A New Documentary Spotlights HIV & Black People

In a blog post titled "National AIDS Memorial Releases Newest Mini-Documentary: The Black Community & AIDS," the organization details the seventh film in its oral history project. Here is an edited excerpt.

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The National AIDS Memorial has released its latest mini-documentary, The Black Community & AIDS, the seventh film in its oral history series, Surviving Voices*. In The Black Community & AIDS, nearly two dozen survivors and advocates from across the United States who are thriving share their hopes and struggles about the HIV and AIDS epidemic and its disproportionate impact on the Black community.

The film opens with powerful words from Phill Wilson, founder of the Black AIDS Institute, who says, "My grandmother used to say, 'When white people get a cold, Black people get pneumonia.' And so I thought, If white people are getting the plague, what in the hell are we going to get?"

The 17-minute film can be viewed on the National AIDS Memorial website and its YouTube channel. In addition to the mini-documentary, viewers can watch individual interview segments featuring candid, deeper conversations with the film's participants.

Advocate Tori Cooper says, "To talk about HIV in the Black community in the present day, you have to really look at the history of HIV and Black people. Black people have been villainized and stigmatized around not just having an HIV diagnosis but as being pushers of the virus. That stigma that was perpetuated 40 years ago still exists and still impacts the way society thinks about people who are living with HIV."

Dázon Dixon Diallo, founder and president of SisterLove, the first women's HIV and sexual reproductive justice organization in the Southern United States, says, "For this epidemic, men opened the door—on the advocacy, on the activism. But it will be women who close the door on this epidemic. Because once women own it, we change things, and when we change things, we change things for everybody."

Sharing her truth and powerful story, advocate Sharron Chatman emotionally says, “My mother made me eat off of paper plates and plastic forks, and that was hurtful because it was my mom. Mothers aren’t supposed to reject or feel that way towards their child. Through SisterLove, I began to understand that me being HIV positive was no longer fearful in my life. I became a warrior.”

These are just a few of the important topics the film addresses through the powerful stories of interviewees.

The Black Community & AIDS was produced and directed by Jörg Fockele. Chevron, a long-standing partner of the National AIDS Memorial, is the presenting partner and has provided major funding for the program annually during the past five years.

“These films really bring to the forefront the power of storytelling and the lessons that can be taught for current and future generations,” says Huma Abbasi, general manager of health and medical at Chevron. “Our longtime support for this program is part of our commitment to sharing the very human experiences that have shaped four decades of the AIDS epidemic. These stories demonstrate the devastating impact that continues today, the hope and the work that still lie ahead.”

Community partners include the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, Black Brothers Esteem, the New York City LGBT Community Center, Oasis Florida, W.O.M.E.N. Inc., GLAAD, MOBI, GMHC, Frontline Legal Services, Native Son, SisterLove, AIDS Project of the East Bay, Positive Women’s Network–USA and Thrive SS.

*Created in 2015, this multiyear AIDS oral history project helps ensure that stories and lessons of the epidemic are captured, curated and retained for future generations.

Additional featured films include Substance Users, The Recovery Community & AIDS, The Transgender Community & AIDS, Asians & Pacific Islanders & AIDS, Women & AIDS, The Hemophilia Community & AIDS and The San Francisco Leather Community & AIDS.

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