26th Annual Whitaker St. Louis International Film Festival
Mean Streets: Viewing the Divided City Through the Lens of Film and Television

Now in its second year as a part of the St. Louis International Film Festival, “Mean Streets: Viewing the Divided City Through the Lens of Film and Television” explores one of the United States’ most persistent and vexing problems: segregation. The program primarily focuses on the racial divide in St. Louis and other U.S. cities, but also offers an international perspective with “The Field,” which deals with the longstanding Israeli/Palestinian divide on the West Bank. The 12 programs take place on the festival’s two weekends — Nov. 3-5 and 10-12 — at Washington University’s Brown Hall Auditorium, the Missouri History Museum, and St. Louis Public Library’s Central Library. All programs are free and open to the public, and feature accompanying directors and subjects and/or post-film discussions with experts.

SCHEDULE

**Washington U./Brown**
Saturday, Nov. 4
1 pm Priced Out, with short “Displaced & Erased”
Sunday, Nov. 5
1 pm Copwatch
4 pm True Conviction, with short “Robert”
7:30 pm Never Been a Time
**Missouri History Museum**
Friday, Nov. 10
7 pm Marvin Booker Was Murdered
Saturday, Nov. 11
1 pm Nat Bates for Mayor
3:30 pm Street Fighting Men
7 pm For Ahkeem
Sunday Nov. 12
2 pm The Blood Is at the Doorstep
6 pm Whose Streets?

**St. Louis Public Library**
Sunday Nov. 12
1:30 pm In the Heat of the Night, with short “Streets of Greenwood”
FILM DESCRIPTIONS

The Blood Is at the Doorstep
Offering a painfully realistic glimpse inside a movement born out of tragedy, “The Blood Is at the Doorstep” provides a behind-the-scenes look at one of America’s most pressing social issues. A roofer by day, Nate Hamilton juggled community college and fatherhood in the evening, leading what he describes as “a pretty simple life.” That all changed in 2014, when his brother Dontre was shot 14 times and killed by a Milwaukee police officer. An unarmed black man, Donte was living with paranoid schizophrenia, and his death raised a complex of problems involving the police’s actions: the rapid escalation of force, the use of racial profiling, and the failure to recognize mental-health issues. Filmed over the course of three years in the direct aftermath of Dontre’s death, this intimate vérité documentary follows Nate and his family as they struggle to find answers and to challenge a criminal-justice system stacked against them. In their quest for justice, the Hamilton family and a grieving community must publicly square off against a police union that vows to stand as one and an embattled chief of police who finds himself stuck between activists and a union that has lost confidence in his leadership. Despite a multitude of setbacks, the Hamilton family inspires substantive reforms on a local level. But when another controversial police shooting in Milwaukee sets off several nights of violent unrest, the Hamiltons activate to maintain peace, as they anxiously wait to see if the reforms they fought so hard for will make a difference for the next family.
With director Erik Ljung.

Copwatch
In Ferguson, Michael Brown died after being shot by police. In New York, Eric Garner died after a chokehold by police. In Baltimore, Freddie Gray died being transported by police. The names of these men have been burned into our public consciousness, and the videos of their deaths broadcast around the globe. They horrified us, made us reevaluate the way we look at the world, and ignited a movement to show that their lives mattered. But there are stories that have not yet been told surrounding these events: stories not about what happened in front of the cameras but about who stood behind them. Copwatching is a nonviolent way to observe police activity and record it, with the dual goal of exposing misconduct and using a physical presence to prevent it. “Copwatch” sheds light on the group We Copwatch and features an array of unlikely heroes, including David Whitt of Ferguson, Jacob Crawford of Oakland, Ramsey Orta of New York, and Kevin Moore of Baltimore. We Copwatch’s men and women, from different races and backgrounds, have dedicated their lives to creating a better future for their children and communities. Granted unprecedented access, including footage never seen before publicly, “Copwatch” defines and personalizes a public narrative that is playing out across America every day.
With subject David Whitt.
**The Field**

*Mordechai Vardi, Israel/Palestine, 2017, 73 min., Arabic, English & Hebrew*

Near the West Bank’s Gush Etzion Junction — between Jerusalem and Hevron — Ali Abu Awwad dedicates his family’s field as a Palestinian Center for Non-Violence. Despite a life filled with pain and conflict — his four years in an Israeli prison, his drive-by shooting by an Israeli, his mother’s five-year prison sentence, his brother’s death at the hands of an Israeli soldier — Ali creates the organization Roots with local Israeli settlers to advance responsibility and to promote the grassroots work necessary for political reconciliation. “The Field” director Mordechai Vardi — a resident of the Gush Etzion Bloc, a cluster of Israeli settlements — accompanies members of the Roots initiative for two-and-a-half years and documents the changes transpiring on both sides. The film’s chronicle includes a 2015 wave of violence at Gush Etzion Junction during the “Intifada of Knives,” a fraught period during which the peace activists must confront the reality of their own relatives being attacked. Beautifully shot and well paced, “The Field” unsettles and often upsets, with its everyday scenes of living in a militarized zone proving both moving and chilling.

**With a local expert TBD.**

**For Ahkeem**


Beginning one year before the fatal police shooting of a black teenager in nearby Ferguson, “For Ahkeem” is the coming-of-age story of Daje Shelton, a black 17-year-old girl in North St. Louis. She fights for her future as she is placed in an alternative high school and navigates the marginalized neighborhoods, biased criminal-justice policies, and economic devastation that have set up many black youth like her to fail. After she is expelled from her public high school, a juvenile court judge sends Daje to the court-supervised Innovative Concept Academy, which offers her one last chance to earn a diploma. Over two years, Daje struggles to maintain focus in school, attends the funerals of friends killed around her, falls in love with a classmate named Antonio, and navigates a loving-but-tumultuous relationship with her mother. As Antonio is drawn into the criminal-justice system and events in Ferguson — just four miles from her home — seize the national spotlight, Daje learns she is pregnant and must contend with the reality of raising a young black boy. “For Ahkeem” illuminates challenges that many black teenagers face in America today, and witnesses the strength, resilience, and determination it takes to survive.

**With co-directors Jeremy Levine and Landon Van Soest, subject Daje Shelton, and producer Jeff Truesdell.**

**In the Heat of the Night**


As timely and relevant as it was in 1967 — an especially fraught time in the civil-rights movement, when American cities were riven by race riots — “In the Heat of the Night” celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. The Oscar winner as Best Picture, the film was shot in nearby Sparta, Ill. — only 50 miles from St. Louis — because the film’s star, Sidney Poitier, legitimately feared for his life if the production were based in the South. In the film, Philadelphia police detective Virgil Tibbs (Poitier) is arrested on suspicion of murder by Bill Gillespie (Rod Steiger), the racist police chief of tiny Sparta, Miss. After Tibbs proves not only his own innocence but that of another man, he joins forces with Gillespie to track down the real killer.
Their investigation takes them through every social level of the town, with Tibbs making both enemies and unlikely friends as he hunts for the truth.

With the short “Streets of Greenwood” (John Reavis, Fred Wardenburg & Jack Willis, U.S., 1963, 20 min.): Recently restored by Washington U.’s Film & Media Archive, the film chronicles the voter-registration efforts of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Greenwood, Miss., in the summer of 1963, at the height of the civil-rights movement.

**Introduction and post-film discussion with Novotny Lawrence, associate professor of Race, Media, and Popular Culture in the Radio, Television, and Digital Media Department at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.**

**Marvin Booker Was Murdered**


On July 9, 2010, Marvin Booker, a homeless street preacher with mental-health issues was beaten to death by five sheriff deputies while being booked into the Denver Detention Center. The event was caught on tape and witnessed by more than 20 people. Yet the city of Denver never indicted — or even reprimanded — any of the deputies involved. “Marvin Booker Was Murdered” explores how the largely Memphis-based Booker family — many of whom are preachers, including Marvin’s brother, the Rev. Spencer Booker of St. Louis’ St. Paul AME Church — relentlessly pushes his case through the court system in an attempt to secure some form of justice. With their two persistent Denver attorneys and supportive community members from both cities, the Bookers fight to ensure that the civil rights of people like Marvin will not be violated in the future. The story of Marvin Booker reveals how a city chose to protect the “thin blue line” instead of a citizen's constitutional rights.

**With director Wade Gardner and members of the Booker family.**

**Nat Bates for Mayor**


“Nat Bates for Mayor” tells the story of the outrageous 2014 mayor's race in Richmond, home to the second-largest refinery in California. In a brazen move, Chevron spends more than $3 million to back 83-year-old African-American stalwart Nat Bates. Bates makes a Faustian bargain with the city’s corporate behemoth in a cagy attempt to preserve the longstanding but waning power of Richmond’s black working-class community, whose rich history dates back to the formation of the Kaiser shipyards during World War II. The election pits black against white and pro-development forces against eco-friendly progressives in a pitched David vs. Goliath battle. The unusual question: Who qualifies as David? Is Nat Bates a savior or a stooge? Offering a wild, entertaining ride, “Nat Bates for Mayor” chronicles a race that includes a dizzying array of offbeat, bigger-than-life small-town pols. With extraordinary access, the guerilla-style documentary captures revealing personal moments as it follows the candidates on the campaign trail and records the city's audacious Jerry Springer-like city-council meetings. Featuring cameos by Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders and legendary civil-rights leader Andrew Young, the documentary provocatively explores important issues — corporate influence, race, gentrification, homophobia, and political self-determination — with humor and insight.

**With co-directors Bradley Berman and Eric Weiss.**
Never Been a Time
“Never Been a Time” uses the 1917 East St. Louis race riot to unpack hidden facts that reveal the complexity of racism in all of America. The film links events separated by as much as a 100 years and as few as 20 miles, tracing the line between the East St. Louis pogrom — one of the worst racially motivated massacres in American history — and the 2014 racial uprisings in Ferguson and the 2017 protests in Minnesota over the shooting death of Philando Castile. Moving from micro to macro, the film broadens to include the full sweep of the African-American experience, showing the unequal citizenship accorded to blacks on all levels: economic, political, and social. The words of poets, the recollections of descendants, the analysis of scholars, and the testimonies of the 1917 victims create a multilayered documentary that demonstrates there has “never been a time” when people of African descent were treated with fairness in the U.S. without some type of demand for change.

With director Denise Ward-Brown and writer Harper Barnes, author of “Never Been a Time: The 1917 Race Riot That Sparked the Civil Rights Movement.”

Priced Out
At a time of skyrocketing racial and class tensions in America, “Priced Out” is an investigative and personal look at how housing prices are displacing Portland's black community and working families all across the city. The documentary explores the complexities and contradictions of gentrification and the future of American cities. In the late 1990s, Nikki Williams, a black single mother, embraced the idea of gentrification. At the time, her block was filled with drug dealers, and boarded-up storefronts lined her neighborhood streets. Now, a decade-and-a-half later, Governing Magazine has ranked Portland as the “Most Gentrified City in America,” and Nikki’s neighborhood has become one of the trendiest places in the country to live. Crime is down, houses have been fixed up, and new bars and restaurants open up almost every day. But half the black population has left, and average home prices have gone from $30,000 to $410,000. The neighborhoods of North/Northeast Portland have gone from being majority black to majority white. Rents are climbing, homes are being replaced with apartment blocks, and the word “gentrification” is on everyone’s lips. “Priced Out” explores why such a dramatic change occurred and what that change means for residents of other communities that face gentrification.


With director Cornelius Swart.

Street Fighting Men
Andrew James, U.S., 2017, 110 min.
In a rapidly changing America where mass inequality and dwindling opportunity have devastated the black working class, three Detroit men must fight to build something lasting for themselves and future generations. “Street Fighting Men,” which celebrates dogged persistence in the face of overwhelming adversity, takes a deep vérité dive into the lives of three African Americans: retired cop Jack Rabbit, who continues to patrol the mean streets as a citizen; Deris, who has made bad choices in the past — and continues to self-sabotage — but wants to further his education to serve as a role model for his baby daughter; and Luke, who labors mightily as he
rehabs a seriously dilapidated house while putting together a meager living. Shot over three years in the neighborhoods of Detroit, “Street Fighting Men” is a modern American narrative: a story of hard work, faith, and manhood in a community left to fend for itself.

With director Andrew James.

**True Conviction**

*Jamie Meltzer, U.S., 2017, 84 min.*

Christopher Scott was released from prison after serving 13 years of a life sentence for a murder he didn’t commit. That nightmare scenario is far too common: More than 30 people like Chris have been exonerated in Dallas County, Texas. Most of them are black men locked up in their youth who emerged in middle age looking for a way to make sense of what happened. One day, at a support-group meeting for exonerees, Chris has a light-bulb moment: Exonerees could become detectives, investigating the cases of other wrongfully convicted people and proving their innocence. “True Conviction” follows Chris and his team — Steven Phillips and Johnnie Lindsey — as they work to both realize their dream of becoming detectives and try to understand their own unjust experiences. As the trio of newly minted detective seek redemption, attempting to right the wrongs they experienced, Chris has faith that he can make a difference in the criminal-justice system. But that faith is mightily challenged as he and his colleagues must clear almost impossibly high hurdles in their pursuit of freeing a wrongfully convicted person.

With the short “**Robert**” (Sarah Fleming & Joann Self Selvidge, U.S., 2016, 8 min.): “Robert” tells the story of a young man who is incarcerated and transferred to criminal court at the age of 15.

With subject Christopher Scott.

**Whose Streets?**


Told by the activists and leaders who live and breathe the Black Lives Matter movement for justice, “Whose Streets?” is an unflinching look at the Ferguson uprising. When unarmed teenager Michael Brown is killed by police and left lying in the street for hours, it marks a breaking point for the residents of St. Louis. Grief, long-standing racial tensions, and renewed anger bring residents together to hold vigil and protest this latest tragedy. Empowered parents, artists, and teachers from around the country come together as freedom fighters. As the National Guard descends on Ferguson with military-grade weaponry, these young community members become the torchbearers of a new resistance. Filmmakers Sabaah Folayan and Damon Davis know this story because they’ve lived it. “Whose Streets?” is a powerful battle cry from a generation fighting not just for their civil rights but also for the simple right to live.

With co-director Damond Davis and subjects.