

ABSENT

WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY THOMAS WALTER BOOKER | DIRECTED BY AMANI MELIYAH | STARRING RONALD BENSON-EL JR. AND GEORGE BENNETT WATSON

A person is shown from behind, sitting in a wheelchair. They are wearing a dark jacket and dark pants. A large, vibrant red rose is balanced on top of their head. The person is positioned in front of a large window that looks out onto a bright, outdoor scene with trees. The lighting is soft and natural, coming from the window. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

LOGLINE

A teenage boy from Washington DC must learn to forgive his father to get his life back on track.



SYNOPSIS

Ra'Keese, a teen born and raised in the heart of D.C., withdraws from the things he loves most when his father suddenly moves across the country. His grades and extracurricular activities suffer as he slips further into recurring nightmares where he is desperately searching for his father in the woods, a seemingly endless longing for connection that he feels in and out of dreaming.

Through the guidance of a caring teacher, Mr. Setchi, the lessons bestowed from plays read in English class, and the grit of running track, Ra journeys to discover his own manhood and make peace with the distance between him and his father.

Absent is a coming of age story about the importance of male figures in a boy's life and how the choices our parents make springboard our own maturity.

ARTISTIC STATEMENT

ABSENT is a nuanced portrayal of how families are separated by the effects of gentrification and the importance of intergenerational black male relationships. Though there are few women characters in the film, I believe that media depictions of healthy masculinity and exploring the platonic intimacies that exist between men are key to creating safe realities for women and femmes. The true victims of hyper masculine and violent portrayals of black men in media are the black women that are in community with the men who internalize these images and beliefs. By intentionally disrupting this messaging and exploring the nuances of love and connection between these male characters, we give permission for black men to soften - creating safety within themselves and those around them.

For Ra'Keese it is the absence of his father in his daily life that causes him to spiral into depression. I am investigating the everyday communal aspects of Ra's life from English class to track practice to juxtapose the loneliness he feels inside despite always being surrounded. This overwhelming feeling of grief is articulated through a recurring nightmare where Ra is frantically searching for his father in the woods. To heighten the understanding of Ra's inner turmoil, the elements of the dream world begin to emerge in Ra's reality. Ra's bedroom and English classroom become extensions of the forest, the foliage in his mind so thick that it seeps into his real life. This artistic choice adds texture to Ra's melancholy and challenges the notation that black men must be strong or unbothered when faced with emotional distress. The female gaze offered through my direction, and editor Natalie Henderson, creates a world with soft edges, an emphasis on the emotional arc of every character, and a celebration of the fluidity of dreams.



Amelia H.

THEMES / GENRE

THEMES

Mentorship / Chosen Family

D.C. Culture

The importance of Arts Education

Love

Track & Field

Dreams

GENRE

drama

magic realism

CHARACTERS

RA'KEESE WALKER

Ra'Keese Walker: Black, male. 18+ to play 17. Our protagonist, quirky, bright, and intuitive. Born and raised in NW DC. Putting on for Petworth. Awkward. Would never brag about it, but always does his work. Reliable and dependable. Admires his Dad in all his greatness. A naturally talented sprinter, he dreams of being faster than his Dad in the 110m hurdles. Lives with his Mom but visits his Dad on the weekends.

portrayed by Ronald Benson-El, Jr.



CHARACTERS

JEREMY SETCHI

Jeremy Setchi: Black male. Late 20's, Early 30's. Born and raised in NW DC around Shaw. Got his Masters Degree in African American studies from Howard. Grounded, he's seen a lot of life in his relatively short time on earth. Even tempered, but he won't tolerate mess in his classroom. Use to run track in high school, his event was hurdles. Truly cares for his student's growth and success.

portrayed by Thomas Walter Booker



CHARACTERS

REYMOND DEAN

Black male. 60's-70's. Ra'Keese's Dad. Retired athlete, he currently holds the world record for the 110m hurdles. Originally born and raised in the Baton Rouge/New Orleans area. Since retiring, he has struggled with staying active, bringing him some health complications, i.e Diabetes. He can't have too much sugar. He has been married for 6 months to his wife Gloria. A firm believer of "Good wife, Good life." He is afraid of dying alone.

portrayed by george bennett watson

CHARACTERS



THE STUDENTS

Each student in Mr. Setchi's class has a different relationship with their parents. It shapes their interactions with Ra and the ways they participate in class. The students come from all four quadrants of DC bringing their own individual points of view and life experiences to each class discussion.



LOCATIONS

KENILWORTH TRACK

Washington, DC



LOCATIONS



FOREST

*(private residence)
Washington, D.C.*



LOCATIONS

BLOW PIERCE SCHOOL

Washington, D.C.



LOCATIONS

REYMOND'S APARTMENT



LOCATIONS

RA'KEESE'S BEDROOM

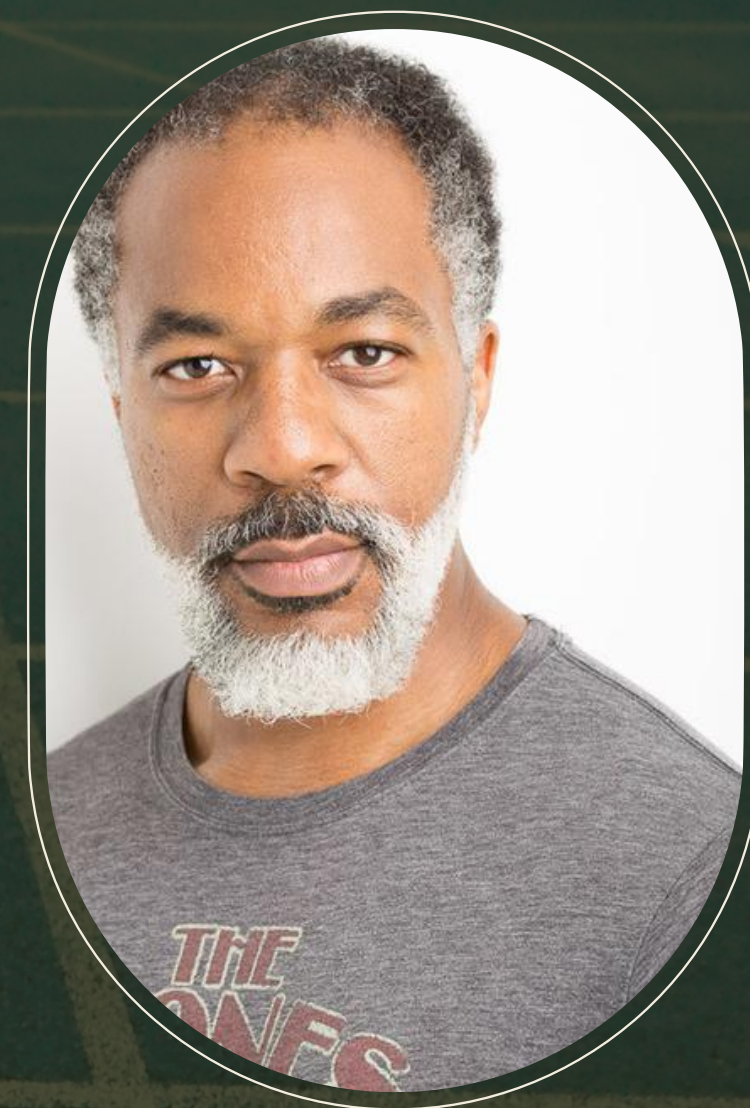


MEET THE CAST



RONALD BENSON-EL, JR. *as Ra'Keese*

Brought up in the DMV, Ronald Benson-El Jr is a multiskilled artist who started his training at Duke Ellington School of the Arts in the Theatre Program. He then graduated from the BFA Acting Conservatory program at SUNY Purchase College. Ronald also has a passion for fight choreography and stunt work. Ronald competed on the national television show American Ninja Warrior during the Season 11 Baltimore Qualifier Course. More info can be found on Instagram: @ronaldbensonel



GEORGE BENNETT WATSON *as Reymond*

jeorge bennett watson is an actor from Windsor, North Carolina. TV/film credits: Mark Higgins in Netflix' Luke Cage, LMN's "untitled affair project," Det. John Ahern, NBC's "Homicide: Life in the Streets," HBO's "The Wire," FX' "Justified," Showtime's "Shameless," CBS' "Cold Case," and Red Wall Productions' short "Saving Father." jeorge has also performed on stage in many regional theatres such as Woolly Mammoth Theatre, (DC), Arena Stage,(DC), and Moving Arts,(LA).

MEET THE CREATIVE TEAM

THOMAS WALTER BOOKER

Writer & Producer of ABSENT
cast as "Mr. Setchi"



"It's a love letter to my father; and to D.C. for experiences central to the legacy of "Chocolate City" that must be memorialized in the face of erasure due to ongoing gentrification."

Born and raised in the nation's capital, Washington, DC, Thomas has guest starred on episodes of FBI and Blue Bloods, Off-Broadway credits include the 2023 Pulitzer Prize Finalist for Drama, On Sugarland at New York Theatre Workshop. Regional credits include the 2022 Pulitzer Prize Award Winner for Drama, Fat Ham at Studio Theatre, One Night in Miami at City Theatre, and Necessary Sacrifices at Ford's Theatre. His film credits include, Becoming, TikTok Challenged, and Giles. Thomas is an alum of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts and SUNY Purchase's Acting Conservatory. More info on Thomas can be found at thomaswalterbooker.com @thomaswalterbooker & @purpdoorproductionz on Instagram.

MEET THE CREATIVE TEAM

amani meliyah

Director

A multidisciplinary artist based in Brooklyn, NY, amani creates socio-political portraits of identity, faith, and community through live performance, movement, poetry, and video. As a performer, amani played leading roles in independent films that have been screened at Harlem International Film Festival, Gary International, and Vancouver Independent Film Festival among others. They have been featured on The Daily Show with Trevor Noah and national commercials for Ulta Beauty and Function of Beauty. amani's experience as a performer has informed her directing practice. She has directed several new theatrical productions in NYC and has been an associate director off-broadway. amani has directed short films "Daughters", "Parkside" and "ROOFTOP JESUS". She is the 2024 National Black Theatre Soul L.A.B. Directing Resident and an alumni of the Roundabout Directors Group.

www.amanimeliyah.com



BRADLEY CREDIT

Director of Photography

Bradley Credit is a Washington, D.C. born-and-raised cinematographer whose work spans narrative, commercials, documentary, and music videos. He is a Young Guns 22 Award recipient. His work has screened at festivals such as the Blackstar Film Festival, the Atlanta Film Festival, the Pan African Film Festival, and the Chicago International Film Festival, and has been featured in Rolling Stone, The FADER, PAPER Magazine, Booooooom, and Director's Notes. His commercial work includes clients such as Gucci, Vogue, Apple Music, Facebook, Adidas, Puma, Amazon, Walmart, Sephora, and Topicals. In 2023, he was named a Rising Star of Cinematography by American Cinematographer.



MEET THE CREATIVE TEAM



RED TRUSS

Producer

Red Truss is a writer and filmmaker based in New York City whose work spans commercials, branded content, music videos and films. His films have screened at film festivals both domestically and internationally. He's a recent graduate of Morehouse College and now attends Columbia University's MFA Film program where he studies Creative Producing. Red is a waymaker who's passionate about storytelling and collaborating with others to help bring their projects to life.



VICTORIA WALLACE

Producer

Born and raised in Washington, DC, Victoria studied Theatre at Duke Ellington School of the Arts and BFA Acting & a minor in Hispanic Studies at Marymount Manhattan College. Recent credits include: Still Got Game (Producer), Cherry in BET's "The Christmas Lottery", and Gabourey Sidibe's "The Tale of Four".

JAYME LAWSON

Associate Producer

Jayme Lawson is an actress from Washington, D.C. “After graduating Juilliard School in May 2019, Lawson landed her first film role in the 2020 film Farewell Amor as Sylvia. In 2019, she gained attention when she was cast in the film The Batman (2022) as Bella Reál, a mayoral candidate for Gotham City. In January 2021, she was cast as a young Michelle Obama in the television series The First Lady (2022). In 2022, she appeared in the drama films Till, How to Blow Up a Pipeline, and The Woman King as Myrlie Evers, Alisha, and Shante, respectively. In 2024 she portrayed the esteemed Dr. Betty Shabazz in NatGeo’s and Disney’s Genius:MLK/X series.”



BUDGET BREAKDOWN

TALENT	\$4,547
CREW	\$14,450
EQUIPMENT	\$2,159
INSURANCE	\$3,999
LOCATIONS	\$1,530
TRANSPORTATION	\$2,866
CRAFT SERVICES	\$441
POST PRODUCTION	\$3,618
DISTRIBUTION	\$1,850
TOTAL	\$35,460

TIMELINE

OCT 2023 - MAY 2024

- Crowdfunding
 - Raised \$11K
- Pre-production
- NYC public reading of script

JUNE 2024

- Fundraiser and community events in DC
 - Raised \$5K
- Received Panavision Filmmaker Grant
- Fundraising total \$19k

JULY 2024

- In kind G&E received from UnderHill Productions (\$12K value)
- Take out business loan of \$15k to green light
- Principal Photography

AUG 2024 - FEB 2025

- Post production
- Continued Fundraising for post and loan repayment

MARCH - JUNE 2025

- Submit to film festivals
- Screening at Duke Ellington School of the Arts, and subsequent screenings at several DC local organizations and other DC Public High Schools

A film crew is shown on a track. A large professional camera is mounted on a tripod in the foreground. Several crew members are visible, some looking at the camera and others talking. The background shows a track and some trees.

TO DATE WE HAVE RAISED \$27,150

80% OF THE TOTAL GOAL

**WE HAVE RECEIVED IN-KIND CAMERA EQUIPMENT THROUGH THE PANAVISION FILMMAKER GRANT VALUED AT \$550,000
AND GRIP AND ELECTRIC FROM UNDERHILL PRODUCTIONS VALUED AT \$11,200**

WE HAD A SUCCESSFUL 4 DAY SHOOT WHERE ALL 35 CAST AND CREW MEMBERS WERE FAIRLY COMPENSATED FOR THEIR WORK

EVEN WITH THESE ACCOMPLISHMENTS
WE HAD TO TAKE OUT A BUSINESS LOAN OF \$15,000 TO GREEN THE LIGHT THE PROJECT

WE ARE STILL IN NEED OF \$8,500

THIS WILL COVER THE REMAINING LOAN REPAYMENT AND POST PRODUCTION COST

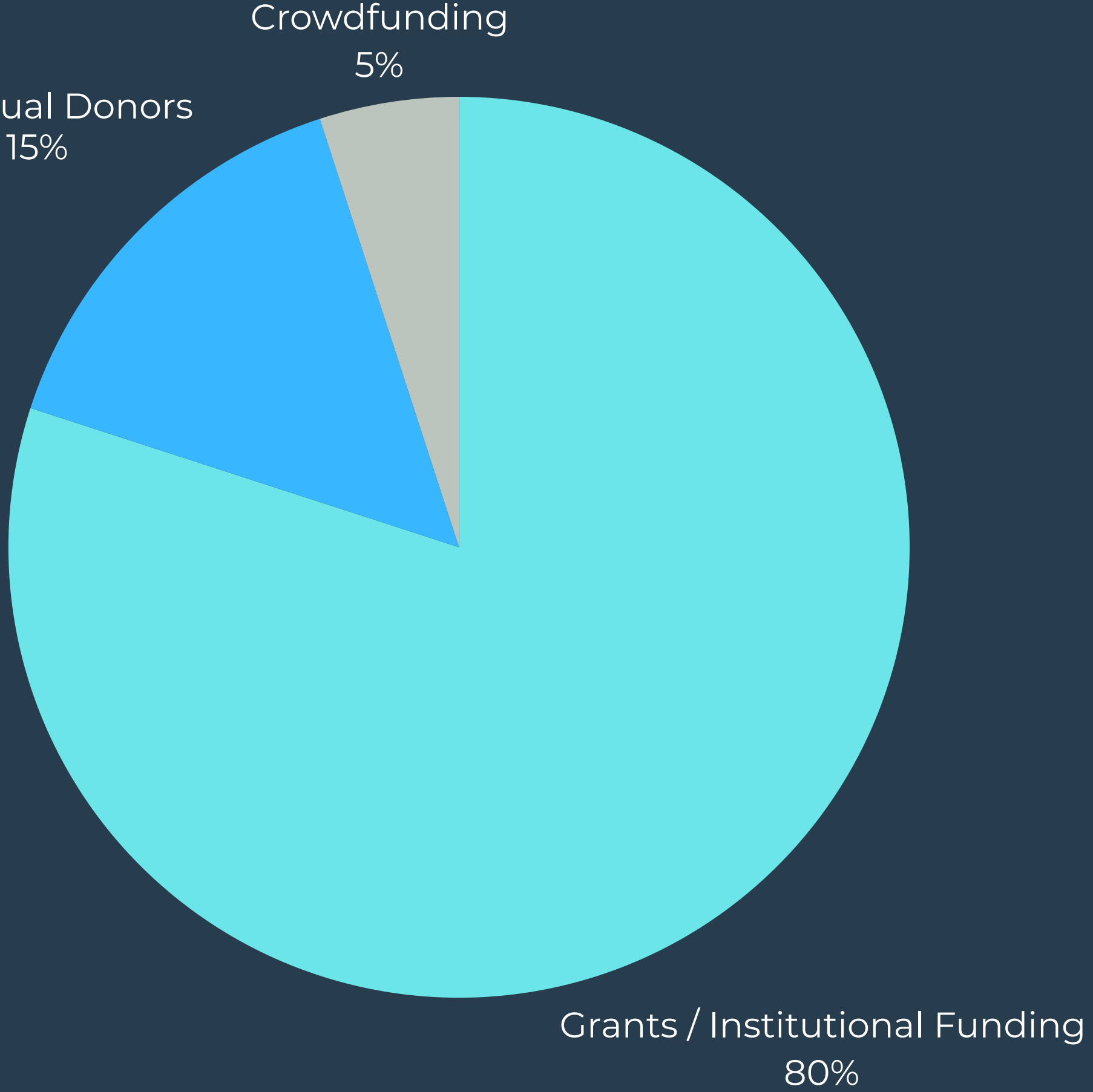
WE ARE ONLY 20% AWAY FROM THE FINISH LINE

FUNDRAISING STRATEGY

Fundraising goal = \$8,500

Our primary method of fundraising thus far has been crowdfunding (\$21,000). We have nearly exhausted our individual networks and are strongly seeking institutional support to complete the project.

Receiving 80% of our goal from Grants (\$6,800) will only leave \$1,700 to raise from crowdfunding and individual donors which is a highly achievable goal.

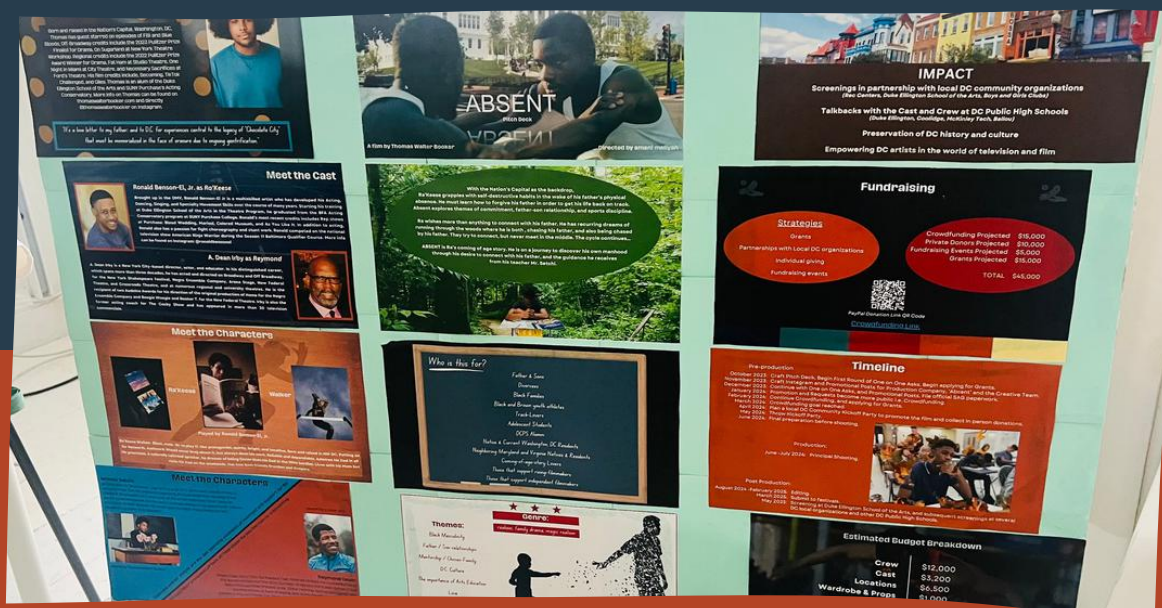


MARKETING

- Featured in national publication Philly Plain Dealer
- Featured on DMV local podcasts: Embracing Arlington Arts and Brown Girl Interrupting
- Will reach out to local DC radio stations (Majic 102.3 and 93.9 WKYS) and news channels (Fox5DC) to promote screening

DISTRIBUTION

- The Dad Gang Partnership Screening at the historic MLK DC Public Library in 2025
- We will submit to 36 festivals including American Black Film Festival and Atlanta Film Festival
- Screenings in partnership with local DC community organizations (*Rec Centers, Duke Ellington School of the Arts, Boys and Girls Clubs*)



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Coffee Break Chat

Purp Door Productionz is Working to Change the Film & Production Landscape for Black Actors

Booker, a New York City based actor and film producer, is seeking to change the media landscape and create opportunities for black and brown actors.

Martin Sakansong

- Talkbacks with the Cast and Crew at DC Public High Schools (*Duke Ellington, Coolidge, McKinley Tech, Ballou*)
- Preservation of DC history and culture
- Empowering DC artists in the world of television and film
- Provide job opportunities for Black and POC filmmakers

THANK YOU
FOR SUPPORTING
OUR WORK

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