you know, uncovered a chapter that I, you know, very faintly knew about a city that I spent a lot of time in working at the Miami Film Festival. What was the process for you to, you know, to, to excavate that history?
- Dudley Alexis: [00:51:32](#) Well the first thing I've done is read a lot of, a lot of the books about the history of Miami and, and a lot of the books did not go much about detail, that much details. And, and from there, I started reading a lot of the newspapers and from, from the newspaper, a lot of the people I actually interviewed, I've



learned about them reading the newspapers and, and highlighting their names and started looking for them. But, but and, and at the same time, I was going to our archival footage, newsreel that that was happening at of stuff that was happening at the same time. It took me, I had so many newsreel to look at, it took me like almost a year to go to all of them and to catalog all of them, see, see which footage I can use and which and, and from there, it was helpful to learn so much about the city too. And, and the books help the, the historical books helped.

Dudley Alexis: [00:52:38](#)

That's something, I, I suggest a lot of the people who know a lot of the filmmakers when they search, you know, if they want to start doing those projects. So actually there's a lot of the research, a lot of the historians, I wrote wonderful, wonderful books about their work. And one thing also I did is when you reading those books, I make sure sometimes they do, they have their own references. I tend to go to the back of the book with all the references that they actually had and actually go and read them myself, because sometime they have detailed that doesn't really concern the books that I'm, I'm concerned more on my project. So, yeah.

Thom Powers: [00:53:20](#)

Let me ask you about the archival footage. Cause we were talking about that earlier in the show with Shola Lynch, you know, the, the places where archives are sometimes blank on, on black history or sometimes if they, if their archives that were taken through mainstream news media, you know, were through a specific filters. Sometimes they're very, you know racist or racially blind filter. I wonder if, as you were trying to, you know, dig into that history through local news archives, you know, what were the, what were the things you were finding? What were the things you were looking for and were harder to find?

Dudley Alexis: [00:54:01](#)

Well, they're... Going to, to the archives, like, you know, I run into that problem. A lot of the black history is, is it's almost hard. It's really hard to find them the way they are kept up. And it, that was one of the struggles doing this project in Miami. in Miami fortunately we have the Black Archive here in Miami that does a great, really great job in archiving, some artifact that we got to the black experience in Miami. And and also the Wolfson Archive did a really good, good job cata, cata, catalog some of



the, some of the stories regarding black residents in Miami. But at the same time, there are certain stuff that I hear coming from a whole history, and I'm looking for the actual stuff from the archives that I don't have them. And that was pretty unfortunate for me doing this project. But, and at the same time, I will, I will meet people that will have stuff in their house that are really great artifacts, but I don't know where to put them. And then that's, that's the other struggle that I had and I was dealing with during this project.

- Thom Powers: [00:55:19](#) Cause you do, you did do dig up some photographs and some footage that totally apart from you know, this terrible the terrible events in 1980, but that really bring Miami's black history and black community to life. Those were really nice to see.
- Dudley Alexis: [00:55:41](#) Yeah, those, those were coming from the Wolfson Archive, which was really I was really lucky. That's one of the few archives they have about a few archival footage that they have about Overtown, which is the segregated community that, that was created from the 1910, from the late 1800 to, until it that's still here right now.
- Thom Powers: [00:56:11](#) And then Overdown was impacted.
- Dudley Alexis: [00:56:14](#) It was impacted by the highway that was built through it. And, and pretty much by, by that highway going to Overtown caused like the migration from Overtown to Liberty City. And that's, that's, that's how you ended up having that same community just migrated to a new segregated section of the, of the city. And, and one other thing I was trying to find actually, there's that a wall that's that separated the black section of Miami from the, from the white section, it was kind of hard to find that particular, even a picture of that wall from, from that time. And this wall was
- Thom Powers: [00:56:55](#) This was like a 10 foot tall wall. You, I remember image of it, today t's been kind of reduced, you can see the
- Dudley Alexis: [00:57:05](#) Today it's like two feet tall.
- Thom Powers: [00:57:07](#) Yeah. You can see the lines it, but it's hard to see that history without getting a visual of that wall.



- Dudley Alexis: [00:57:13](#) Yeah.
- New Speaker: [00:57:14](#) Can you talk about being a filmmaker in Miami? You know, much of media is concentrated in New York, Los Angeles much of the documentary community. We certainly see regional documentary outposts, like Kartemquin in Chicago where Steve James works. But and, and Miami adds a lot of strong filmmakers working there, but nowhere near the kind of same infrastructure or you know, access to to the people who make decisions about distribution that exist in New York and Los Angeles. So I, you know, I wonder about what are some advantages or disadvantages you feel about being in a city with with, with a smaller community?
- Dudley Alexis: [00:58:12](#) Well, one thing, one thing that is right, we do not have the same infrastructure in LA or New York but that, that makes it unfortunate for us to find distribution as a lot of great talents here. But one thing that I love, I love the fact that I'm in Miami and telling those there's a lot of new stories people never heard before that are coming out of Miami, and I'm happy I'm part of that. And, and, and and you know, some of my friends and some people I've met some of the filmmakers here in Miami, their stories are so powerful. So, you know, there new stories, you know, Miami is so diverse in so many ways and we have the Caribbean, it's a mixture of the Latin America, Caribbean, and the US all met... all meeting in one place.
- Dudley Alexis: [00:59:03](#) And, and, and I think that melting pot allow us to create new types of stories people never heard before. And that's one thing I love about Miami and to be able to, and I think Miami is being overlooked by some of the storytellers that we have coming out. And, and I would like, you know, distributors to start paying attention more to the city, and some of the great filmmakers are coming out of Miami. Because some of the stories, some of the work I've seen, some of my friends, you know do it, they're phenomenal. I know. And, and, you know, from you know I'm trying to think now, but a lot of them are really, really phenomenal.
- Thom Powers: [00:59:48](#) Well. I mean certainly Moonlight a couple of years ago was you know,
- Dudley Alexis: [00:59:54](#) Perfect example, Moonlight.



- Thom Powers: [00:59:54](#) around the world of what kind of talent exists in Miami. As as we wrap this up, you know, when you've been making this film for a couple years now, it's coming out in this moment where you were questions about police violence in the black community are certainly on everyone's mind. I, I wonder, you know, how you're thinking about the material you've been working on for a couple of years, if you're thinking about it in a different way, you know, as you see what's going on around the country right now,
- Dudley Alexis: [01:00:30](#) You know, when, when when I was working on the film, I was trying to finish it like before the 40th anniversary of the, of the of the whole incident that happened in Miami. And I wanted to do it in a way to bring the history. So, so something can be, so we cannot repeat those things, those same mistakes. And so we can learn why those actually happened. That's, that's one of the thing I was trying to focus on, learn why those those moment keep happening in history. So, so when being, working, working on this project for the past it was like three years, really, for the past few years, it's been, I had a sense, something like that was going to happen again. And I just didn't know it was gonna be in that scale, but because even some of the people I was interviewing was telling me, even in the city of Miami, they feel the same thing is growing, and the same thing it's gonna happen again. It is just, it is just out..... I think, you know, looking at what's happening now I feel we, you know, looking, there's a lot of things to look at. I know from, from looking at policy and I think it goes, you know, facing those stuff, go beyond just policies. It goes into, you know, looking at that, you know, the culture that, that allow, you know, white supremacy to, to take, you know, to take hold and, and, and we, you know, really challenged that.
- Thom Powers: [01:02:17](#) Well, I hope that people get to see When Liberty Burns, if you're in the U S you can watch it today. I saw some on the chat asking when they can see it in the UK. I know Dudley, you're still figuring out your your distribution for it. You know, certainly here in New York, we'll, we're look for opportunities to showcase it for our audiences for people who want to follow the project and your news about distribution, where should they go



- Dudley Alexis: [01:02:47](#) Well they can follow us at @LibertyBurnsDoc on Twitter and @WhenLibertyBurns on Instagram and also on Facebook our page.
- Thom Powers: [01:03:03](#) Great. And so I very much appreciate you joining us today, cause I know in an hour. You've got another conversation on Facebook lives that people can also tune into. And you're going to have many of the people who are involved in this. Dudley, thank you very much for taking the time and for this film.
- Dudley Alexis: [01:03:22](#) Thank you for having me. Thank you for having me.
- Thom Powers: [01:03:25](#) it's a pleasure. All right. As I wrap up here, I want to remind you as always...here we go.. To check out our Monday Memo on that you can subscribe to for free we deliver an email newsletter to you every Monday that gives you the week's documentary news. I want to give a big thanks to the DOC NYC team Sarah Modo, Caitlin Boyle, and Raphaela Neihausen
- Thom Powers: [01:04:02](#) And again, thanks to our guests, Shola Lynch. Shola I see you in the chat? Thank you for all your contributions. We will have to come back and have a larger conversation about archives cause it's favorite topic of mine. And I know you have so much to say about it. Thank you to Steve James, and we look forward to seeing more City So Real. You can see the first four parts this weekend at AFI docs. Thank you to Dudley Alexis. Please try to make time today to see When Liberty Burns at the Miami Film Festival. William Greaves film NATION TIME - GARY is available to watch for free at AFI Docs for the rest of the weekends. Do yourself a favor and see that we hope that you will join us again. Next Friday. We'll be announcing our guest list on Monday. Have a good weekend, have a happy father's day and be well.