

Growing Pains

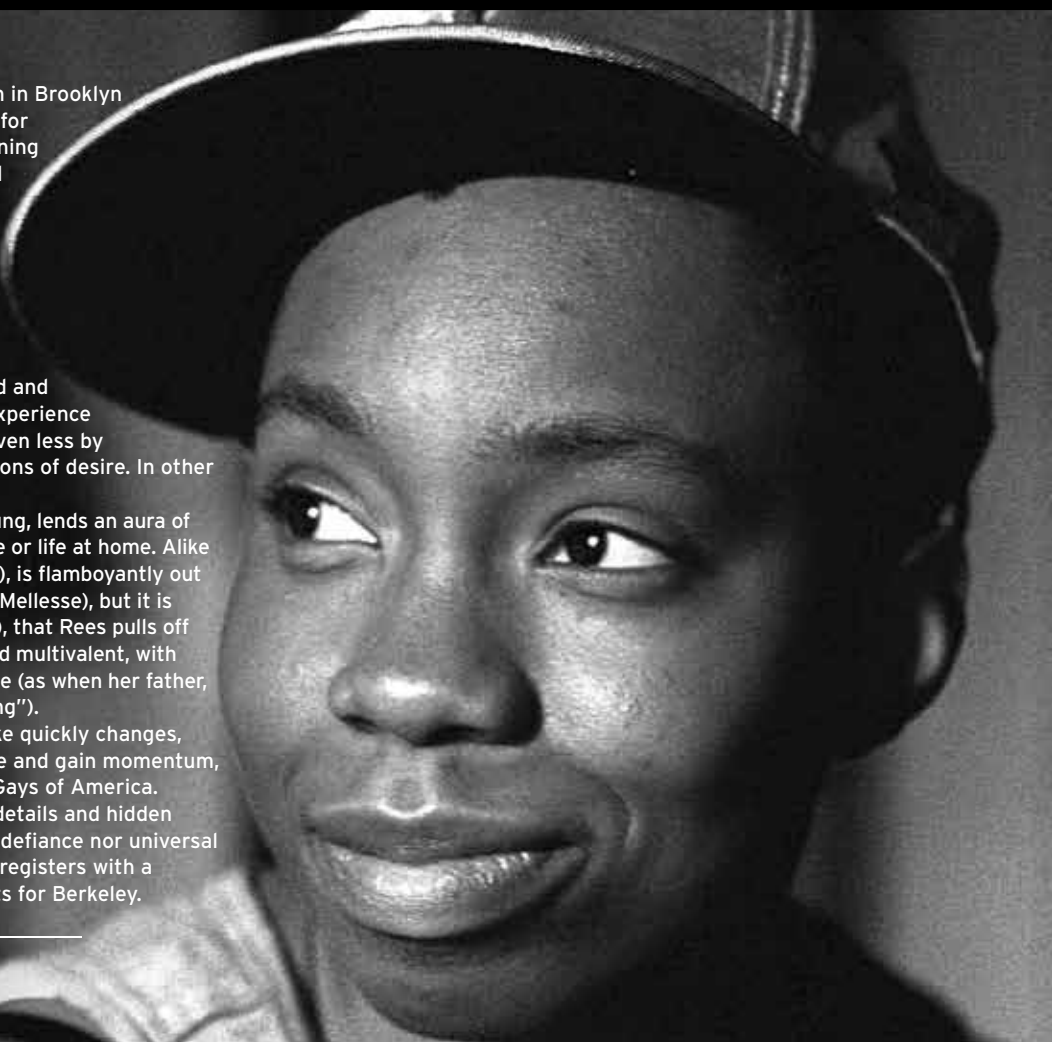
In 2007, Dee Rees wrote and directed a short film, *Pariah*, about a black teen in Brooklyn struggling to come to terms with her identity as a lesbian. Rees – who interned for Spike Lee’s 40 Acres program – went on to direct two more shorts before returning to the compelling drama of a teenaged protagonist who, in her search for sexual identity, shuffles through personas like masks at a costume ball. In fleshing out the character of Alike and further deepening the teen’s social and domestic milieus, Rees has fashioned *Pariah* into a full-length feature that is as urgent, moving and meaningful as anything released this year.

The pitfalls of Rees’s subject matter are so vast and inertial they seem almost insurmountable – the gravitational pull of the black/teen/poet/lesbian complex has *Afterschool Special* written all over it. *Pariah*, however, is anything but a pat treatment of a subject that is, ironically, both culturally misunderstood and artistically pre-loaded with melodrama. Although Alike (Adepero Oduye) does experience the multifarious difficulties of coming out, she is hardly a pure victim; she is driven less by outrage at her predicament than by confusion, pride and the universal compulsions of desire. In other words, she is a teenager, and she wants a girlfriend.

Director Rees, thanks in part to the gorgeous cinematography of Bradford Young, lends an aura of gritty authenticity to Alike’s environment, whether that is school, her social scene or life at home. Alike is a good student with a gift for poetry, and her best friend, Laura (Pernell Walker), is flamboyantly out and proud. At home, Alike is constantly sparring with her nosy little sister (Sahra Mellese), but it is in the depiction of her parents, Arthur (Charles Parnell) and Audrey (Kim Wayans), that Rees pulls off a minor miracle; the representation of the parental dynamic is subtle, complex and multivalent, with forces of denial and sympathy revealed in ways that are refreshingly unpredictable (as when her father, a cop, says with devastating weariness that he is “tired of this whole tom boy thing”).

Pariah is woven together with small, authentic moments – such as when Alike quickly changes, superhero-like, out of her girly school clothes into butch duds – that accumulate and gain momentum, though the momentum created is hardly a *Rocky*-like triumph for the Closeted Gays of America. Rather, the movie gathers its power in the progress of daily life, with its telling details and hidden truths. When Alike recites “I am not broken, I am free,” her words, neither open defiance nor universal rallying cry, are simply an affirmation of identity, and their idiosyncratic poetry registers with a shock of recognition. “I’m not leaving,” Alike tells her parents before she departs for Berkeley. “I’m choosing.” – Rick Levin

Pariah opens Friday, Feb. 17, at Bijou Cinemas; info & times at bijou-cinemas.com



Eugene Goes to the Oscars

If a Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front cuts from dramatic media footage, including the burning of a \$12-million ski resort at Vail, Colo., and the arson at the University of Washington Center for Urban Horticulture, to the streets of New York City, where activist and ecosaboteur Daniel McGowan was living in 2005. He was arrested in December of that year for his role in the ELF arsons that raged across the Northwest from 1996 to 2001 and charged as a “terrorist.” The film quietly makes its point that McGowan traveled a long way, physically and philosophically, from NYC to Oregon and arson and what drove him there.

If a Tree Falls is not an “activist film” per se, though it has a distinct activist appeal. It gives an equal amount of time to the voices of McGowan and Eugene’s own Tim Lewis, Jim Flynn and Civil Liberties Defense Center (CLDC) attorney Lauren Regan as it does to prosecutor Kirk Engdall and Eugene Police Detective Greg Harvey.

The film’s clear-eyed take on the dramatic events that catalyzed the local ELF movement – from the Eugene downtown pepper-spray incident to the WTO protests – lets viewers make their own decisions about the environmental and social issues that led to the arsons. The documentary draws on archival footage, and longtime Eugeneans will recognize shots by Lewis from Warner Creek and other protests that lend a feeling of an insider’s view. – Camilla Mortensen

If a Tree Falls is up for an Academy Award. It screens at Bijou Art Cinemas starting Feb. 17. Proceeds from Sunday, Feb. 19, benefit the CLDC.

21 and older: come to Science Factory After Dark February 24th, 5-9pm

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	2/16 THU	for February 16-23	2/17 FRI	2/18 SAT	2/19 SUN	2/20 MON	2/21 TUE	2/22 WED	2/23 THU
5:10 9:15	OSCAR NOMINATED ANIMATED SHORT FILMS	10:00 NOON 10:00	1:00 10:00	7:10	7:10	9:30	9:30		
7:00	OSCAR NOMINATED LIVE ACTION SHORT FILMS	3:00 7:30	3:00	9:10	9:10	7:15	7:15		
	OSCAR NOMINATED DOCUMENTARY SHORT FILMS	7:20							
5:30	LE HAVRE	5:15	5:15	5:15	5:00	5:00	5:00	5:00	
	PARIAH A stinging street-smart story of an African American teen's struggle to come of age and come out.	1:45 3:45 5:45 7:45	2:45 4:45 6:45 8:45	2:45 4:45 6:45 8:45	4:45 6:45 8:45	4:45 6:45 8:45	4:45 6:45 8:45	4:45 6:45 8:45	
A DANGEROUS METHOD Ends 2/16!	IF A TREE FALLS: A STORY OF THE EARTH LIBERATION FRONT	9:45	1:00	7:30 *benefits CLDC					
	ADVANCE TICKETS AVAILABLE NOW FOR THE BIJOU'S ANNUAL OSCAR PARTY & BENEFIT, FEB. 26th at 3pm \$10/advance; \$12/day of event at our box office or through our website								

*Adults—\$7 * Students w/ID—\$6 * Seniors—\$5 * Matinees—\$5 * Miser Mondays—\$3*

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