(Philadelphia, PA - August 9, 2021) — The BlackStar Film Festival, the world's premier celebration of Black, Brown, and Indigenous film and video artists, presented this year with lead sponsor Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, is pleased to announce this year’s award-winning films.

Winners include Best Feature Documentary Writing With Fire, profiling India's only newspaper run by Dalit women, and the group of journalists who break traditions on the frontlines of India's biggest issues, and Best Feature Narrative Eyimofe (This Is My Desire), following the stories of a pair of Lagosians, Mofe, a factory technician, and Rosa, a
hairdresser, on their quest for what they believe will be a better life on foreign shores. Both films were Philadelphia premieres.

The full list of winning films is below.

This year also marks the second Vimeo Staff Pick Award at BlackStar. Short films featured in the festival are eligible for this award, which includes a $2,500 cash prize, a Vimeo Pro account, and, of course, a Vimeo Staff Pick. The winning film, DEAR PHILADELPHIA (directed by Renee Osubu), is available to watch worldwide for free on Vimeo now.

Lionsgate and STARZ partnered with BlackStar to present the Lionsgate/STARZ Speculative Fiction Award this year. The winner of this prize will receive $5,000 and have the opportunity to showcase their films on STARZ in Black. The winner is Inheritance (directed by Annalise Lockhart).

The winners of the third annual BlackStar Pitch, offering filmmakers of color the chance to propose their short nonfiction projects to an illustrious panel of funders, distributors, and producers, were Claudia Owusu and Ife Oluwamuyide. They will receive an artist grant and mentorship from WarnerMedia OneFifty as well as a free Vimeo Pro Account. An honorable mention winner will receive a $2,500 cash prize from POV and IF/Then, mentorship from IF/Then staff, and two hours of impact campaign planning support from Working Films. The Pitch Honorable Mention was awarded to Beeta Baghoolizadeh and Shane Nassiri.

This year BlackStar attendees online were invited to vote for their favorite films in each category. The winners of the Audience Awards are Writing With Fire (Best Feature Documentary) Beans (Best Feature Narrative) Abundance (Best Short Narrative) Process (Best Experimental Film) and BABYBANGZ (Best Short Documentary).

Finally, BlackStar members voted Testimony: 52nd St. and the Invisible Violence of UPenn, directed by Amelia Carter, as the winner of the Shine Award, given each year to films directed by Philadelphia-based filmmakers. This year seven films were eligible for the prize.
This year’s BlackStar Film Festival lineup included approximately 80 films, including 19 world premieres, representing 27 countries. In addition to presenting an array of live programs, panels, and select in-person events and screenings, this year also marked BlackStar’s selection by the **Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences** as a qualifying festival for both short documentary and short narrative films, making BlackStar’s Best Narrative Short and Best Documentary Short winners eligible for entrance at the Academy Awards. The festival also featured several in-person screenings, including the world premiere of feature documentary *Eyes on the Prize: Hallowed Ground* (directed by **Sophia Nahli Allison**), which screened online and in person at the Mann Center for Performing Arts in advance of its streaming availability on HBO Max.

This year’s Festival is presented with the support of the following sponsors: Annenberg School for Communication, Facebook, Lionsgate/STARZ, Open Society Foundations, WarnerMedia, Eventive, Color of Change, MediaJustice, Netflix, PECO, Philadelphia Foundation, REI Coop Studios, Urban Affairs Coalition/Ending Racism Partnership, The Study Hotel, American Documentary/POV, Catapult Fund, Creative Artists Agency, Firelight Media, Impact Partners, ITVS, The Gotham Film & Media Institute, Leeway Foundation, PBS, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Scattergood Foundation, Temple University Department of Theater, Film and Media Arts, Vimeo and WORLD Channel.

For more information on the festival and its programs, visit www.blackstarfest.org/2021festival/.

**About BlackStar Projects**

BlackStar Projects is the producer of the BlackStar Film Festival, an annual celebration of the visual and storytelling traditions of the African diaspora and global communities of color — showcasing films by Black, Brown, and Indigenous people from around the world. In addition to the acclaimed festival, BlackStar presents an array of programming across film and visual culture year-round, and produces the twice-annual journal *Seen*.

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Winning Films:

**Best Experimental Film**
Jurors: Caroline Monnet, David Hartt, Portia Cobbs

**Letter From Your Far-Off Country**
Dir: Suneil Sanzgiri
A search for solidarity in the sounds and colors of a spontaneous movement in Delhi led by Muslim women, an Iqbal Bano song, the poetry of Agha Shahid Ali, and images of B.R. Ambedkar — a radical anti-caste Dalit intellectual — all revolving around a letter addressed to a distant relative.

Jury Comment: LETTER FROM YOUR FAR-OFF COUNTRY is a beautifully realized and layered film that poetically moves back and forth between public and private history.

**Best Short Documentary**
Jurors: Louis Massiah, Rea Tajiri, Yance Ford

**Dear Philadelphia**
Dir: Renee Maria Osubu
With the help of their family, friends, and faith, three fathers unravel the incomparable partnership of forgiveness and community in North Philly. Whilst walking through the intimate truths of life that can sometimes become a barrier, the film is a reminder that hope can be found in all situations.

Jury Comment: DEAR PHILADELPHIA is an intimate portrait that shows the energy and resourcefulness of community, in which the characters were allowed to narrate their own stories through an outsider who is clearly trusted by their subjects.

**Elena**
Dir: Michèle Stephenson
In 1937, tens of thousands of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent were exterminated by the Dominican army, on the basis of anti-black racism. Fast-forward to
2013, the Dominican Republic’s Supreme Court stripped the citizenship of anyone with Haitian parents, retroactive to 1929, rendering more than 200,000 people stateless. Elena, the young protagonist of the film, and her family stand to lose their legal residency in the Dominican Republic if they don’t manage to get their documents in time. Negotiating a mountain of opaque bureaucratic processes and a racist, hostile society around, Elena becomes the face of the struggle to remain in a country built on the labor of her father and forefathers.

Jury Comment: ELENA is a strong and powerful story that gives the sense that Elena is fully participating in this film process; remarkable access.

**Best Short Narrative**

Jurors: D'Lo, Jason Reynolds, Lynnée Denise

**Lizard**

Dir: Akinola Davies Jr.

An 8-year-old girl with an ability to sense danger gets ejected from Sunday school service. She unwittingly witnesses the underbelly in and around a mega church in Lagos.

Jury Comment: LIZARD is a masterpiece giving political, class, religious, and postcolonial critique, with the nerve to be a thriller because of its music.

**Best Feature Documentary**

Jurors: Asad Muhammad, Monika Navarro, Tracy Rector

**Writing With Fire**

Dir: Rintu Thomas & Sushmit Ghosh

In a cluttered news landscape dominated by men, emerges India's only newspaper run by Dalit women. Armed with smartphones, Chief Reporter Meera and her journalists break traditions, be it on the frontlines of India's biggest issues or within the confines of their homes, redefining what it means to be powerful.
Jury Comment: A gripping and beautifully shot film, WRITING WITH FIRE is a testament to the power of journalism and of women forging their own path.

**Best Feature Narrative**

Jurors: Dagmawi Woubshet, Rajendra Roy, Tayarisha Poe

**Eyimofe (This Is My Desire)**

Dir: Arie & Chuko Esiri

Set in Lagos, Nigeria and told in two chapters, Eyimofe (This is My Desire) follows the stories of Mofe, a factory technician, and Rosa, a hairdresser, on their quest for what they believe will be a better life on foreign shores.

Jury Comment: EYIMOFE (THIS IS MY DESIRE) is a beautifully shot, vibrant film whose cinematography believes fully in its environment, and carries an acting style that captures a complete snapshot of life in a place.

**Special Prizes:**

**BlackStar Pitch Winner**

Judges: Alex Hannibal, CNN, Caitlin Mae Burke, IF/Then, Chi-hui Yang, Ford Foundation/JustFilms, Chloe Walters-Wallace, Firelight Media, Chris Hastings, WORLD Channel/WGBH, Jeff Seelbach, Topic/First Look Media, Mervyn Marcano, Field/House Productions, Opal Hope Bennett, POV/American Documentary

**Ampe Study: or Leap into the Sky, Black Girl**

Claudia Owusu & Ife Oluwamuyide

**BlackStar Pitch Honorable Mention**

**Diaspora Letters: Postmarks Between Iran and the US**

Beeta Baghoolizadeh & Shane Nassiri

**Lionsgate/STARZ Award for Best Speculative Fiction**
Inheritance
Dir: Annalise Lockhart
On Norra's 25th birthday, she and her brother inherit the deed to their family's small cabin. With this auspicious birthday, she starts seeing the spirits that have been haunting her brother and father for years.

Shine Award Winner

Testimony: 52nd St. and the Invisible Violence of UPenn
Dir. Amelia Carter

Vimeo Staff Pick Award

Dear Philadelphia
Dir: Renee Osubu
With the help of their family, friends, and faith, three fathers unravel the incomparable partnership of forgiveness and community in North Philly. Whilst walking through the intimate truths of life that can sometimes become a barrier, the film is a reminder that hope can be found in all situations.

Richard Nichols Luminary Award

Menelik Shabazz
Presented to Nadia Denton
“The late Menelik Shabazz’s life and career are an inspiration to our BlackStar family, and we are honored to present our 2021 Richard Nichols Luminary Award to the late and great Menelik Shabazz. Shabazz’s daughter, Nadia Denton, has accepted this award on his behalf.” - Nehad Khader, Festival Director

**Audience Awards**

Best Feature Documentary:

**Writing With Fire**
Dir: Rintu Thomas & Sushmit Ghosh

Best Feature Narrative:

**Beans**
Dir: Tracey Deer

Best Short Narrative:

**Abundance**
Dir: Kym Allen

Best Experimental Film:

**Process**
Dir: Christian Padron

Best Short Documentary:

**BABYBANCZ**
Dir: Juliana Kasumu