

STRONG ISLAND

A film by Yance Ford



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**BERLINALE 2017
STRONG ISLAND SCREENING SCHEDULE**

OFFICIAL SCREENINGS

TIME & DATE	LOCATION
• 17:00 SUN, February 12th	CineStar 7 - PREMIERE
• 22:00 MON, February 13th	CineStar7
• 13:30 TUE, February 14th	International
• 17:15 THU, February 16th	CineStar 3
• 17:30 SAT, February 18th	Cubix 7

MARKET SCREENINGS

TIME & DATE	LOCATION
• 13:10 THU, February 9th	CinemaxX 14
• 9:00 MON, February 13th	Kino Arsenal 2

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Strong Island chronicles the arc of a family across history, geography and tragedy - from the racial segregation of the Jim Crow South to the promise of New York City; from the presumed safety of middle class suburbs, to the maelstrom of an unexpected, violent death. It is the story of the Ford family: Barbara Dunmore, William Ford and their three children and how their lives were shaped by the enduring shadow of race in America. In April 1992, on Long Island NY, William Jr., the Ford's eldest child, a black 24 year-old teacher, was killed by Mark Reilly, a white 19 year-old mechanic. Although Ford was unarmed, he became the prime suspect in his own murder. A deeply intimate and meditative film, Strong Island asks what one can do when the grief of loss is entwined with historical injustice, and how one grapples with the complicity of silence, which can bind a family in an imitation of life, and a nation with a false sense of justice.

SYNOPSIS

Strong Island chronicles the arc of a family across history, geography and tragedy - from the racial segregation of the Jim Crow South to the promise of New York City; from the presumed safety of middle class suburbs, to the maelstrom of an unexpected, violent death. It is the story of the Ford family: Barbara Dunmore, William Ford and their three children and how their lives were shaped by the enduring shadow of race in America. A deeply intimate and meditative film, Strong Island asks what one can do when the grief of loss is entwined with historical injustice, and how one grapples with the complicity of silence, which can bind a family in an imitation of life, and a nation with a false sense of justice.

In April 1992, on Long Island NY, William Jr., the Ford's eldest child, a black 24 year-old teacher, confronted Tom Datre Jr., an auto body shop owner about the quality of a car repair. The interaction turned deadly when Mark Reilly, a white 19 year-old mechanic on the premises, shot Ford once in the chest, killing him. Although Ford was unarmed, he soon became the prime suspect in his own murder. When an all-white Grand Jury decided that no crime had been committed, the killer returned to his life, and the Ford family retreated into a devastated silence that persisted for decades.

Made over the course of ten years, Strong Island is an inquiry into the muted implosion of the Ford family after William's murder, and a sense-making of the still unanswered questions that surrounded it. Bringing together family archives, domestic tableaux, penetrating conversations with friends and family, and interviews with prosecutors and police, filmmaker Yance Ford creates a revelation of loss, fear and accountability. And though Strong Island indicts the US judicial system and social structures of blackness, and draws a direct line from them to William Jr.'s death and the atomization of the Ford family, the film

is not ultimately concerned with finding closure in these institutions. Instead, it seeks truths within the process of filmmaking itself and suggests that justice can be found through a reclamation of narrative from history; through owning and telling the story of a loved one.

DIRECTOR NOTES – Yance Ford

Background

On the night that riots engulfed South Central Los Angeles, I sat in my college dorm room transfixed by the televised images, silent and awake. On April 29, 1992 four LAPD Officers were acquitted of the most serious criminal charges from their beating of Rodney King. The Defense made the argument that the videotape did not represent reality, that the jury could not believe their eyes, that “something else” had happened to justify the beating.

Twenty-two days before, my older brother had been shot and killed by a 19 year-old white man who claimed he fired in self-defense. William, who was unarmed, was described as “the nicest guy in the world, but then something would happen, something would come over him” and the police pursued a line of inquiry designed to characterize William as a menace.

This is what blackness means in America: that what you see is not actually what you are seeing. Blackness is a visual disturbance. You are visible and invisible all at once if you are black. You are rage and you are danger if you are black. Most importantly, blackness must be contained.

My parents were grade-school sweethearts who became middle-class strivers. For 38 years they lived the American Dream: three kids, two jobs, two cars, and the split-ranch they called home. Until their first born son was murdered. Sitting there watching the riots, I resented the choice that my parents had made - to contain their rage - a choice they felt they had to make to keep me and my sister safe from retribution by the killer’s associates. It was an act of love, but in the end, that choice did not keep us safe. My sister and I lost ourselves in a world frozen in time, and the people we could have been are unknown to us. The Dream had become a nightmare. In order to live, I had to try to understand it. I realized I did not need permission to tell this story. I needed courage.

* * *

About the film

When I first began this film my goals were simple- uncover why my brother’s murder went unpunished and look at what injustice lived out over time had done to my family. Beginning with intimate conversations with my mother about why she and my father did not do more after William was killed, I moved on to the Detective for the Suffolk County Police Department and former Assistant District Attorneys who investigated the case, asking for any bit of information they could

remember- any fact they could share. I learned that when a Grand Jury declines to press charges and the accused goes home, the official record is permanently sealed. The only document available to me was William's autopsy report. Then there was the day my mother gave me William's diary, and my line of inquiry shifted. I began to learn more about who my brother was and what he wanted for his life, in his own words. In these pages was a William I had never known. In order to make the film, I had to stop keeping secrets, stop keeping William's secrets and open the door. And I realized that because it was now going to be a different kind of investigation, I had to draw on every creative resource I had and assemble a gifted creative team that included my DoP, editor, producer, co-producer and composers.

Strong Island is mindful in its construction, from the choice of each frame to the length of each shot- the film is meant to be an immersive experience: exposing you to what you know exists but hopefully have never experienced. I try to offer a pacing and a style that returns the very thing that is stolen from us each day – our ability to reflect – and offer it back. While the narrative of Strong Island is an investigation that unfolds in layers, the formal aesthetic balances the tension between reserved observation and intense intimacy. The formal interior shooting style and photographic composition of images help establish that William is both there and gone. If the content is fraught, it is held within a stable constant frame, reflecting the simultaneous dynamic of suspense and suspension. We are both safe and trapped in these rooms. This home. This world. This is how we live in a family that has suffered through tragedy. It is as close as I can take you.

Many films have told the dark, unsettling lesson about the elusive meaning of 'justice'. Most people leave these films at a considerable distance from the characters. The door into an intimate and challenging knowledge is rarely if ever opened, rarely if ever offered as a possible place of engagement. But how else can we interrogate our fear? How else comprehend the relationship between loss and history. How else, change.

KEY PERSONNEL

Yance Ford – Director, Producer

Yance Ford, who is transgender, is a recipient of the Creative Capital Award, a MacDowell Colony Fellowship, a Sundance Documentary Film Program Fellowship, and was among Filmmaker Magazine's 25 New Faces of Independent Film in 2011. For ten years Ford was privileged to work as Series Producer for the PBS showcase POV and where his curatorial work helped garner more than 16 Emmy nominations. Ford is also an architectural welder, and while at Modern Art Foundry he helped assemble the sculpture "Maman" by Louise Bourgeois—the series of three spiders exhibited at Rockefeller Center, and now on permanent display at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain.

Joslyn Barnes -Producer

Joslyn Barnes is a writer and producer. Among the films she has been involved with producing since co-founding Louverture Films together with actor Danny Glover and partners Susan Rockefeller and Bertha Foundation are: the feature documentaries *Trouble the Water*, *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975*, *The House I Live In*, *Concerning Violence*, *Shadow World*, and the forthcoming films *Tigmi Nigren* by Tala Hadid, *Idiom* by RaMell Ross, *Angels Are Made of Light* by James Longley, and *Aquarela* by Victor Kossakovsky; the narrative features *Bamako*, *The Time That Remains*, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, *The Narrow Frame of Midnight*, *Cemetery of Splendour*, *White Sun*, and the forthcoming *Zama* by Lucrecia Martel.

Alan Jacobsen – Director of Photography

Alan Jacobsen has photographed two documentaries for two-time Oscar nominated director Marshall Curry: "RACING DREAMS" and "POINT AND SHOOT", both films receiving the Grand Jury Prize at the Tribeca Film Festival. Other docs of note include SXSW cinema *verité* favorite "ELECTION DAY", the Emmy-nominated "JOURNALIST AND THE JIHADI: THE MURDER OF DANIEL PEARL" for HBO, and Oscar-shortlisted and Sundance Competition title THE TRIALS OF DARRYL HUNT. Alan also shot the Sundance Jury Award-winning short WET DREAMS AND FALSE IMAGES. Alan's narrative feature work includes the Tribeca Film Festival selection THE AUTEUR, and the Sundance Film Festival competition film TOE TO TOE. In addition to short-form and commercial work for directors including Peter Sillen, Jeremy Saulnier, Annetta Marion, and Morgan Spurlock, Alan is currently shooting a globetrotting feature doc for the Rockefeller Foundation, as well as "Finding 52", for Josh Zeman and Adrian Grenier.

Janus Billeskov Jansen – Editor

Janus Billeskov Jansen entered the Danish film industry in 1970 and in 1973 he was the lead editor in charge on a feature film for the first time. He has edited a large number of internationally acknowledged feature films and documentaries, and directed numerous Danish documentaries. Since 1979 he has been teaching editing and narrative at The National Film School of Denmark. He won the 2009 Sundance World Cinema Documentary Film Editing Award for his work on 'Burma VJ'. Janus has cooperated with most of the influential Danish directors in the past 30 years; most significant is the lifelong creative relationship with the Academy Award winning director Billie August.

J.T. Takagi – Sound Recordist

Ms. Takagi is NY based sound recordist, filmmaker and educator. Her documentary recording credits include *Tell Them We Are Rising: The Story of Historically Black Colleges and Universities* (also at Sundance 2017); *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter Movement*; *August Wilson: The Ground on Which I Stand*, *Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*, *Through a Lens Darkly: Black Photographers and the Emergence of a People*, *The Rise and Fall of Penn Station*, as well as projects for HBO, History Channel and A&E. She received a sound Emmy nomination for Spike Lee's *Four Little Girls* and a CAS nomination for Stanley Nelson's *Sweet Honey in the Rock: Raise Your Voice*. Takagi's own films, on Asian American and Korean peninsular issues have aired on POV and PBS select as well. She teaches, is the interim Executive Director of Third World Newsreel, a progressive media arts center, and serves on the board of several Asian American community organizations

Hildur Guðnadóttir – Original Music

Hildur is an Icelandic cellist, composer and singer who has been manifesting herself at the forefront of experimental pop and contemporary music (e.g. with the band múm). In her solo works she draws out a broad spectrum of sounds from her instrument, ranging from intimate simplicity to huge soundscapes. Her recent film credits include *Tom of Finland*, *The Revenant* and *Sicario*.

Craig Sutherland – Original Music

Craig Sutherland was born in Scotland and raised in the small village of Kincardine in the 1980's. His mother presented him with his first cassette tape and walkman when he was just two years old. Sutherland believes this was the spark that set his love for sound ablaze. This love of sound, coupled with his fascination of the moving image has led him to become a film composer and sound designer; and one with a unique sonic palette. 2015 saw Craig relocating from Scotland to New York City to design sound for *The Light Between Oceans* (DreamWorks) directed by Derek Cianfrance. Now living in New York, he recently composed music and designed sound for Judd Apatow's *30/30*

documentary on Mets legends Doc Gooden and Darryl Strawberry, and for Yance's Ford feature documentary Strong Island.

Signe Byrge Sørensen – Co Producer

Signe Byrge Sørensen is a two-time Oscar® nominee for producing *The Act of Killing* in 2014 and *The Look of Silence* in 2016. She was nominated for the Producer's Guild Award in 2016 for *The Look of Silence*. She won Cinema Eye awards for the production of both these films. Signe Byrge Sørensen has been a producer since 1998. She began in SPOR Media in 1998, moved to Final Cut Productions ApS in 2004 and co-founded Final Cut for Real ApS in 2009. She has produced documentaries in for example South Africa, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Thailand, Indonesia, Colombia, the US and Argentina, besides Denmark and Sweden. While at SPOR Media she was the Danish co-producer for *Steps for the future*. She holds an MA in International Development Studies and Communication Studies from Roskilde University, Denmark, 1998 (1st). She did the European co-production courses EURODOC in 2003 and EAVE in 2010. In 2014 Signe Byrge Sørensen received the Danish Documentary Award called the Roos Prize. She also received the Danish Award called The Timbuktu Award and the Danish Director's Award called The Ib Award.

Danny Glover – Executive Producer

In addition to being one of the most acclaimed actors of our time, with a career spanning 30 years from "Places in the Heart", "The Color Purple", the "Lethal Weapon" series and the award-winning "To Sleep with Anger", Danny Glover has also produced, executive produced and financed numerous projects for film, television and theatre. Among these are "Good Fences", "3 AM", "Freedom Song", "Get on the Bus", "Deadly Voyage", "Buffalo Soldiers", "The Saint of Fort Washington", "To Sleep with Anger", and "Mooladé", as well as the series "Courage" and "America's Dream". Since co-founding Louverture Films, Glover has executive or co-produced "Bamako", "Africa Unite", "Trouble the Water", "Salt of this Sea", "Soundtrack for a Revolution", "Dum Maaro Dum", "The Black Power Mixtape", "The Disappearance of McKinley Nolan", "The House I Live In", "Highway", "The Narrow Frame of Midnight", "Cemetery of Splendour", and "White Sun". He associate produced "The Time That Remains" and the 2010 Cannes Palme d'Or winner "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives". The recipient of countless awards for his humanitarian and advocacy efforts on behalf of economic and social justice causes, Glover is a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador and a recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from Amnesty International.

Susan Rockefeller – Executive Producer

Susan Rockefeller is a partner in Louverture Films and a documentary filmmaker whose in-depth look at critical issues has won top awards at many film festivals across the United States and around the world. Her recent efforts include producing and directing the HBO documentary "Making the Crooked

Straight," which received a Christopher Award; and directing and producing "Striking a Chord" on the ability of music to help heal Post Traumatic Stress (PTSD). She directed and produced "Mission of Mermaids" on ocean health, and is currently in production on two films: one about agricultural breeders, farmers and chefs; the other on Bach's "Coffee Cantata." When she's not making films, Susan designs message-inspired jewelry to raise awareness about protecting family, art and nature, and sits on the boards of Oceana, the We Are Family Foundation and the program committee for The Stone Barns for Sustainable Agriculture.

Bertha Foundation – Executive Producer

Bertha Foundation dreams of a more just world and supports forms of activism that aim to bring about change. We champion those using media, law and enterprise as tools to achieve their vision. We envision a society where stories come from many different voices, where law is used as a tool for justice and where business delivers positive social impact. We work with a network of people whom we believe can change the world - activists working with storytellers and lawyers. While powerful on their own, we also look for opportunities for leaders to collaborate across portfolios.

Michel Merkt – Executive Producer

Michel Merkt is an entertainment entrepreneur based in The Principality of Monaco. He is mainly working with independent production companies on international features and co-productions and documentaries for cinema. His credits include Maps to the Stars (Palme d'Or best actress 2014) from David Cronenberg and Life from Anton Corbijn, Arabian Nights (Oscar® 2016 pre nomination by the Portuguese Film Academy), and In The Shadow of Women, featured at the Directors' Fortnight. In 2016 he produced Maren Ade's Toni Erdmann, Paul Verhoeven's Elle, Claude Barras' animation film My Life as a Zucchini, Kleber Mendonça Filho's Aquarius, Xavier Dolan's It's Only the End of the World, and Oliver Laxe's Mimosas – all of which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival or Director's Fortnight 2016. He is currently working on projects from Lucrecia Martel, Michele Pannetta, Anup Singh and Shahaf Peled, to name a few. Furthermore, Michel is a consultant for numerous private investors, foundations and philanthropic organizations. One of his goals is "not to change, the world but at least to try to change the vision of the world." He is one of the founders of CIC (Cannes Investors Club), part of the Marché du Film program, with the aim of contributing towards the development of cinema by facilitating networking and giving a first approach to the movie business and investment opportunities to influential investors.

Laura Poitras – Executive Producer

Laura is a filmmaker and journalist. Her film CITIZENFOUR won an Oscar® for best documentary, as well as awards from BAFTA, Independent Spirit Award, and the Director's Guild of America. The first film in her

9/11 trilogy, *My Country, My Country*, was nominated for an Oscar. The second film, *The Oath*, was nominated for two Emmys. Her reporting on NSA surveillance shared in the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for public service. She received a Peabody Award for her film *Flag Wars*. She recently exhibited her first solo museum show at the Whitney Museum of American Art. She is a co-creator of Field of Vision <<https://theintercept.com/fieldofvision/>>.

Sonya Childress – Impact Advisor

Sonya Childress serves as the Director of Partnerships and Engagement for Firelight Media, a non-profit media organization led by veteran filmmaker Stanley Nelson and Marcia Smith. Sonya manages Firelight’s Community Engagement Division, which meets the needs of filmmakers, organizers, educators and philanthropists by connecting high-quality social issue media with concrete and innovative ways for audiences to become inspired, educated, and mobilized into action. She has directed and advised countless social impact film campaigns, including “Freedom Summer”, “Freedom Riders”, “The Interrupters”, “Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes”, “Favela Rising”, “Africa Unite”, “Farmingville”, and “Deadline”. Sonya produced a GOTV Toolkit for “Freedom Summer”, video modules for “The New Americans” and co-produced a three-part film series called “Immigration: Beyond the Headlines”.

MAIN CREDITS

Cinetic Media and Doc & Film International
Present
A Yanceville Films and Louverture Films production
STRONG ISLAND
A film by Yance Ford

2017 – US / Denmark – 107 minutes – sound Dolby 5.1 – ratio 1.78 – English

Featuring, in order of appearance

BARBARA DUNMORE FORD
YANCE FORD
HARVEY WALKER
KEVIN MYERS
LAUREN FORD
DAVID BREEN
ED BOYAR

Directed by
YANCE FORD

Produced by
JOSLYN BARNES
YANCE FORD

Co-Produced by
SIGNE BYRGE SØRENSEN

Director of Photography
ALAN JACOBSEN

Edited by
JANUS BILLESKOV JANSEN

Original Music by
HILDUR GUDNADÓTTIR
CRAIG SUTHERLAND

A **YANCEVILLE FILMS** and **LOUVERTURE FILMS** Production

In Co-Production with

**FINAL CUT FOR REAL
AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY | POV**

In Association with

**JUST FILMS | FORD FOUNDATION
CHICKEN & EGG PICTURES**

Executive Producers

**DANNY GLOVER
SUSAN ROCKEFELLER
BERTHA FOUNDATION
MICHEL MERKT
LAURA POITRAS**

Executive Producer for American Documentary | POV

**SIMON KILMURRY
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JUSTINE NAGAN**

Co-Executive Producer for American Documentary | POV

CYNTHIA LÓPEZ

Danish Film Institute

CECILIA LIDIN

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FLEMMING HEDEGAARD LARSEN

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FIELD OF VISION
LYNDA WEINMAN**

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IDFA Forum
GoodPitch Chicago
CPH:FORUM of CPH:DOX – Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival 2015**

Strong Island is a co production of
YANCEVILLE FILMS, LOUVERTURE FILMS, FINAL CUT FOR REAL, POV

www.strongislandfilm.com

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A FILM BY **YANCE FORD**

CINETIC MEDIA AND DOC & FILM INTERNATIONAL PRESENT A YANCEVILLE FILMS AND LOUVERTURE FILMS PRODUCTION IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH FINAL CUT FOR REAL AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY I POV

IN ASSOCIATION WITH JUSTFILMS I FORD FOUNDATION CHICKEN & EGG PICTURES 'STRONG ISLAND' DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ALAN JACOBSEN EDITED BY JANUS BILLESKOV JANSEN EDITOR SHANNON KENNEDY

ORIGINAL MUSIC HILDIR GUÐNAÐÓTTIR CRAIG SUTHERLAND SOUND EDITOR DAN TIMMONS SOUND MIXER TONY VOLANTE CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCER FOR AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY I POV CYNTHIA LÓPEZ EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS FOR AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY I POV SIMON KILMURRY CHRIS WHITE JUSTINE NAGAN

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