

## **CHANGING FACE OF HARLEM**

EXPLORES THE DRASTIC TRANSFORMATION OF THIS  
HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOOD OVER A TEN YEAR SPAN



A THIRD WORLD NEWSREEL RELEASE



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# CHANGING FACE OF HARLEM

A documentary by Shawn Batey

Told through the personal accounts of residents, business owners, politicians and real estate developers, CHANGING FACE OF HARLEM explores the drastic transformation of this historic neighborhood over a ten year span. The film tackles the pressing issues of class and cultural preservation as the neighborhood struggles to change for the better.

Recognized internationally as “The Black Mecca,” the neighborhood of Harlem was overlooked for decades. Longtime residents weathered the storm despite the abundance of negligent landlords and the lack of basic city services. Bank practices of redlining in the 1980s prevented many residents from purchasing historic brownstones within their own blocks.

Recently, however, Harlem has developed into a prosperous neighborhood for commercial and corporate interests that now consider buying property in the area an ideal investment. With this influx of real estate developments, a younger and more affluent group of new residents has move in dramatically growing and changing the population of Harlem.

Harlem residents have a mixed range of opinions about the future of their community. Some are fearful of what lies ahead and look towards the past for the best of its years. Others foresee a brighter future and happier days for a better Harlem. The consensus in the community is a concern and necessity for cultural preservation.

As urban communities of color across the nation face similar struggles, CHANGING FACE OF HARLEM addresses the timely issues of urban renewal, gentrification and how a community deals with the challenge of maintaining identity while accepting change. (2014, 62 min, US)



Shawn Batey an award-winning filmmaker has over eight years experience as a producer, director, and writer of documentary films and videos. Shawn is a native of St. Louis who currently resides in New York City.

Director: Shawn Batey  
Producers: Shawn Batey & Shaun Jaffier  
Cast: Frank Anderson, Asadah Kirkland, Tekima Berlack & Zevilla Jackson Preston  
Editors: Tat Ho Yee , Jason L. Pollard  
Director of Photography: Kira Kelly  
Music Composer: Jay Rodriguez



San Diego Black Film Festival  
Charlotte Black Film Festival, NC  
Imagenation-Raw Space Gallery,  
Harlem

San Francisco Film Festival  
Historic Harlem Parks Film Festival  
Capital City Black Film Festival  
Long Beach Indie Film Festival  
Harlem Film Festival

St. Louis Black Film Festival  
New Filmmakers Series, New York  
Maysles Cinema, Harlem  
Urban Media Makers Film Festival,  
Atlanta

Reel Sisters Film Festival, New York  
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Calabar Imports Pop Up, New York  
Tsiion Café, New York  
California African-American Museum,  
Los Angeles

National Conference on Race &  
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National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts  
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PROGRESSIVE MEDIA SINCE 1968

# SD Black Film Fest kicks off its 12th year

## Annual cinematic event celebrates filmmakers and their films

By Marcia Manna, Special to the U-T | 6 a.m. Jan. 30, 2014



"The Changing Face of Harlem" will screen at the San Diego Black Film Festival *Publicity photo*

The San Diego Black Film Festival, established in 2002, is an annual, four-day winter event beginning today at the Reading Cinemas Gaslamp 15, downtown.

But preparations start early in summer, when more than a dozen committee and jury members begin to review hundreds of films showcasing African-American culture or the African Diaspora, submitted from around the world.

Making a film can be even more time intensive.

It took Shawn Batey nearly 14 years to produce her one-hour documentary, "The Changing Face of Harlem," which premieres on Saturday at the festival.

Known as the Black Mecca, Harlem is undergoing revitalization, and Batey's film explores the impact of those changes from the perspective of residents and small business owners.

"I have an interest in how people preserve neighborhoods and what makes them special," she said. "It's not just a piece about New York. It's about changing communities, culture preservation and how you work through change and demographics. Do you keep your head down or do you participate?"

Urban development not only altered Harlem's landscape; the skyrocketing rents pushed out lower-income residents and shuttered mom-and-pop stores. And a history of redlining, the unethical practice of banks denying loans in neighborhoods inhabited by people of color, kept many Harlemites from owning their homes.

"I'm curious to see how this film will play in San Diego and how people will relate it to their communities and some of the issues they face," Batey said.

The SDBFF offers a whirlwind of activities, including a round-table discussion with industry professionals, a red-carpet reception and an awards dinner (this year staged at the Hard Rock Hotel). The films represent multiple genres, from animation and comedy to music videos.

"Tula the Revolt," a drama starring Danny Glover that is based on a true story about a slave uprising in Curacao, opens the film festival today.

Celebrities slated to appear include actress Robin Givens and musician and songwriter Bill Withers, known for the soulful hits "Ain't No Sunshine," "Lean on Me" and "Use Me."

At 10 a.m. Saturday, Withers will attend a complimentary screening of his documentary "Still Bill." Free tickets must be reserved and are available online.

Kristoff St. John, who plays the role of Neil Winters on the CBS television soap "The Young and the Restless," will appear Saturday afternoon to promote the premiere of his true-to-life documentary titled, "A Man Called God."

Karen Willis, the festival's director, said SDBFF is one of the largest black film festivals in the country with a reputation for attracting distribution deals.

"When a filmmaker comes to the San Diego Black Film Festival and their film is picked up for distribution, we feel that we have done our job," said Willis. "That's what it is all about."

*Marcia Manna is an arts and entertainment writer.*

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## Harlem church screens films to bridge gap between gentrification and education

[Courtenay Brown](#) | 7/29/2013, 10:58 a.m.



TEN founder Joe Rogers, Jr. helped facilitate a discussion among community members after the screening of two films about gentrification. Courtenay Brown photo

It was the good ol' times all over again Monday night at AME Zion Church on the Hill. More than 30 people gathered to watch and discuss two locally produced documentaries that helped the audience reminisce about an older Harlem that was once a stomping ground for small Black-owned businesses. The films then offered a sharp contrast to these memories with images of a more modern, gentrified Harlem.

The screenings were a summer edition of a larger initiative founded in March of 2011, "The Harlem/Washington Heights Education Film Screening and Community Discussion Series," which works in conjunction with Total Equity Now (TEN), Community League of the Heights (CLOTH) and AME Zion Church on the Hill. The session on gentrification is the 20th event the three organizations have hosted together.

The Rev. DeForest Raphael of AME Church on the Hill is happy to see the church become a resource to the community, as it continues to host monthly events with TEN and CLOTH. “The church gains a sense of connectedness,” Raphael said. “With Columbia University’s expansion, the community is changing and the church is seen as an entity that supports the community.”

Joe Rogers Jr., founder of TEN, an organization that seeks to empower members of the Harlem community through education, said that he wanted to screen the films and allow attendees themselves to bridge the gap between two topics, gentrification and education, which are often discussed separately.

“We don’t just watch a film and then talk at people for an hour and a half or so,” Rogers said. “We show the film as a launching point for a democratic, small-group community center dialogue.”

To encourage this dialogue, Rogers pulled the attendees, who varied in age and race, into different groups after watching “El Barrio Tours: Gentrification in East Harlem” by Andrew Padilla and “Changing Face of Harlem” by Shawn Batey. The groups were asked to produce questions for the two filmmakers about the effects of gentrification and education, as well as allow an opportunity to build communities across the various backgrounds and neighborhoods from which they came.

Yvonne Stennett, executive director of CLOTH, a 61-year-old organization that is committed to bettering the lives of southern Washington Heights residents, said that it was especially important for different people from different communities to come together to discuss these issues.

“We have to address issues head-on that are controversial because if you don’t, what comes out of it is more pain than good,” Stennett said. “It’s important to have these types of platforms so that people can talk and try to figure out how we cope with it and make the best out of the situation that as individuals we may not have control over.”

Discussion lasted more than two hours after the films were screened as several individuals posed questions to the filmmakers and one another about the positive effects gentrification could have on education, such as the diversification of schools, and the negative effects, like the loss of culture and sense of place. One attendee, Bernadette Anderson, who works with the International Youth Leadership Institute, described the discussion as “healthy” and “informative.”

“I think the forum created an environment for us to become activists and have community, and find solutions to the issues in our communities,” said Anderson, who has an interest in improving education. Meanwhile, Stennett closed the forum by emphasizing the importance of doing just that.

“This was only the tip of the iceberg,” Stennett said. “I’m glad questions were asked and I don’t think all of them were answered. I think that’s good because now people have the opportunity to go home and think about it a little bit more.”

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Harlem Focus is a blog with an eye on community, culture, art, food and life in and around Harlem. It is a product of the CCNY–Amsterdam News Urban Digital Media Lab in collaboration with the Documentary Forum.

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## New Film Looks at Harlem in Transition

By Michelle Thompson



Filmmaker Shawn Batey conceived her new documentary, “*Changing Face of Harlem*”, with the hope of starting a dialogue between local residents as they tell their stories about their relationship with Harlem and their hopes and dreams for the area. But her work has also sparked unintended dialogues about the role politicians play in developing/hindering a community, and another on funding independent film projects.

Batey’s documentary follows three central characters: Frank, a man who led a tenants’ association; Tekima, a florist; and Asadah, a new business owner. Batey wanted to hear from the residents and allow them to speak for themselves. “I kept reading newspaper articles about the changes coming to Harlem, but I never heard from the residents themselves,” she said.

Though these characters are black, ultimately, Batey argues that Harlem is grappling with an economic divide. “It’s definitely not all about race, but it’s about class,” she says.

You cannot tell a story about Harlem without examining politicians’ discussions with its residents, as they are often the key to allowing financial resources into an area. One [clip](#) shows President Bill Clinton announcing his arrival to Harlem when he opened his office in the area. While many of Harlem’s black residents welcomed him, others expressed skepticism and suspected that he would accelerate the gentrification that would displace them from their neighborhood. Batey’s footage reflects these conflicting concerns: Long-time congressman Charles Rangel is relieved that money is flowing through the area, but understands that Harlem’s newcomers must employ its residents and spread the wealth.

## Changing Face of Harlem trailer

from [Shawn Batey](#) PLUS



Batey spent 10 years working on “Changing Face of Harlem,” much longer than she had planned. While the political, economic, and social changes in Harlem lent themselves to a long-term framing of the film, she encountered her own challenges in terms of funding this independent project. Before there was a Kickstarter, she turned to people she knew in a letter-writing campaign. However, when she did her crowd-funding

campaigns, she noticed that she was competing for funds with producers who had larger circles of giving and people with much deeper pockets.

At this point, Batey sees herself as an expert on fundraising for independent film projects and hopes that in the future, “Kickstarter and Indiegogo would develop tiers of fundraising.”

“Changing Face of Harlem” is not Batey’s first foray into documentary filmmaking. “Hair-tage,” a cultural documentary about dreadlocks, and “60+,” a film about elder female steel drum players, have been screened at film festivals and used in schools.



“Changing Face of Harlem” also has a personal dimension. Batey has seen the effects of gentrification first hand. Before she became a Harlem resident, she lived and worked in Chicago, in the Bucktown neighborhood. That community started out as a working class Polish and Puerto Rican neighborhood (not unlike Greenpoint in New York City) when she moved in, but now it looks like Brooklyn’s Williamsburg. She had also read about Magic Johnson opening the movie theater in Harlem and knew that this signaled a change in Harlem. This became the seed of “Changing Face of Harlem.”

You can see “Changing Face of Harlem” at [Raw Space](#), located at 2031 Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue between 121<sup>st</sup> and 122<sup>nd</sup> streets. Screenings will be from May 3 – May 8 every day at 7:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday will have additional show times. Check with [www.imagination.us](#) for those times.

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#### Photo Captions:

Photo one and trailer were taken from <http://changingfaceofharlem.com/>.

Photo two was take by Michelle Thompson.

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Michelle Thompson is a fellow at the [CCNY-Amsterdam News Urban Digital Media Lab](#).

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