National AIDS Memorial Releases Newest Mini-Documentary: “The Black Community & AIDS” [VIDEO]

Film focuses the camera on the personal stories and insights of survivors and advocates who share how they are thriving and their take on the hope, struggles and challenges that persist today.

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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 project. The Black Community & AIDS” chronicles the personal stories of nearly two dozen survivors and advocates from across the U.S. who are thriving, sharing their hopes and struggles about the HIV/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 which provide candid, deeper conversations with the film participants.

Advocate Tori Cooper says, “To talk about HIV in the Black community in 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.”

Dr. Dázon Dixon Diallo, Founder and President of SisterLove, the first women’s HIV, Sexual Reproductive Justice organization in the southern U.S., “For this epidemic, men opened the door…on the advocacy, on the activism. But what I’m clear about is that it will be the 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 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 wasn’t afraid anymore. I became a warrior.”

These powerful stories are just a few of the important topics the film addresses with interviewees who openly discuss the stigma, shame, and the complex, intersecting and multilayered prejudices that persist today and how so many survivors are thriving, living with pride, dignity and advocating for justice, equal access to care, and an end to the epidemic.

“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, providing major funding annually during the past five years for the program.

“These films really bring to the forefront the power of storytelling and the lessons that can be taught for current and future generations,” said Huma Abbasi, General Manager, Health & Medical at Chevron. "Our long-time 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 lies 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 and Thrive SS.

“This mini-documentary speaks to the work of the National AIDS Memorial in addressing the impact of HIV/AIDS in the Black community and the issues of stigma, discrimination and otherism that still exist today, four decades into this epidemic,” said Chief Executive John Cunningham. “We are so appreciative to the survivors and advocates featured in this film who shared their stories and whose work is helping make a difference in changing the statistics and helping to finally curb the disproportionate impact of this epidemic in the Black community.”

Prior to its official release, “The Black Community & AIDS” was exclusively featured at several major film festivals and HIV/AIDS events throughout the country, including Frameline, SF Queer Film Fest, New York City Black Pride, Positive Living Conference, and Atlanta Black Pride. The film was recognized for its powerful storytelling, including being honored with the prestigious Jury Award at SF Queer Film Fest. The film will also be shown as part of the National AIDS Memorial Change the Pattern initiative that is partnering with Southern AIDS Coalition and Gilead Sciences to bring the AIDS Memorial Quilt to the South as a teaching tool with Quilt displays and programming to reimagine the fight to end HIV.

Created in 2015, this multi-year 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,” “The A&PI Community & AIDS,” “Women & AIDS,” “The National Hemophilia Community &

AIDS," and "The San Francisco Leather Community & AIDS."

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