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Authors

Barahmand, Hasti
Dudakia, Kunti

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OUR SPECTACULAR JOURNEY AS AMATEUR DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKERS
The First Frame

BY HASTI BARAHMAND AND KUNTI DUDAKIA



**ARE YOU BLACK ENUF WAS SCREENED AT THE
4TH ANNUAL DAVIS FEMINIST FILM FESTIVAL
IN 2009.**

APRIL 16, 2009, marked perhaps one of the most momentous and exhilarating experiences in our filmmaking careers—in fact, it may have been the only event to qualify us as documentary filmmakers to begin with. How did we reach such a climax in our careers without really ever having one?

The story began in the winter of 2007 during a Critical Media Literacy course taught at UCLA by Dr. Rhonda Hammer. Understanding how the media constructs images to influence and sway the public in different politically charged ways, and identifying and critiquing those characterizations is the course's objective. As we became progressively more aware of the influencing factors of media, we took our first step toward learning how to cre-

ate film within this consciousness. Naturally, we began our venture into the video-making world with little more than a camera, microphone, and a question. Though our topic had yet to be finalized, we knew the video documentary would delve into the politics and social representations of black women, and how black women deal with their intersectional identities. The double consciousness of black women, who concurrently negotiate their race and gender, was the focus.

We experienced many ups and downs in the making of the film. Professors scheduled to be filmed about race, gender, and class cancelled their appointments or technical difficulties halted the filming of an event or interview. Such humps and hurdles are part of the process of

filmmaking; luckily we were able to jump over these obstacles and still preserve our vision.

The heart-wrenching, sleepless, stressful, patience-testing editing process was nonetheless incredibly rewarding. Our efforts to produce a realistic, critical commentary about the black female experience came to fruition in our labor of love entitled Are You Black Enuf? The Politics of the Black Female Identity. Despite our own critiques of the film's perfection, we were eager to share it with our class and friends; after much deliberation, and encouragement from Dr. Hammer, we submitted it to the Davis Feminist Film Festival.

Devoted to challenging prejudices and stereotypes through film, this annual film festival at UC Davis, promotes scholarly and inter-community dialogue and draws films and documentaries from around the world. We had no real expectations about our chances of being accepted. As we prepared our application and statement for submission, we believe it would be no time before we received an email of rejection. This made it all the more astonishing and worthwhile when we received a letter from the director stating that our admission was accepted and would be screened. A bit speechless at the honor, we were nonetheless proud and excited for the opportunity to have our piece shown to a large audience.

We promised each other that we would make it to the festival, although it meant a 400-mile drive for one of us and interrupting a busy law-school schedule for the other. With butter-

flies in our stomachs and a prayer in our hearts that this community of artists and filmmakers would accept our film, we entered the theater. Prior to the screening, we were introduced, for the first time, as filmmakers and award winners to a select group of attendees. Though feeling shy, we mingled and answered questions about our film and why we had created it. It was an unforgettable moment when a couple approached us to say how excited they were to watch our film, noting that they had made the decision to attend after reading about our submission. With an audience of nearly three hundred, we were introduced on stage then quickly ran to our seats, hoping that an invisibility cloak could mask our fear of rejection.

The film begins with a black screen and subtle African drumming that increases in tempo with narrated spoken word and flashing video montage. Though we sat facing the screen, we were really watching the audience react. It is nerve-racking to bare the product of your hard work, sweat, and tears for all to judge; however, the experience of letting your piece speak to an audience is unforgettable. At the conclusion, the audience erupted into applause, which was music to our ears and calming to our nerves. The first frame of our film is just sound with no image, it is a blank palette that leads to our creative expression which follows. The first frame is our deep breath, our closed eyes, and our hope that despite a short resume, we have a relevant message to share. And remarkable it was to share.

Kunti Dudakia graduated summa cum laude from UCLA in 2007 with a B.A. in Communications Studies and Women's Studies. She received the CSW Constance Coiner Undergraduate Award in 2007. She is currently attending law school at UC Berkeley School of Law (Boalt Hall) where she is the Co-Solicitations editor of the Berkeley Journal of African-American Law and Policy and Co-Chair of the Student Liaison Committee for Faculty Hiring. She is the William K. Coblentz Fellow at the Thelton E. Henderson Center for Social Justice, where she is conducting research on mental health and women of color for an upcoming symposium where she hopes to present an original thesis.

Hasti Barahmand graduated from UCLA with a B.A. in Women's Studies and Education in 2008. She is currently a J.D. candidate at the University of Iowa. A scholar and women's rights activist, she has focused largely on exploring and bringing to light the multifaceted and intersectional experiences of women of color within the U.S. Her works include the research documentary "Queen Kong—A Strategic Look into Hip Hop." She looks to pursue a career in educational law and policy with an emphasis on academic curriculum and access to higher education.