

Press Release



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NEWARK MUSEUM BLACK FILM FESTIVAL MARKS 45th ANNIVERSARY OF VIBRANT FILMMAKING

Longest Running Cinema Genre Tribute made possible by Bank of America

NEWARK, NJ – The Newark Museum Black Film Festival (NMBFF), the longest-running black film festival in the United States, is celebrating its 45th anniversary with a blockbuster lineup of films and documentaries. Films in the line-up include *Losing Ground* (July 3); *Sammy Davis, Jr., I've Gotta Be Me* (Jul 10); and *72 Hours: A Brooklyn Love Story* (July 24).

“Since 1974, we have been a constant champion of films for and by African Americans and the African Diaspora,” said Linda C. Harrison, the Museum’s Director and CEO. “In the beginning, we were one of the few places where you could see films that reflected the diversity of the black experience. In staking our claim to authenticity, we are embracing the tagline ‘Reel Black.’”

In keeping with a cultural event that is authentically Newark, this year’s opening night will screen the HBO documentary *United Skates* on June 26 and will feature a one-of-a-kind experience—a pop up roller rink set up outside the Museum.

NMBFF also will include festival pop-ups focused on African films on Sunday, July 14; and Latina films on July 28. Additionally, the Museum has partnered with Woman in Media to present *Girls on the Reel*, a STEAM program that provides 15 high school girls from Newark with an opportunity to take stop-motion animation workshops in the Museum’s MakerSPACE. The students will create, shoot and edit a Museum-inspired motion picture that will be screened as part of the NMBFF on July 24 along with *72 Hours: A Brooklyn Love Story*.

In the past 44 years, NMBFF has screened more than 917 films to an audience of more than 194,000 adults and youth. Past films of note have included *Selma*, *Ashes and Embers*, *Body and Soul*, *Do the Right Thing* and *Daughters of the Dust*. In partnership with organizations and businesses in Newark, NMBFF films have been screened at Rutgers-Newark, the Newark Public Library and Cityplex 12.

“This year we will continue to uphold our mandate to bring the best of cinema from across the Diaspora to the citizens of Newark and surrounding municipalities,” said NMBFF Chair Richard Wesley.

NMBFF has brought to Newark luminaires such as the late Gordon Parks and Paul Robeson, Jr. and James Van Der Zee; and James Earl Jones, Danny Glover, Reggie and Warrington Hudlin, Ayoka Chenzira, Spike lee, Pam Grier, Donald Bogle, Richard Wesley, Euzhan Palcy, Ava DuVernay and S. Epatha Merkerson to participate in post-screening discussions.

“The intimate discussions between the audience and filmmakers is a unique aspect of NMBFF,” said Pat Faison, NMBFF Coordinator who has been with the festival since its inception. Among the guests this year will be Oscar and Emmy nominated Samuel D. Pollard, who directed *Sammy Davis Jr., I've Gotta Be Me*.

The NMBFF started in 1974 with a touring black film festival that was put together by filmmaker Oliver Franklin who worked at the Annenberg Center for Communication, Art & Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania. The late Gus Henningburg, who was then the Executive Director of the Greater Newark Urban Coalition, learned about the festival and proposed it to the Newark Museum.

In 1976 when the touring festival was no longer available, the Museum made the decision to produce the Festival and established a Selection Committee, whose volunteer members represented important institutions in the community.

In 1981, a Children’s Festival was added, which is now called Youth Cinema. In 1985, the Museum initiated the Paul Robeson Awards to honor excellence in independent filmmaking in five categories.

Warrington Hudlin, President, Black Filmmaker Foundation said, “The Festival came into existence to fill the void left by movie theaters that were fleeing Newark and other inner cities throughout the United States. The real beneficiaries soon became the newly minted generation of young African American filmmakers who were graduating from film schools with films under their arms and looking for a place to screen them. And even today, if a filmmaker wants to put his or her film to a litmus test for authenticity, I say ‘screen it in Newark.’”

“Newark Museum Black Film Festival is a total and complete national treasure,” said actor-producer-director-filmmaker Penwah. “It is such an honor to be associated with such a groundbreaking and vital movement! The staff, the content, the participants - just plain and simple ‘blacknificence.’ They are official originators, not duplicators. Follow their lead!”

Financial support for the festival from Bank of America for the past 19 years has allowed it to expand in the past to venues beyond the museum, including the NJ State Museum in Trenton, Rutgers-Camden and Monmouth Arts Council in Asbury Park.

“The Newark Museum Black Film Festival never fails to bring an impressive lineup of movies to Newark and beyond,” said Bob Doherty, Bank of America New Jersey president. “Celebrating differences in culture, ethnicity and experience helps create stronger and more vibrant communities.”

Tito's Vodka is the official Spirit Sponsor for the second year. The 2019 NBFF season will begin on June 26 and run through July 31 at 6:30 pm. For a complete schedule, visit www.newarkmuseum.org/NBFF.

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Founded in 1909, the Newark Museum is the largest art and education institution in New Jersey and one of the most influential museums in the United States. Its renowned global art collections, supported by significant holdings of science, technology and natural history, rank 12th among North America's art museums. The Museum is dedicated to artistic excellence, education and community engagement with an overarching commitment to broadening and diversifying arts participation. As it has for over a century, the Museum responds to the evolving needs and interests of the diverse audiences it serves by providing exhibitions, programming and resources designed to improve and enrich people's lives.

The Museum also encompasses the Victoria Hall of Science, the Alice and Leonard Dreyfuss Planetarium, the MakerSPACE, the Billy Johnson Auditorium, the Alice Ransom Dreyfuss Memorial Garden, an authentic Schoolhouse from 1784, and the Newark Fire Museum.

The Newark Museum, a not-for-profit museum of art and science, receives operating support from the City of Newark, the State of New Jersey, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State (a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts), the New Jersey Cultural Trust, the Prudential Foundation, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Victoria Foundation, the PSEG Foundation, the Estate of Phyllis and Sanford Bolton, the Wallace Foundation, and other corporations, foundations, and individuals. Funds for acquisitions and activities other than operations are provided by members and other contributors.