

Reel Sisters 28th Anniversary Film Festival



BAM[®]

Reel Sisters Trailblazer Award 2025

Presented by African Voices, Reel Sisters is the first Oscar qualifying film festival devoted to women of color. Reel Sisters is pleased to kick off our festival season with BAM. Reel Sisters will be held from **Oct. 25 -Nov. 10, 2025**. Visit: www.reelsisters.org.

Donate



Samantha Knowles

Director, *Harlem Ice*



OCTOBER 22, 2025 | BAM, 30 LAFAYETTE AVE.



Trailblazer Awards 2025



Eyes on the Prize, III

Trailblazer

Samantha Knowles is an award-winning director. Most recently, she directed the series "Harlem Ice" for Disney+, an episode of the seminal series "Eyes on the Prize" for HBO, and an episode of in the docuseries "Katrina: Come Hell and High Water" for Netflix. She won a Cinema Eye Honors Award for Outstanding Achievement in a Nonfiction Series for co-directing the HBO docuseries "Black and Missing" and her film, "How We Get Free", was shortlisted for the 2024 Academy Award for Best Documentary Short.



Sam Knowles

Moderator

Yoruba Richen is an award-winning documentary filmmaker whose work has been featured on Netflix, FX/Hulu and PBS. Her film *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* won a Peabody and a Gracie Award. Her latest film *FREE JOAN* (pronounced Jo-Anne) LITTLE is premiering at DOC NYC on Nov. 12th, 2025.



Yoruba Richen

Awards Program - Oct. 22, 2025

Greetings | Jesse Trussell,
BAM, Dir. of Film Programming & Strategy

Welcome | Gha'il Rhodes Benjamin,
Mistress of Ceremonies

Carolyn A. Butts, African Voices Founder

Awards Presentation

Stacey Holman, Presenter
Samantha Knowles, Trailblazer Honoree

Film Presentations

Eyes on the Prize, III (Season 1, Ep. 2)
The Code
Harlem Ice

In Conversation

Sam Knowles and Yoruba Richen



Stacey Holman

Award Presenter

Stacey L. Holman is a Harlem-based filmmaker who's directed/produced several award-winning projects including episode three of the 2018 PBS series *Reconstruction: America After the Civil War*. She was a producer on the critically acclaimed documentary *Tell Them We Are Rising: The Story of Black Colleges and Universities*.

Mistress of Ceremonies

Gha'il Rhodes Benjamin (Actress, Master Teaching Artist, Grammy nominated spoken-word performance artist) is a 2020 Audelco Award recipient, for the role of "Wilhemina" in *SASSY MAMAS*. Her credits include *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Steal Away*, *Bee-Luther Hatchee* (NY premiere) and *The Gift*. Gha'il is the actor/spoken word artist in Al Santana's film *REPARATION BLUES* (PBS), *Mrs. Thang* in the film *SWEET THANG*, and the Poetess in *DARK SEED* (films by China Colston).



Gha'il Rhodes Benjamin



REEL SISTERS OF THE DIASPORA

Film Festival + Lecture Series

Women . Films . Empowerment. Celebrating women of color across the globe

2025 Trailblazer Award Ceremony Bios

Trailblazer Award Honoree

Samantha Knowles is an award-winning director. She won a Cinema Eye Honors Award for Outstanding Achievement in a Nonfiction Series for co-directing the HBO docuseries "Black and Missing" and her film, "How We Get Free", was shortlisted for the 2024 Academy Award for Best Documentary Short. She has also won a Television Academy Honors Award, an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Directing, and a Gracie Award for Best Director of a National TV Program. In 2023 she was named to the DOCNYC 40 Under 40 List, which honors and celebrates emerging talent in the documentary world. Her work has screened as part of Hot Docs, DOC NYC, the Tribeca Film Festival, the New York Times Op-Doc series, on HBO, Showtime, and more. Most recently, she directed the series "Harlem Ice" for Disney+, an episode of the seminal series "Eyes on the Prize" for HBO, and an episode of in the docuseries "Katrina: Come Hell and High Water" for Netflix.

Sam's first short film, "Why Do You Have Black Dolls?" was the recipient of Reel Sisters Spirit Award 2012.

Mistress of Ceremonies

Gha'il Rhodes Benjamin (Actress, Master Teaching Artist, Grammy nominated spoken-word performance artist) is a 2020 Audelco Award recipient, for the role of "Wilhemina" in SASSY MAMAS. In 2019 she was featured in the role of 'Dynamite Texas Entrepreneur' Poliina Graves in REUNION IN BARTERSVILLE;(also an Audelco winner) and was featured in the National Black Theatre Festival's 2019 Winston Salem, North Carolina celebration performance in that same role. Other credits include A Raisin in the Sun, Steal Away, We are your sisters, Bee-Luther Hatchee (NY premiere) and The Gift. Gha'il is the actor/spoken word artist in Al Santana's film REPARATION BLUES (PBS), Mrs. Thang in the film SWEET THANG, and the Poetess in DARK SEED (films by China Colston).

Gha'il's writing is featured in *African Voices Magazine's* spring 2020 issue (tribute to Ntozake Shange/Part II) with a poem titled "Tiddies aint everything/for Sara the Butterscotch Sunflower Queen," which recognizes the tenacity of breast cancer survivors. Other highlights include performances on NYC Summer Stage, Community Unity Festival in Grand Rapids, Michigan,

NYC Disability Unite Festival, Lincoln Center Outdoor Summer Series, Central Park Celebrates Juneteenth (2022) at Seneca Village, and most recently a customized poem written for Roberta Flack (performed as Ms. Flack received the Key to the City of New York by Mayor Eric Adams). Info: www.ghairrhodesbenjamin.com

Moderator

Yoruba Richen is an award-winning documentary filmmaker whose work has been featured on multiple outlets, including Netflix, MSNBC, Peacock, FX/Hulu and PBS. Her film *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* won a Peabody and a Gracie Award and was honored by the Television Academy. Other work includes the Emmy-nominated films [American Reckoning](#), *How It Feels to Be Free*; *The Sit In: Harry Belafonte Hosts the Tonight Show* and *Green Book: Guide to Freedom*.

Her film, *The Killing of Breonna Taylor* won an NAACP Image Award. She Co-directed the series *The Fall of Diddy* for HBO Max and ID and her latest film FREE JOAN (pronounced Jo-Anne) LITTLE is premiering at DOC NYC on November 12th, 2025.

Yoruba is the Founding Director of the Documentary Program at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY.

Awards Presenter

Stacey L. Holman is a Harlem-based filmmaker who's directed/produced several award-winning projects including episode three of the 2018 PBS series *Reconstruction: America After the Civil War* hosted by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. She was a producer on the critically acclaimed documentary *Tell Them We Are Rising: The Story of Black Colleges and Universities* and served as Associate Producer on the Emmy award-winning film *Freedom Riders* produced/directed by Stanley Nelson. Additionally, Stacey was Coordinating Producer for Nelson's Peabody Award-winning documentary *Freedom Summer*, and she was Co-Producer on *Mary Lou Williams: The Lady Who Swings the Band*.

Stacey's short film *Dressed Like Kings* garnered the Tribeca Film Festival All-Access Award and aired on the WORLD Channel as part of the AfroPoP Shorts Program. She was the Series Producer/Director of Henry Louis Gates, Jr's Black Church series *The Black Church: This Is Our Story*. Currently, she's one of the producers/directors on Gates' *Making Black America: African American Social Networks* airing on PBS in 2022. Stacey Holman is a 2022 Reel Sisters Trailblazer Award recipient. Information visit www.blackbutterflyproductions.net.

Presenting Organizations



Brooklyn Academy of Music

BAM is the home for curious people and adventurous ideas. We support artistic experimentation and champion inclusion and accessibility throughout the arts as presenter, activator, and connector.  @bamfilmbrooklyn | @bam_brooklyn | BAM.org



African Voices

Founded in 1992, African Voices supports art, literature and film by artists of color. AV serves 5,000 NYC residents through the following key programs: African Voices, a literary magazine that has published more than 4,300+ artists; Reel Sisters of the Diaspora Film Festival & Lecture Series, the nation's first Oscar qualifying film festival devoted to women of color; and AV Readings, Workshops & Performance Series that offers literary readings, artistic workshops, professional forums and art exhibitions at our Brooklyn gallery space. Spelman College is archiving the organization's arts collection for future generations to enjoy.

Reel Sisters has awarded \$75,000 in fellowships and scholarships to women of color filmmakers. Reel Sisters 28th Anniversary festival will be held in Brooklyn from Oct. 25-26, 2025. For information join our mailing list at www.reelsisters.org.

Donate or become a member:

<https://africanvoices.com/membership>

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Reel Sisters 28th Annual Season

Free Digital Issue of Tribute to Harry Belafonte

