

# A Sunny, Idyllic Version Of 1960s Alabama Black Filmmakers Say Melanin-Challenged Cannes Film Festival Can Do Better

By Carla Hay, NABJ Black News & Views

The annual Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, France, has a reputation as one of the most glamorous and prestigious film festivals in the world. But the ugly truth is that Black artists are perpetually underrepresented. That pattern continued for the 2023 Cannes Film Festival, which took place May 16 to May 27. Consider:

- Out of the 21 films that competed for the Palme d'Or, the festival's grand prize, only one was from a Black director: Ramata-Toulaye Sy, for her feature-film directorial debut "Banel e Adama," a romantic drama set in Senegal. Sy, who is French-Senegalese, is only the second Black female director in Cannes Film Festival history chosen to compete in this category.
- It wasn't until 2019 that the Cannes Film Festival chose a Black female director to be in the feature-film competition for the Palme d'Or: Mati Diop, also

French-Senegalese, for "Atlantics (Atlantiques)," which won the Grand Prix Award, the equivalent of second place in the competition.

- There was only one Black winner for the 2023 Cannes Film Festival Awards: Balaji, who won the New Voice Prize for his feature-film directorial debut, "Omen," a movie about witchcraft in Africa. Balaji was born in Congo and lives in Belgium.
- There was only one Black person on the nine-member 2023 Cannes Film Festival grand jury: Rungano Nyoni, a Zambian-British filmmaker, who is best known for her 2017 drama "I Am Not a Witch," which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival that year.
- A Black director has still not won the Palme d'Or.
- A Black director has still not won the Best Director prize at the festival.
- Oscar-winning filmmaker Spike Lee is the only Black person

so far to be chosen as president of the Cannes Film Festival grand jury. He served as jury president in 2021. Lee was originally selected for this position in 2020, but the Cannes Film Festival was canceled that year due to COVID-19.

The Cannes Film Festival did not respond to requests from Black News & Views for comments on the low representation of Black filmmakers at the festival and other race-related issues involving how Black people are treated by the Cannes Film Festival. Lee, who is outspoken about civil rights issues pertaining to Black people, also did not respond to a Black News & Views' request for comment on how the Cannes Film Festival handles representation of Black filmmakers. As of this writing, two movies directed by Lee have had their world premieres at the event: 1989's "Do the Right Thing" and 2018's "BlacKkKlansman." The latter film won the festival's Grand Prix Award. "Banel e Adama" director Sy told the French



Mamadou Diallo, from left, director Ramata-Toulaye Sy, and Khady Mane pose for photographers upon arrival at the premiere of the film 'Banel & Adama' at the 76th international film festival, Cannes, southern France, Saturday, May 20, 2023.

newspaper Le Monde: "I am very proud to represent Africa at Cannes. And I am happy that there are so many of us this year. But we shouldn't have to count African filmmakers, that should be the norm." It should be noted that although the Cannes Film Festival had six feature films from African directors this year, four of those movies are from African filmmakers


who identify as Arab, not Black. These filmmakers are "The Mother of All Lies" director Asmae El Moudir, who is from Morocco; "Les Filles d'Oufa" director Kaouther Ben Hania, who is from Tunisia; "Les Meutes" director Kamal Lazraq, who is from Morocco; and "Goodbye Julia" director Mohamed Kordofani, who is from Sudan. "Goodbye Julia" is the first movie from Sudan

to be selected for the Cannes Film Festival. Compared to other high-profile international film festivals, where Black directors make up at least 15% of awards contestants, the Cannes Film Festival has been slow to include fair representation of Black filmmakers.

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 <b>Savannah Mullen</b> Undecided	 <b>Ty' J Avritt</b> University of Nevada-Las Vegas	 <b>Salem Solomon</b> Oregon State University	 <b>Enrique White</b> Portland State University
 <b>Blake Landry-Silguero</b> University of Nevada-Las Vegas	 <b>Derek Edmondson</b> University of Nevada-Las Vegas	 <b>Sadé Terese Ann DuBoise</b> Willamette University / PNCA	 <b>David Ramzey</b> Mt. Hood Community College

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