

A FILM BY  
**MARQUISE MAYS**

# THE **HEARTLAND**



PRODUCED BY **RJ PRINCE** DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY **JONAH ZORN KOPLIN**

EDITED BY **CALEB PEAVY** SOUND BY **GREGORY THOMAS II** PRODUCTION ASSISTANT **TIERRA HIGGINS**

COMPOSER **WILL CABANISS** GRAPHIC DESIGNER **DANTE NASH** COLORIST **ALEX HARTLEY** PHOTOGRAPHER **JOHN NANCE**

# FILM INFORMATION

## FILM TITLE

# THE HEARTLAND

## LOG LINE

Highlighting both the joys and trials of growing up Black in the Midwest, three Black Milwaukee residents confront & reconcile the unrequited love between them and their city.

## CONTACT INFO

Marquise Mays - Director  
414-510-3902  
marquisejmays@gmail.com

RJ Prince - Producer  
262-402-0011  
rjxprince@gmail.com

## TECHINCAL INFO

Running Time: 24:06  
Exhibition Format: Blu-Ray; DCP  
Aspect Ratio: 2:35:1  
Shooting Format: Digital UHD; 8mm Film  
Color, English

MEDIA  
OFFLINE.

# PRESS RELEASE

## THE HEARTLAND

Marquise Mays  
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414-510-3902

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Milwaukee Native Premieres Love-Letter Documentary About Hometown

All eyes are on Wisconsin after a year in which the state saw white supremacist violence in response to calls for racial justice, allegations of voter suppression during the April primaries and, most recently, a contentious battle for democracy in the presidential election. Milwaukee, the largest city in the Badger State, has been ground zero for these events. But the dozens of news articles written about them have missed the true soul of the city. It's time for people to meet the real Milwaukee.

In *The Heartland*, local filmmaker **Marquise Mays** weaves together the stories of three Black Milwaukeeans as they recount intimate and personal memories from their childhood in the city. As a love letter for all the Black kids in the heartlands, the documentary strives to foster community pride for the city of Milwaukee – to recognize the city's flaws, but to also honor its beauty.

*The Heartland* has been selected to be a part of an emerging filmmaker series curated by John Ridley, founder of Nō Studios and Academy Award-winning screenwriter of *12 Years of Slave*. The Nō Boundaries series is a showcase for filmmakers on the rise with a vision that conquers budget, resource, and time constraints with relentless drive, boundless imagination, and faith.

*The Heartland* is a film developed and produced in part by Leaders Igniting Transformation (LIT) through its inaugural Artist Activist Fellowship. This year, LIT added Cultural Organizing to its mission to shift culture by developing young Black and Brown leaders, known as Artist Activists. By mobilizing young creatives, training them in art activism, and investing in their artistry, LIT is supporting Artist Activists in using their creativity to spark truth, shift culture, and make systemic change so Black and Brown young people can thrive.

### About Marquise Mays

[Marquise Mays](#) is a filmmaker and media scholar based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He holds a M.A from the University of Southern California and a B.A from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His work presents an opportunity for Black kids to be proud to call this place home. As an independent filmmaker, Marquise's films have been screened nationally and internationally. Most recently, he worked as an Associate Producer on the Student Academy Award Winning Film, *The Dope Years: The Untold Story of Latasha Harlins*.

# SYNOPSIS

## SYNOPSIS SHORT

Separated into three chapters, we explore the childhood experience for Black kids growing up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. From the moments when they lost their innocence to the outwardly expression that defined their voices, Black kids in this city proclaim that Milwaukee will always be theirs.

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They lost their innocence. From racial discrimination at local restaurants to religious institutions not accepting one's queerness to the mystery of Alexis Patterson going missing in 2002, Black kids in Milwaukee unfortunately became aware of the politics of themselves at very young ages. At every turn, they were made aware that folks and systems in this city, just did not like Black kids.

They found their voice. Through the lack of access and opportunity in the city, Black kids created their own spaces to grow, to foster identity and to freely express themselves. Whether it be through their vernacular usage of the phrase, "On What?!" or their preference to refer to Nike Air Force Ones as Dookies or even the animated expression of the dance style, twang, Black kids in Milwaukee forged an existence that the city could never deny.

This is why, this is their Milwaukee forever. The greatest goal of a Black kid in Milwaukee was to grow up enough to leave. And to never look back. This time, they're young adults and they're back. Back to reflect and reconcile the unfortunate truths of a city that they love dearly.

# ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Very familiar with the negative projections claimed about my home, I made this short film to showcase a deeply special and nuanced interpretation of Milwaukee, one that included the troubles, but also the joys.

Our youth. Their imaginations, fearless and robust sit at the roof of their mouths, yearning for an opportunity to exist outside of their minds. But too often, especially in a city like Milwaukee, those words are often locked away, never given the chance to live.

In this film, they can be heard, loud and clear. The goal of this documentary is to foster a community pride for the city of Milwaukee. To recognize the city's flaws, but to also honor its beauty. To present an opportunity for Black kids to be proud to call this place home.

And in this current moment, where the city of Milwaukee is being praised and highlighted for "showing up and showing out" at the election polls, it is important that we take time to honor the Black lives that exist beyond our collective civil engagement.

We showcase the true charm and charisma of the Black kids in Milwaukee and all of the power and potential that they have that others can't seem to see. One that often gets ranked as insignificant.

# CREDITS

Director - Marquise Mays

Producer - RJ Prince

Prod. Managers - Corey Fells, Nailah Johnson

Milwaukee Natives - Cassandra "Casey" Coulson, Radaya Ellis, Matthew Lewis

Director of Photography - Jonah Zorn Koplín

Editor - Caleb Peavy

Sound - Gregory Thomas II

Color - Alex Hartley

Music - Will Cabaniss

Mix & Master - Jackson Bierfeldt

Drone Operator - Nations Stephenson

Still Photography - John Nance

PA - Tierra Higgins

Graphic Design - Dante Nash, Stephen Guma

Executive Producers - Leaders Igniting Transformation, Media Offline

# PRODUCTION





# THE CREW

Marquise Mays is an award-winning filmmaker and media scholar based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Experienced in an array of media and arts practices—from cinematic storytelling to exhibition curation—Marquise brings imagination, technical expertise, and cultural awareness to entertainment productions, journalistic undertakings or media-rich events and civic engagements.

As an independent filmmaker, Marquise presents a range of access points for participation in dialogues, theoretical deliberations, and creative enterprises related to the projections of Black life on screen. This is most recently seen in his work as an Associate Producer on the Student Academy Award Winning Film, *The Dope Years*.

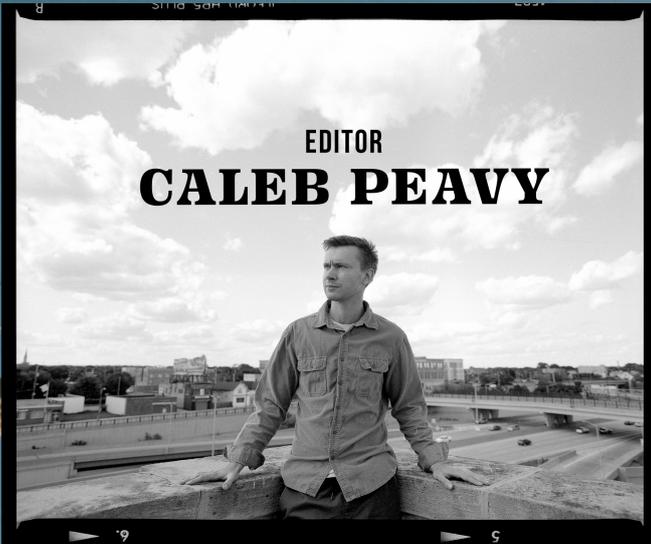


Independent filmmaker RJ Prince is a native to Milwaukee, WI. A graduate of Roosevelt University (Chicago, IL), RJ studied Political Science which informed his innate curiosity for storytelling. As an independent storyteller, RJ's goal is to breathe new life into stories addressing themes of healing, transformation, and social justice.



Jonah Koplín is a filmmaker currently living in Brooklyn, NY. Jonah dabbles in everything from commercial work, to narrative and documentary alternating between director and cinematographer. Jonah has hands in multiple projects at the moment and is currently producing two feature length films, while just having wrapped shooting a short film and music video.

# THE CREW



Based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Caleb's interest as a filmmaker is to share stories of Midwestern people and culture. He is also interested in documenting the relationship between humans and nature. After graduating from UW-Milwaukee in May 2019, Caleb has been working as a freelance Videographer, Grip, AC and Production Assistant.

Gregory Thomas II is a MFA student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee with a focus on cinematic arts. Born and raised in Milwaukee, Gregory wants to have a deeper understanding of the integration of film, sound and the body in order to appreciate a sense of self, culture and community.



Will is a producer and composer of new music in Chicago. His work revolves around group singing, jazz, collaboration, and electronic music. He produces for independent artists, writes for film and video, and composes for choirs and a cappella groups.



# THE CREW



Alex is currently based in Portland, Maine but works closely with collaborators from NYC and beyond. He got his start in Post Production at Goldcrest Post in NYC assisting with finishing feature films and episodic TV and freelances as a colorist. When he's outside of the dark color suite he searches for unique moments to capture through various photographic mediums, and is enamored with the art of image-making and storytelling.

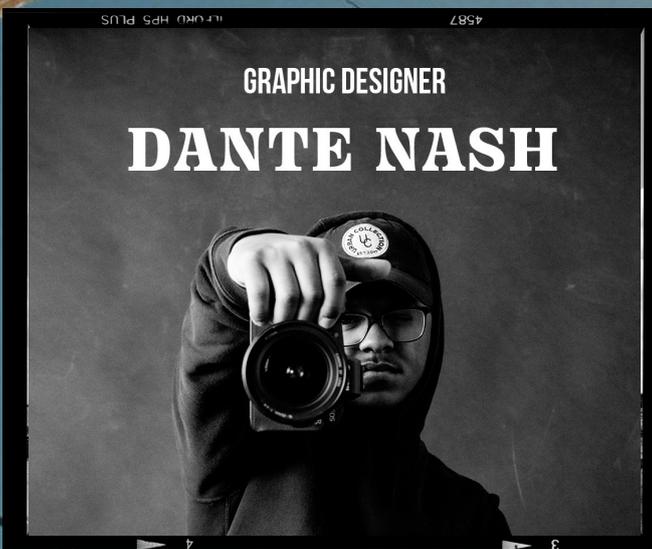


John is a photographer from Milwaukee, WI. He believes in documenting realities in every form through his visual photography. Traversing between digital and film photography, John presents a multitude of humanity through his catalogue of art.



Tierra is currently a student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, studying Theatre Drama with a certificate in Digital Cinema Production. Growing up in Milwaukee Wisconsin, she learned her passion for storytelling and directing. As a student, Tierra has had the opportunity to stage-manage two shows and direct two theatrical productions.

# THE CREW



Dante is native to Milwaukee, WI and is currently an official Multi-Media Designer for the Milwaukee Bucks! Yeah, you read that right. Dante graduated with a BA in Art from UW-Madison. Through his progressing style, Dante seeks to represent unique and diverse cultures, via color or subject, within pieces to captivate and inspire others.



Corey is a photographer, filmmaker and overall creative. With a completed Museum exhibition, residencies and many more creative ventures, he's looking to create or help create stories about neighborhoods from all over to relate to Milwaukee.