

Dante James: The Huey P. Newton Documentary

Dante James is an Emmy Award-winning independent filmmaker who has produced and directed critically-acclaimed documentary and dramatic films. He is also the assistant director of the African Cultural Center at North Carolina State University (NCSU).

Prior to joining the faculty at NCSU, he was an Artist in Residence and Instructor at Duke University. In 2006, he won a National Emmy for his work as series producer of the well-received PBS series, "Slavery and the Making of America." James' most recent offering, "Harlem in Montmartre: A Paris Jazz Story," was awarded Best Documentary at the 2010 Pan African International Film Festival in Cannes, France.

In 2008 he wrote, produced and directed "The Doll," an adaptation of a classic short story by Charles W. Chesnutt. That picture received the Best Dramatic Short Film Award at that year's Hollywood Black Film Festival.

Earlier in his career, Dante executive produced the PBS series, "This Far by Faith" for Blackside Films in Boston, Mass. He was also honored with the DuPont Columbia Silver Baton for his work at Blackside.

Mr. James has a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Grand Valley State University and a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from Duke University. In 2008 he was awarded an honorary Ph.D., a Doctorate of Humane Letters by Grand Valley State University.

During the summer of 2010 he served as a guest lecturer at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. And he plans to return to Cape Town to make a film with a black South African resident of the Khayelitsha Township. A member of the Directors Guild of America and the Writers Guild of America, Dante is currently developing an independent feature-length documentary about Huey P. Newton and the Black Panther Party. See: <http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1649581507/the-story-of-huey-p-newton-and-the-black-panther-p>

Kam Williams: Hi, Dante, thanks for the interview. How ya been, bro?

Dante James: Hi Kam, thank you for your continued



CELEBRITY INTERVIEW

by Kam Williams

interest in my work. The last few months have been really busy. I'm enjoying my responsibilities as assistant director of NCSU's African-American Cultural Center and all of my film projects. The independent feature and, of course, the feature documentary on Huey P. Newton and the Black Panther Party are moving forward.

KW: What interested you in doing a documentary about Huey Newton?

DJ: As a young person, I was interested in the Black Panther Party and their efforts to serve the needs of the community while also having the courage to confront oppressive exploitative forces in the community. That interest grew as I got older and, as you are aware, all of my films explore some aspect of the African American experience. So, a film on Huey P. Newton and the Black Panther Party is an opportunity to grow intellectually while also exploring an often misrepresented movement.

KW: Do you think that the Panthers have been slighted by history because J. Edgar Hoover was so successful at destroying the Party?

DJ: That is a very interesting question. I think the misrepresentations of the Black Panther Party are certainly connected to J. Edgar Hoover and his unrelenting efforts to destroy the Party. For about ten years, Hoover illegally used the power of the federal government along with black informants to create dissension within the Party and to present a negative image of the Party

to the general public. Additionally, in concert with local police officials, Hoover used brutal force in his effort to destroy the Black Panther Party. The images and accounts of these efforts have misrepresented the Black Panther Party movement. Historically, and even today, external forces including the government, the mainstream corporate media and academics have defined the Black Panther Party. This film will be the first to tell the story of the Black Panthers from inside the Party. Black Panther Party members will define themselves and their movement.

KW: How did you get David Hilliard to participate in the project?

DJ: Actually David who was Huey P. Newton's childhood friend, a founding member of the Party and its Chief of Staff, approached me. David also led the Party during the



time that Huey and Bobby Seale were incarcerated. David and I spent several months talking about the film in terms of a conceptual framework at the same time that I conducted my own research. During these conversations David would tell me these incredible stories about Huey's vision for the party, the inner workings of the party, the mistakes they made, the successful maneuvers, and the pain and agony of the murder of Party members. One of the main misconceptions of the party is grounded in the concept of armed struggle. While there were factions of the party who pushed an armed struggle agenda, that was not Huey's vision. This was a leading source of tension within the Party and it will be a major story focus of the film.

KW: What about Bobby Seale, who I think of as the only other surviving founder of the Black Panthers?

DJ: I haven't had a chance to speak to Bobby Seale yet. I have been working very closely with David Hilliard and I'm thrilled to have the support of Fredrika Newton, Huey's widow and the president of The Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation. Of course, we want to and will speak to Bobby Seale but the story of the Black Panther Party, in essence, is the story of Huey Newton. Huey had his own personal issues. He was complex, he was brilliant, and he was a student of history, politics and economic theory. Clearly, Huey P. Newton was the leader and standard bearer of the Black Panther Party.

KW: What sort of archival footage will you have access to?

DJ: David was very forward thinking in terms of the legacy of the Black Panther Party. He has every issue of the newspaper, hours of unseen film footage and unheard audio recordings, documents and correspondence. It's these materials that will facilitate our efforts to tell the story of Huey Newton and the Black Panthers from inside the Party. To that end, we need support from the public to raise the development funds to catalogue these materials and to have film footage cleaned and transferred to a digital format. We are asking that conscious and critical thinking individuals go to Kickstarter.com and contribute to the project. It is essential that people contribute today because we only have 21 days left to raise the development funds at Kickstarter.com.

KW: Will you also be looking at documents made available by the Freedom of Information Act proving the U.S. government's infiltration of and war on the Panthers via the FBI's Cointelpro program?

DJ: Another major story line is the violence and oppression of the Black Panther Party under the aus-



Dante James



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