

IF YOU WAKE UP YOU'LL BE POWERFUL.

# DISPATCHES FROM CLEVELAND

CLEVELAND  
INTERNATIONAL  
FILM FESTIVAL  
OFFICIAL SELECTION

ALBIN PICTURES PRESENTS DISPATCHES FROM CLEVELAND WRITTEN BY CATHERINE DJUMI PRODUCED BY CATHERINE DJUMI AND SARESHA KFI  
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: DENIEL PEPPS COSTUME DESIGNER: WARDLONE TAYLOR EDITOR: CINDIE NORTHERN EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: EMRI LEWIS  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: LAURA TATIAN AND LAURA PELTONI EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: CINDIE NORTHERN AND FRESHPRODUCE INC. BASEER JONES  
CASTING: DANA-JIN DAVIS MICHAELA ANGELA DAVIS SHANYA DIAZ VAN KINES BARBARA KITURANG  
KIM LUCAS SCOT KANAGANA NIK NODEN PORIHA RICHEN RINKISEN NORI TAJA AND SACHA SANON



www.dispatchesfromcleveland.com



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Aubin Pictures/Catherine Gund:

***Dispatches from Cleveland (2017)***

Mic.com, Cleveland Magazine, Substream, Cleveland Film Society, Beyond Chron

***Chavela (2017)***

Hollywood Reporter

***Born to Fly (2014)***

LA Times



Visit our website to watch the short video we created in partnership with Color of Change, using excerpts from *Dispatches from Cleveland*, to show how Black voters in Cleveland used the power of their voice and their vote to demand justice.

## SYNOPSIS

"I didn't ask to be a leader," Samaria Rice explains, but "they made me a leader when they killed my son." Samaria is referring to the death of her 12-year-old son, Tamir, at the hands of the Cleveland police department in November 2014. The case received national attention, and the country watched as Prosecutor Timothy McGinty refused to hold police accountable and indict the police officer who shot young Tamir. Samaria continues, "Prosecutor McGinty didn't advocate for me and he covered up for the officers." This case, and the pushback from the prosecutor's office, galvanized the citizens of Cleveland to band together to successfully unseat him in the next election.



*Dispatches from Cleveland* is a feature-length documentary in five parts that closely examines the early 21st century, rust-belt city of Cleveland, Ohio, one of the most racially divided cities in America. The film follows ordinary people - long shaken by police misconduct, social discrimination, and poverty - whose love for their home pushes them to work together to bring about real change.

Spanning the 2015 Movement for Black Lives Convening to the 2016 Republican National Convention, the film weaves together the experiences of people using varied strategies to achieve similar goals, such as impacting down-ballot races. Depicting the intersecting movements in Cleveland, the film highlights that lasting change will come from prioritizing the lives of those most marginalized,

This film presents a nuanced examination of a national movement as only documentary film can - focusing on an individual location and decisive characters during a crucial year.

Jamilah King, in her coverage for Mic.com, cites that in cities like Cleveland, "transforming the criminal justice system through affecting local elections has proven to be an important strategy."



Cleveland is the pulse of a nation and a potential harbinger of what is to come throughout the country.

# IMPACT + OUTREACH STRATEGY

*Dispatches from Cleveland* is a powerful organizing tool, part of a grassroots movement in Cleveland, Ohio, to create justice and fairness from the most local level of streets and neighborhoods to the highest public offices. For a revolutionary movement to maximize a moment, to gain traction, to garner broad identification and influence, it must have the power to sustain its purpose and the energy to grow. It must have momentum. *Dispatches from Cleveland* focuses on such a force. The film, like the movement itself, is an impetus, an instigation, an inspiration.

This film not only documents the tenor and bass of the times, but also serves as an organizing tool. As such, we have a three-tiered approach to our outreach - impacting the biggest audience possible, working on the ground to promote change, and spreading our message online.

## REACHING A WIDE AUDIENCE

In order to make the most impact, reaching a wide audience is an essential component of our outreach strategy. To maximize the immediacy and accessibility of streaming the pieces online, we've opted to place each of the five chapters online soon after the film is completed. That, in line with our nationwide festival run, will be the first step in our expansive outreach plan.

## ON THE GROUND

Beyond our national coverage, our film will be seen locally at community screenings and each one of the five parts can be used to assist organizing strategies. Aubin Pictures has partnered with key advocacy groups locally and nationally in an effort to help turn this movement moment into lasting change.

We are collaborating with several partners to use the film as a training tool for a new generation of leaders and activists, to inspire grassroots organizers to think about building power in Cleveland and beyond,

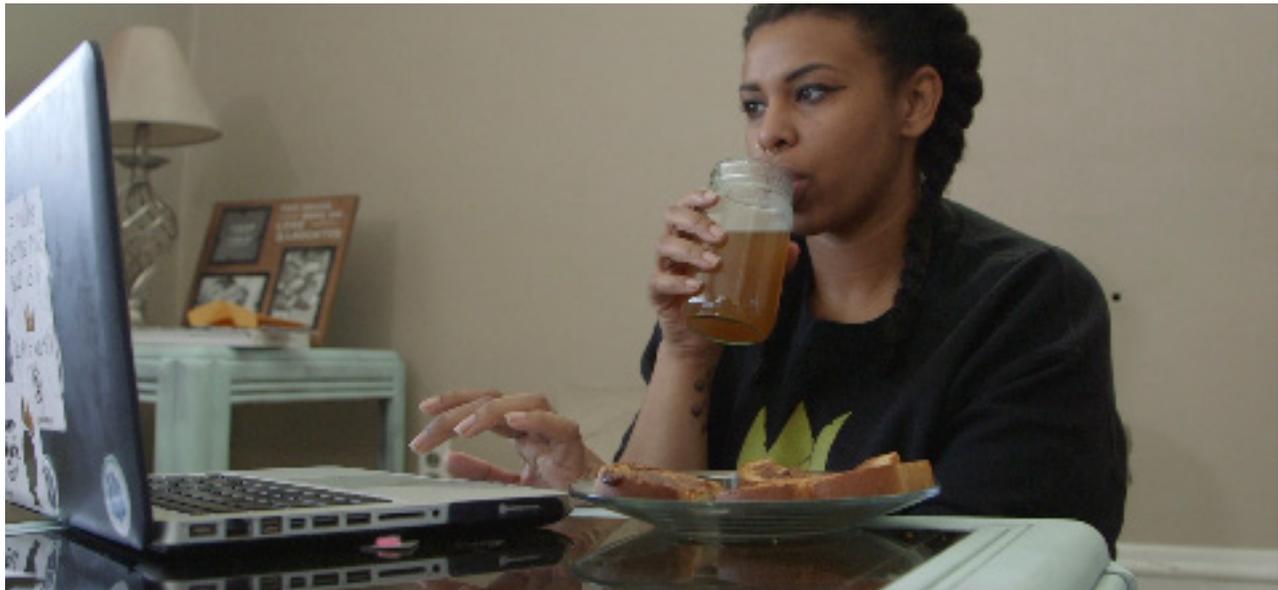
and to elevate the movement's strategic thinking. The Ohio Organizing Collaborative (OOC), a coalition of 20 organizations throughout the state of Ohio that work together to push social, racial, and economic justice has a solid three-year plan to raise the minimum wage within the state. The Ohio Student Association, which organizes young people to form independent political power, engaged over 25,000 young people to take action during the 2014 election season. We are also working closely with the KHNEMU Lighthouse Foundation community center. Even before the death of Tamir Rice at the hands of police officers, KHNEMU had been working in the community on a Toy Gun Buyback where local youth traded their guns for comic books and now KHNEMU is running voter registration drives that engage community members to confront and change the most pressing issues in their communities. Other organizations we've partnered with are the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), and Neighborhood Progress, Inc., amongst many others.



Our partner organizations are helping us facilitate both local and national interest for the film by reaching out to their networks to educate and engage their members in tandem with our launch. With a particular focus on young adults and the college-age market, we will target our outreach to classrooms and organizing sessions. Our chaptered format is designed to be easily segmented and shared by communities.

In addition, organizers will use the film as a core part of a Cleveland voter education and mobilization program that will target 25,000 newly registered voters and 50,000 low propensity voters. They will use digital and person-to-person organizing and deploy the film to deepen the conversation about what is happening and why. These conversations will take place in alignment with pivotal local and national elections (i.e., mayor, governor, prosecutor, and judicial elections) in the hopes of mobilizing viewers to take a stand at the ballots.

In 2017-2018, partner organizations will pioneer efforts to fight racial injustice, electoral discrimination, and community disenfranchisement through social media, advocacy, and door-to-door, face-to-face engagement. From “Get Out the Vote” campaigns to direct action and policy change, we will continue to work with advocacy organizations and movement leaders in order to transfer philosophies displayed onscreen into change on the ground.



## ON-LINE

We will use Aubin’s social media networks to magnify our impact. In February 2016, we launched a website dedicated to *Dispatches from Cleveland* ([dispatchesfromcleveland.com](http://dispatchesfromcleveland.com)) which contains a comprehensive, multi-media timeline from the 1960’s to today covering landmark national legal cases, incidents of police violence, and national trends of discrimination against marginalized people that deeply effect the greater Cleveland area. Our website also features a blog that houses statistics, links, and information on the movements in Cleveland, as well as a rich photo gallery from two years of filming in Cleveland. We created this site to educate our viewers by offering ideas for further participation, background and historical information, as well as other tools for engagement. 2017 marks the launch of a robust outreach campaign on our social media sites (Current social media stats: Facebook: 10,500+ “likes” and Twitter: 1,000+ followers). Through these venues we regularly share updates, images, and videos in order to create a hub for local and national activism.

With our online presence, we hope to inspire other communities beyond Cleveland. Our website will serve as a model for activists fighting for change in other distressed cities throughout the nation.

# PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS



GET=QUAL. #HACKCLE



## THE TEAM



### **DIRECTOR/PRODUCER:**

Catherine Gund, the Founder and Director of Aubin Pictures, is an Emmy-nominated producer, director, writer, and activist. Her media work focuses on strategic and sustainable social transformation, arts and culture, HIV/AIDS and reproductive health, and the environment. Her films - which include *Dispatches from Cleveland*, *Chavela*, *American Rhapsody* (in progress), *Born to Fly*, *What's On Your Plate?*, *A Touch of Greatness*, *Motherland Afghanistan*, *Making Grace*, *On Hostile Ground*, and *Hallelujah!* - have screened around the world in festivals, theaters, museums, and schools; on PBS, the Discovery Channel, and the Sundance Channel. Gund's most recent project, *Chavela*, is centered around exclusive interview and performance footage of Mexican chanteuse Chavela Vargas shot in 1991, and guided by her unique voice, the film weaves an arresting portrait of a woman who dared to dress, speak, sing, and dream her unique life into being. Her other film *Born to Fly* pushes the boundaries between action and art, daring us to join choreographer Elizabeth Streb and her dancers in pursuit of human flight. She lives in NYC with her four children.

### **PRODUCER:**



Daresha Kyi is an award-winning filmmaker and television producer with over 25 years in the business. After working in the New York City independent film community, she decided to attend film school and became a member of the scholars program at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts where she graduated with a degree in Film & TV. She also won a full fellowship from TriStar Pictures to attend the Directors Program at The American Film Institute (AFI) based on her multiple award-winning short films. She wrote, produced, directed and co-starred in *Land Where My Fathers Died* with Isaiah Washington. She also served as executive producer of the award-winning short, *Thugs, The Musical!* starring David Alan Grier and Margaret Cho. Most recently she was a field producer on *Totally Biased with W.* Kamau Bell, story producer on *La Voz Kids* (Telemundo's *The Voice* for children), and the writer for the weekend morning talk show *Arise & Shine*, hosted by Richard Pryor's daughter, Rain. She is currently co-directing and co-producing Aubin Pictures' *Chavela*.

### **CONSULTING PRODUCER:**



Stephanie Wang-Breal has been producing and directing films and commercials for the past 13 years. She directed the award-winning feature length documentary, *Wo Ai Ni Mommy* (I Love You, Mommy). The film was nominated for an Emmy®, and was the recipient of three Grand Jury Best Documentary Awards at the AFI/ Discovery Silverdocs Film Festival, the Asian American International Film Festival and the San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival, as well as a 2011 CINE special Jury Award. The film had its national television broadcast in 2010 on the award winning PBS series *POV*. Stephanie's second feature-length documentary, *Tough Love*, premiered at the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival in April 2014 and premiered on PBS *POV* in July 2015. Stephanie has also directed pieces for Verifone, Tiffany's, Apple, Goldman Sachs, UNICEF, CNN, MTV Networks. Stephanie currently sits on the board of the New York Women's Foundation and resides in Brooklyn with her husband, son & daughter.

## THE TEAM CONTINUED...

### ASSOCIATE PRODUCER:



Laura Tatham hails from the world of book publishing, having spent five years working in both the corporate (Simon & Schuster) and non-profit (Feminist Press) sector. In that time, she worked on multiple New York Times bestsellers, as well as Lambda Literary and Pulitzer Prize winning works. She has experience in marketing, publishing, as well as film and book production. She has a background in literature, having earned a Master's degree in American Literature from Drew University in 2009. Laura is also associate producing Aubin's Chavela. Laura resides in Jersey City with her loving partner and cat.

### ASSOCIATE PRODUCER:



Laura Piloni has been working on feature-length and short form documentary and narrative film projects such as *Front Cover* (2015) and *Kingdom Of Shadows* (2015) since 2013. Most recently she was an associate producer for the upcoming women and human rights documentary, *Home Truth*. Laura graduated summa cum laude from the City College of New York (CCNY) where she received a BFA in Film and Video Production. She worked as a tutor and administrative assistant at the CUNY Writing Center for four years. She was also a mentor and videographer at Hofstra University's Documenting Diversity program.

### EDITOR:



Cinque Northern is a NY based, multi-talented Editor, Director and Videographer. A proud alum of *Filmmaker Magazine's "Twenty-five New Faces of Independent Film"*, Cinque has written and directed narrative shorts which have earned festival recognition and numerous awards. His work as a videographer has taken him to London, Paris, Italy, Cuba and Bosnia. Cinque has also been a documentary editor for over ten years cutting short form and feature films for PBS. He's taught various filmmaking workshops for teens in Manhattan, The Bronx, and Nigeria. Cinque holds an MFA in Filmmaking from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts

### EDITOR



Born in Brasil, Gil was raised on a steady diet of Bossa Nova, Brazilian funk, punk rock and British 2-tone ska. This imbued young Gil with a deep sense of rhythm he would take with him as he emigrated to the US. After graduating from the Academy of Art in San Francisco, Gil arrived in the Big Apple and launched his attack on the world of moving images. Stints at *Missing Pieces*, *Mother*, ESPN, NBC and CNN honed his skills even further. With one foot in commercial and one foot in documentary, Gil marries style to storytelling. His work has been screened at festivals both domestic and international and his videos have garnered millions of views on the interwebs.

### EDITOR:



Having a built an exceptional editing career over the years, Emir Lewis recently made a successful entrée into the producer's chair which garnered him an Emmy nomination for the WNET PBS special, *Pioneers of THIRTEEN* (2013). He also had a chance to shape the critically acclaimed *Stretch & Bobbito: Radio That Changed Lives* from both the Editing & Interviewers to help bring that amazing story to life. Emir's long list of editing credits span documentaries, tv series, and feature films beginning with *Slam* (1998) which received both the prestigious Sundance Grand Jury Prize and the

## THE TEAM CONTINUED...

Cannes Camera D'Or through HBO's O.J. - A Story in Black & White (2003 Emmy winner), PBS' Two Towns of Jasper (2003 DuPont and Peabody Awards), and Nickelodeon/MTV Networks' I Sit Where I Want- The Legacy of Brown v. Board (2005 Parents' Choice Award). Emir is also very happy teaching the next generation of students the fine art of editorial storytelling at both N.Y.U. & Brooklyn College.

### CONSULTING EDITOR:



Lynn True is a documentary filmmaker and co-founder of True Walker Productions. Lynn directed, produced, and edited the feature LUMO, which was broadcast on PBS/POV in 2007, and Summer Pasture, which was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award and an IFP Gotham Award, won a Peabody Award, and aired on PBS/Independent Lens in 2012. Her last film, In Transit, was made in collaboration with the late Albert Maysles and premiered at the 2015 Tribeca Film Festival where it won the Special Jury Prize. Lynn graduated from Brown University with a joint degree in Urban Studies and Architecture and lives in New York City with her husband and filmmaking partner, Nelson Walker.

### CINEMATOGRAPHER



As a 2008 and 2014 Emmy Award Winner, a 10 time nominated Director, Cinematographer, and Post-Production Editor, De'Niel Phipps has made his mark in the film and television industry for the past 15 years. His film production credits include commercials for McDonalds, Nationwide Insurance, and Goodyear Tire, and such feature films as the Lions Gate production of One For The Money, Paramount Pictures film Fun Size, and the independent film Tomorrow You're Gone, and Bet On A Bad Horse. He has also helped produce television programming for MTV's reality show, MADE, ESPN, NBC Universal, and a host of other media outlets. Adding to his credits is the short films, Fin Del Ano which premiered at 168 International Film Festival, and Sundance. Born To dp Films, which is his creative outlet, has produced the short film, Save Us, and the long form documentary currently in production, Something In The Water. He also produces music videos for national recording artists and various genres.

### SOUND DESIGNER

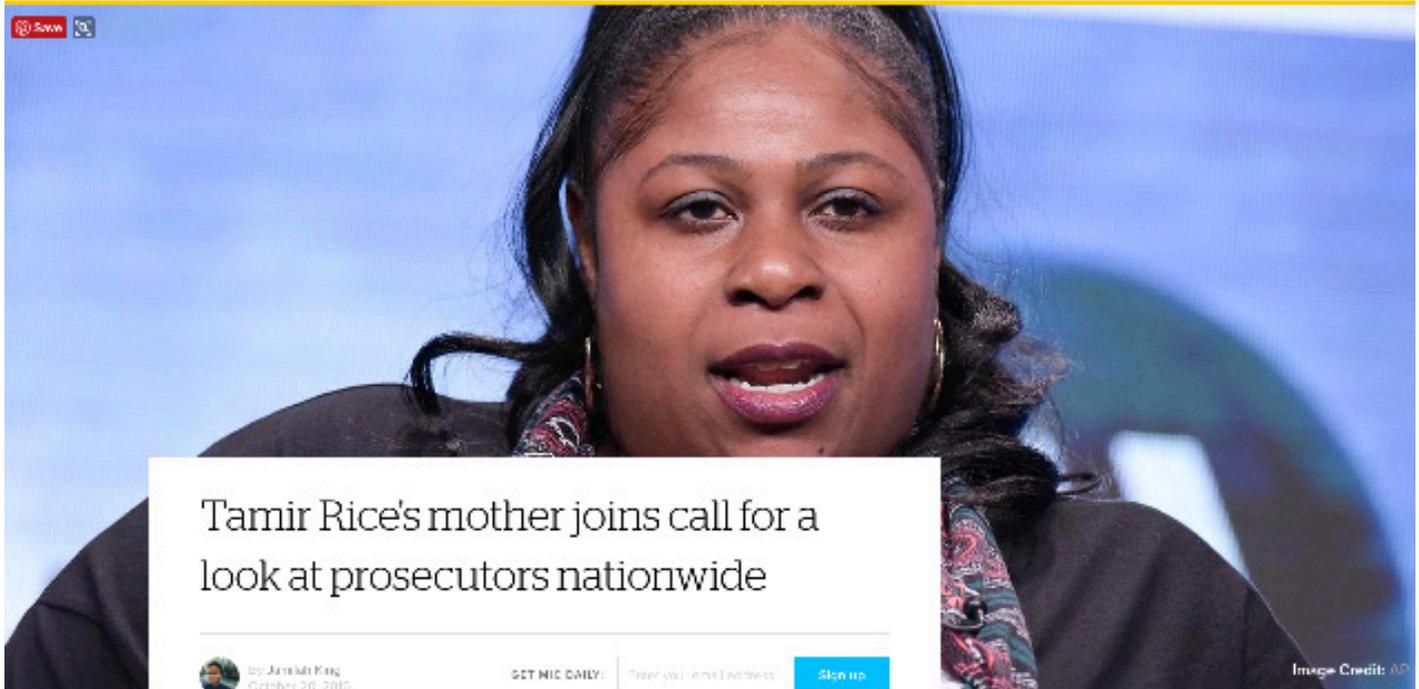


Dr. Marlowe "Mauly" Taylor is the lead sound designer at Studio 76 and a native of Cleveland. He is a Distinguished Alumni from Ohio University, where he received an MFA from the School of Film, in addition to completing PhD work there and teaching classes at Cleveland State University. DJ Mauly has earned certified RIAA multi-platinum honors as well as certified gold achievements. He has mixed sound for over 43 films, including The Bronze (2015), Draft Day (2014), The Kings of Summer (2013), Alex Cross (2012), and worked with numerous artists including Chuck D of Public Enemy, Bone Thugs & Harmony, Snoop Dogg, and Buck Cherry.



# SELECTED PRESS





“I didn’t ask to be a leader,” Samaria Rice said, whose 12-year-old son Tamir was shot and killed by Cleveland police in 2014. “They made me a leader when they killed my son.”

And she’s taking that role seriously. Earlier this year, Rice helped lead the call to replace Prosecutor Timothy J. McGinty, who declined to bring criminal charges against the two police officers who shot her son.

Now, she’s the face of a nationwide effort to look more closely at prosecutors in cities and counties across the country, 95% of whom are white and more than 70% of whom run unopposed. In the fight to curb police violence, prosecutors are uniquely positioned to hold officers accountable for their actions.

“Prosecutor McGinty didn’t advocate for me and he covered up for the officers,” Rice says in a new video made by Aubin Pictures for ColorofChange.org, an online civil rights organization that’s leading a campaign to educate black voters about the power of district attorneys.

The effort is just the latest in a series of moves by advocates to call attention to down-ballot races in elections nationwide. African-American voters are reliably democratic and are expected to turn out in large numbers for Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton. Millennial black voters have been notably skeptical of Clinton and of voting as a way to enact measurable, systemic change. But as police violence continues to motivate black millennials politically, the movement that’s sprung up around ending it is grappling with where to go next.

In cities like Cleveland and Chicago, transforming the criminal justice system through affecting local elections has proven to be an important strategy.



# A Documentary Takes on Racial Injustice Post-Tamir Rice

***Dispatches From Cleveland* shows how disparate people can unite for solutions.**

*Dispatches From Cleveland* hits you with an emotional sledgehammer in the opening credits. Footage of a crane ripping through the Cuddell Commons Park gazebo where 12-year-old Tamir Rice was killed by a Cleveland police officer in 2014 is interspersed with somber reminders of lost innocence: kids on the swings nearby, construction crews removing stuffed animals left in memoriam of the “Young Black King.”

But this is not a story about defeat. Emmy-nominated director and producer Catherine Gund shows us Clevelanders, who despite being broken, fight for justice in the wake of police violence. Playing at the Cleveland International Film Festival March 31 and April 1 as part of a new race relations sidebar, the film emerged from how Cleveland’s

response differed from cities such as Ferguson, Missouri, where riots occurred.

“Cleveland was more uncoordinated and less visible,” says Gund, a New York City resident who lived on Cleveland’s East Side as a child. “What became the story for me was seeing how everyday people still had a voice and could collectively make a difference.”

Yet she quickly realized the issues were much deeper than police violence. “Cleveland is historically segregated,” she says. “The divisions are built by people not knowing each other. We need to erase that ignorance.”

The 51-year-old filmmaker split the documentary into five parts, alternating between chapters exploring police violence, poverty and equality. A moving interview with Rice’s mother, Samaria, helps fuel the story. “She knows that the only way anything will change is if she doggedly pursues justice,” Gund says.

Along the way, we also hear from activists such as Fred Ward of the Khnemu Foundation Lighthouse Center and transgender DJ and photographer Zoe Renee Lapin. “We need to start celebrating the leadership of people who have been most threatened by the system and therefore have the most ideas,” Gund says.

The narrative shifts from people left powerless by the system to finding ways to exercise power. We get glimpses of the movement to defeat prosecutor Timothy McGinty, who recommended a grand jury not bring charges against the officers involved in Rice’s death.

Gund was moved to see so many groups band together to elect a new prosecutor. “That was one of the reasons I went back to Cleveland,” she says, “to be empowered, and I was, from their resilience and tenacity and seeing their dedication.”



## MSPIFF: ‘Dispatches from Cleveland’ provides a roadmap for social justice

News Film Reviews Film Reviews by [Leigh Monson](#) - Mar 31, 2017



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Lately there has been a surge of documentaries that focus on racial inequality and institutionalized violence in the United States, and you only have to watch the news in order to understand why there isn't a lack of material for filmmakers to work with. Black Lives Matter has no shortage of causes and deaths to rally around, and as our highest levels of government call for a greater level of deference to police discretion, it doesn't seem like this reality is going to change without concerted effort by a vast number of people working in concert. This is the niche that *Dispatches from Cleveland* finds itself in as a slightly different take on the modern civil rights battle for racial equality.

Separated into five chapters, it would be easy to mistake *Dispatches from Cleveland* as a broad, tangent-laden overview of racial inequality in one of the nation's most impoverished cities. What starts as a case study into the police shooting of 12-year-old Tamir Rice abruptly transitions in the second chapter into a conversation about socioeconomic differences within

power in neighborhoods of color, how marginalized queer and trans members of the Black community have largely been silenced in the broader narrative of institutional oppression, and finally how a community can come together to cause institutional changes one election at a time.

That final piece is what keeps the film from being a mess of interrelated tangents without any sort of central thesis. The purpose of this film isn't so much to be informative, as the people most likely to see this film are members of communities similarly effected by institutional and economic violence and are therefore likely already familiar with the factual basis on which the film is constructed. Instead, director [Catherine Gund](#) uses her five chapter structure to build to her thesis at the end, to establish the message that communities can band together to create real change if they only put in the time and effort to get out the vote. It's a slow-burning message that may at first seem subtextual, but by the powerful ending it becomes clear that this is a directed call to action for oppressed communities.

*Dispatches from Cleveland* at first appears to be a case study of one young boy's unjust death, but it expands into a case study for an entire city's conscience. It's not a nationwide analysis of systemic oppression like *13th* or *I Am Not Your Negro*, but instead finds its power in a modern example of how individual communities can move forward. And as much as it is important to understand our past so as not to repeat it, knowing how to build our future is just as important. *Dispatches from Cleveland* shows us how.

**Editors note:** *Dispatches from Cleveland* will appear at the Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival on April 20 and 23, 2017.

# CATHERINE GUND'S FILM TELLS 'EVERYONE'S STORY'

March 31, 2017 | posted by Lara Klaber in Filmmakers



Catherine Gund's "Dispatches From Cleveland" starts with a striking scene: children idly swinging on a swing set while the Cudell Gazebo—the site where Tamir Rice was killed in 2014—is deconstructed right in front of them.

From there, this poignant, sobering, and powerful documentary traces the aftermath and impact of the 12-year-old's death, while also profiling the city of Cleveland and its ingrained structural issues, including economic and racial inequality.

Gund's original impetus for making this documentary was the "rampant, police-involved violence" in cities across the U.S.

"In 2014, I met some activists involved with the Ohio Student Association (OSA) who wanted their message to be amplified far and wide," the director/producer says. After Rice's death, she "started following the OSA organizers, who then led me to other organizers, and from there the story told itself. We all knew what was happening was wrong."

Filming for "Dispatches From Cleveland" began in April 2015 and continued on during major events—including that July's Movement for Black Lives National Convening and the 2016 Republican National Convention—before concluding with the gazebo deconstruction.

Gund ended up structuring "Dispatches From Cleveland" into five separate chapters, each with its own narrative arc and compelling protagonists—including trans activist/artist Zoë Renee Lapin and Tamir Rice's mother, Samaria.

"This format allows us to focus on five different aspects of the city, showing recurring characters but cumulative impacts and efforts," Gund says.

"I knew Cleveland's story hadn't been told," she adds. "Some have pronounced this time in Cleveland as a resurgence of the city, but I don't find that to be true. The soul of this city lives in its people and this resurgence does not include many of the city's residents. Going in,

I knew we had to tell those fuller stories. This is everyone's story."

Gund was particularly mindful of wanting to "reflect the reality of trans and queer leadership in the local movement," she says.

"I knew I was going to tell a richer story about trans people than usually gets told when people just add a 'T' to the end of LGBT. As Zoë demonstrates in the film, this movement work is required of her and so many others because of circumstance."

The episodic structure of "Dispatches From Cleveland" also ended up being the perfect fit for the documentary's approach and content. "I wanted to make short films because they can be used more easily in organizing efforts to mobilize, educate, and inspire," Gund says. "They get right to the point."

In this way, the documentary aims to point out that challenging the status quo is a vital first step toward change.

“Our goal in making this film was for audiences to gain a deeper insight into and understanding of the struggles and opportunities that come with fighting for justice on a human scale,” Gund says.

“We are all a part of the social and political fabric of the day, and Cleveland’s fight for justice mirrors the one playing out on the national stage. All of us, regardless of where we live, have to change how power and control are wielded in the interests of the few,” she continues.

However, the documentary is also a galvanizing tool, a way to empower people and convince them to get involved in their local communities, and work to make a difference.

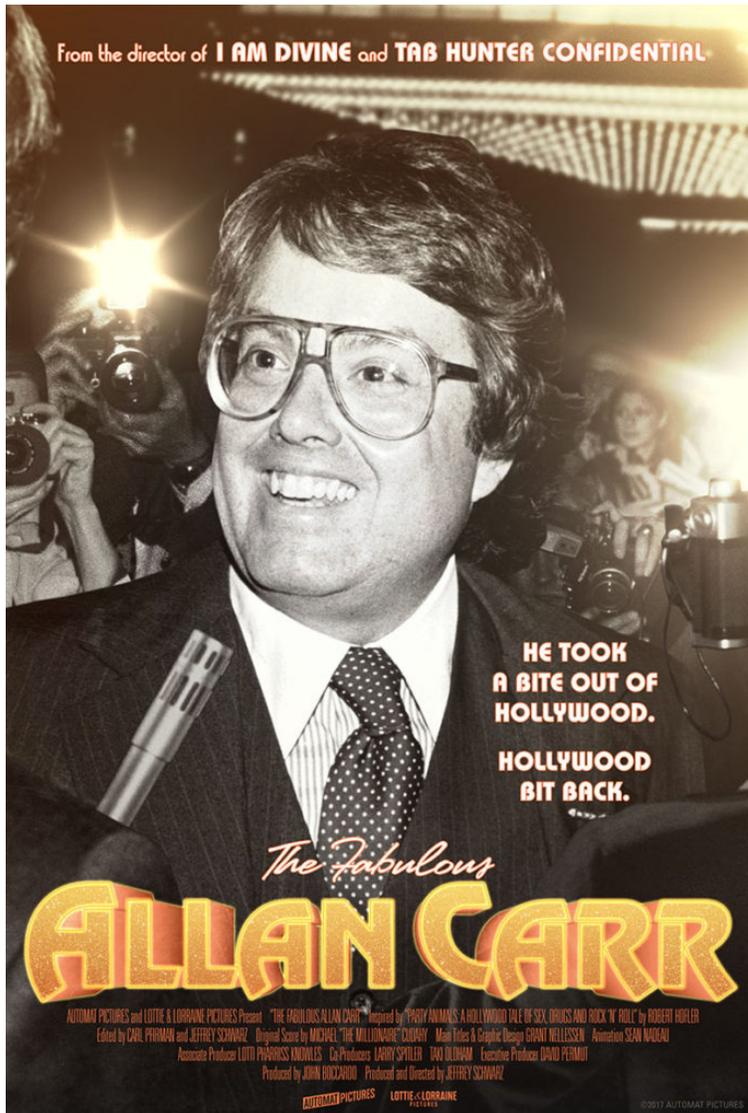
“I want people of all different communities to see that they can do something, they can get involved,” Gund says. “I want people to ask the question: ‘What can I do?’ There is so much that needs to be done. Claim your power. Find your voice. Participate in transformation.

“As Samaria Rice said, ‘You have to speak out. You have to let the world know.’ My family is from Cleveland. I know its history. I believe in its future. Cleveland is a bellwether for change.”

— Annie Zaleski

# REVIEWS FROM FRAMELINE 41 ([HTTP://WWW.BEYONDCHRON.ORG/REVIEWS-FRAMELINE-41/](http://www.beyondchron.org/reviews-frame-line-41/))

by Peter Wong  
(<http://www.beyondchron.org/author/peter/>) on June 15, 2017



The screening of Carolyn Sherer and Lara Embry's moving documentary "Alabama Bound" will very likely be one of Frameline 41's more interactive showings. Audience members will cheer subject Cari's efforts to be legally recognized as a mother. Meanwhile, Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore's appearances onscreen will understandably provoke loud boos and worse.

These audience reactions are understandable. The film shows that this incredibly conservative Southern state seems politically determined to reject the lessons of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and other Civil Rights struggles. In Alabama, as one subject puts it, anything associated with the federal government (e.g. the Voting Rights Act) will garner instant opposition.

That political reality makes the struggles of the subjects of the film all the more poignant. In the Alabama state legislature, out lesbian Patricia Todd serves as the state governing body's sole LGBT voice. Kay and Cari wage a nearly decade-long fight to obtain legal recognition for Cari as a parent of Kay's then-infant son. Kinley and her wife Autumn fight repeated court delays and judicial hostility to regain custody of Kinley's son after she learns the boy's step-mother has been physically abusing him.

It's one thing to remember the truism that fighting for social change is basically a "two steps forward, one step backwards" dance. It's another thing to see the small but noticeable human costs of waging that struggle. The years of endless court delays prevent Kinley and Autumn from even planning a simple family vacation. Kay's son spends his childhood watching strange adults deny his parental relationship with Kay and Cari.

Seeing Judge Moore's very visible Ten Commandments lapel pin makes ludicrous Christofascist attempts to clothe their homophobia in "protecting family values" dress. A judge who intensely grills Kinley while treating a physically abusive straight step-mother with kid gloves isn't protecting the best interests of Kinley's son. He's more interested in using the law to preserve Christian privilege.

Certainly the subjects of the film could find more socially welcoming states elsewhere. But their love for their home state means fighting to make it a welcoming place that will accept LGBTs. As such small successes as changing neighbors' mental images of gays and lesbians show, even a conservative backwater has the potential to change for the

better.

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Catherine Gund's web docuseries "Dispatches From Cleveland" shows that no injustice is an island, a wrong to be suffered solely by the directly injured community. Instead, its five chapters outline how seemingly disparate wrongs such as economic apartheid and trans rights can provide starting points for unifying different communities.

Providing a throughline for “Dispatches From Cleveland” is the tragic Tamir Rice shooting and the efforts of Rice’s surviving family to obtain justice. It’s horrible realizing just how close the 12-year-old boy was to his front door when the two Cleveland cops abruptly shot him in less than a second. Images of the Rice memorial being buried in snow poignantly symbolize the heinous efforts of Cleveland officials to bury public anger at the shooting’s occurrence.

By widening its scope beyond a 12-year-old boy’s tragic death, Gund’s webseries shows that Rice’s death was a symptom of a systemically unequal city. Cleveland unfortunately deserves its reputation as America’s most distressed city. Its state of economic apartheid means West Cleveland is prosperous while East Cleveland, where most of the city’s black residents live, is economically struggling. Four to five years of home foreclosures have wiped out decades of painfully built black wealth.

“Dispatches From Cleveland” may offer a clear-eyed presentation of realities in Cleveland’s poorer half. But it doesn’t wallow in factual miserabilism. Residents such as Khnemu Community Center organizer Fred Ward struggle to build community in this economically devastated area. Ward himself turned to crime as a survival tool. Fortunately, an act of compassion by then-police officer Marvin Cross led to a 10-year prison stay that eventually provided Ward with an opportunity to find a more constructive direction in life.

Connecting trans rights to Rice’s killing is not that great a stretch. The murder of transwoman Cemina “Cece” Dove was treated with the same public disrespect that befell Rice. Yet a discussion among different stakeholders shows accepting connecting trans rights to police killings of blacks is still a big ask.

Gund’s Frameline Completion Fund Recipient may not offer uplifting catharsis. But her docuseries offers an honesty that its marginalized subjects have been denied in other media.

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Ernesto Contreras’ “I Dream In Another Language” may possess a title promising mystery and magic. Yet the onscreen results feel as flaccid as the penis of an internally homophobic character.

That statement doesn’t really spoil Contreras’ film. “I Dream in Another Language” is screening in an international LGBT film festival. Why characters Isauro and Evaristo have spent decades refusing to speak to each other can be reasonably guessed. If anything, the plot revelation will spark a bored sigh.

Getting Isauro and Evaristo to speak to each other again provides the film’s suspense. At stake is the preservation of a dying language. These two men wind up becoming the last speakers of the Indian language Zikril. Young linguist Martin cannot preserve Zikril except via recorded conversations of the language being used.

Yet Zikril as spoken never lives up to its legend as a language partially rooted in nature’s sounds and partially a gift from the gods. Whenever the language is spoken onscreen, it never feels like a weakened but still living thing. The director’s decision to not provide subtitles for his fictional language leaves the viewer wondering whether there is some common lyricism in Zikril that’s passing over their heads.

But very old school anime fans, those enthralled by anime despite lacking subtitles, can pinpoint where Contreras truly goes wrong. The actors speaking in Zikril never convey the emotions behind their alien words. Except for one amusing moment where Evaristo uses Zikril to complain about Martin’s carnal interest in Evaristo’s granddaughter Lluvia, this fictional language repeatedly feels as if it’s already dead.

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Frameline Award-winning director Jeffrey Schwarz (“Tab Hunter Confidential”) returns to the Frameline screen with a rollicking hard-partying portrait of a Hollywood producing legend. Schwarz’ documentary “The Fabulous Allan Carr” follows the life of the titular 1970s-1980s producer whose fabulous Tinseltown life avoided the blight of mediocrity.

The man born at birth as Alan Solomon adopted the Carr name because it rhymed with “star.” But as Schwarz shows, Carr’s star-making acumen could live up to his stage name. Bringing out the untapped potential of Ann-Margaret and turning the “Grease” movie into a world-wide phenomenon were just two of his professional accomplishments.

Schwarz captures the truth that Carr’s fascination with Hollywood stardom didn’t stop with creating stars. It extended to living a star’s life. Carr’s frequent weight problems meant both that he wouldn’t have a star’s ideal body and that caftans would be an essential part of his wardrobe. But in other respects, such as the old Hollywood pedigree of his primary home and the parties for the famous held in his personal Egyptian-themed disco club, he lived his dream life.

“The Fabulous Allan Carr” shows that Carr’s commercial instincts could pull him out of the Hollywood fanboy category. Would a fanboy have seen the American commercial potential in a film about a soccer team forced into cannibalism to survive a plane crash in the Andes? Yet the producer’s commercial sensibilities never seemed sufficiently grounded in reality to warn him away from disaster. Instead of disowning Olivia Newton-John for declining the lead role in “Can’t Stop The Music,” Carr should have taken Newton-John’s rejection as a warning about the film’s commercial problems.

Carr’s production of the 1989 Academy Awards ceremony probably seemed to him like a career apotheosis, a way to publicly give back to the glamorous world that shaped his life. Yet bringing out period stars to evoke the legacy of old Hollywood in the opening number only embarrassingly underlined the generation-and-a-half gulf between 1950s Hollywood and late 1980s Hollywood.

# 'Chavela': Film Review | Berlin 2017

9:38 AM PST 2/12/2017 by David Rooney

**Hollywood Reporter**

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Courtesy of Berlinale

Chavela Vargas

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*A ballad of solitude rendered as an anthem of joyous defiance.* [T](#)

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A trailblazing free spirit whose appetite for tequila and women was as legendary as her soul-stirring vocals, Mexican singer Chavela Vargas is given an adoring salute in this documentary portrait.

Nobody employs tortured, torchy vocals to quite such lush emotional effect onscreen as Pedro Almodovar. The Spanish maestro is among those paying loving tribute to one of his favorites muses, Mexican *ranchera* specialist Chavela Vargas, in this celebratory legacy documentary. A hard-drinking rebel who shredded the prevailing stereotype of the fem and flirty, hip-swinging *senorita* in Mexican popular music, the singer commands the stage in passionate performances throughout *Chavela*, owning a trademark

androgynous look of ponchos over pants that made her a queer icon long before she openly defined herself as a lesbian at age 81.

A natural for LGBT film forums as well as music-related programming, the entertaining documentary is by Catherine Gund (whose 2014 feature, *Born to Fly: Elizabeth Streb vs. Gravity*, also blended performance with personal profile), co-directing with Dareshi Kyi. The strong connection to the subject is evident from the grainy video interview with Vargas that serves as the film's spine, shot by a young Gund in the early '90s in Mexico and dug out after the singer's death in 2012, aged 93.

The core material is augmented with a wealth of archival footage and photographs, as well as extensive interviews with music aficionados, associates, friends, lovers and admirers. While the package is fairly conventional in assembly, the talking-head elements are graced by the choice to shoot in homey spaces like kitchens and living rooms or outdoors, with the interviewees surrounded by food, books, records, artworks and mementos — or by nature. That creates a lovely suggestion of life coursing through the movie, an idea in keeping with the subject herself.

Born Isabel Vargas Lizano in Costa Rica in 1919, Chavela was an unloved, lonely child whose boyish manner was an embarrassment to her traditional churchy parents. The Golden Age of Mexican Cinema drew her as an angry young runaway to her adoptive country, where she eventually became a professional singer.

While Chavela appears to have been a striking, Modigliani-esque beauty in photos from her early adulthood, she claims: "Dressed like a woman, I looked like a transvestite." Only once she settled on her defining personal style did her fame grow. With her hair pulled back in a severe braid and later chopped off, wearing no makeup and masculine clothing, she began singing deeply felt songs of pain, solitude and lost love in a voice both rough and tender that suggested she had literally been torn apart. The filmmakers run English translations of the lyrics onscreen in an elegant, floating font, underlining the unifying sentiments of the songs, many of them popularized by Jose Alfredo Jimenez and intended to be sung by men for women.

At the same time, Chavela was partying hard with fellow traveling musicians, draining bottle after bottle of tequila in rowdy all-night sessions at bohemian hangouts. "She had to be stronger, more macho and more drunk than all the other singing cowboys," comments one observer. She became a sexual outlaw in a misogynistic, homophobic, patriarchal society. Her unambiguous homosexuality mostly went unacknowledged, even if she allegedly was sleeping in secret with countless wives of politicians and intellectuals.

Chavela herself, along with others, admits that accounts of her conquests — such as slipping away with Ava Gardner from Elizabeth Taylor's Acapulco wedding to Mike Todd — may or may not have been embroidered. She also retains an air of mystery regarding her brief but intense liaison with Frida Kahlo, illustrated in some fabulous photos. But the documentary makes a persuasive case that legend trumps truth. This also applies to under-explored mentions of her propensity for violence and gun-slinging.

There were dark times, during which she dropped out of sight for 12 years, living in Tepozotlan in the 1980s in a haze of alcoholism before being rescued by a Huichol Indian family that turned her onto Shamanism. She then enjoyed an amazing comeback in her 70s in Spain, when Almodovar's influential support helped introduce her to a wider audience and led to her playing the great stages that were off limits in her younger years, among them Carnegie Hall, the Olympia in Paris and the Bellas Artes in Mexico City. Footage of these late-career performances becomes increasingly emotional as she grows frailer, with her former manager noting that she tried as hard as she could to die onstage. Images from her funeral bring tears.

"Chavela lived in a continuous state of farewell," says Almodovar, describing her hunger to keep performing until the end. The warmth and humor with which the director speaks of her is matched by words from other intimates like Spanish pop star and actor Miguel Bose, who recalls Chavela telling him: "If I had been a man you would have been my perfect woman." That kind of subversive gender twist seems all the more radical coming from a woman of Vargas' vintage and background. Among the most touching tributes come from her longtime lover Alicia Elena Perez, who refers to her grandly as "la Senora," though doesn't gloss over the more tempestuous side of their relationship.

"What a blessing from the cosmos to be born a woman," says Chavela, who lived out and proud for decades before she put a name to her sexuality, but dedicated all her songs to every woman. And yet as Almodovar attests, she created such an intimate rapport between performer and listener that she seemed to be singing only to you.

ENTERTAINMENT / MOVIES

# Review 'Born to Fly' captures Elizabeth Streb in action



Elizabeth Streb at her loft in a scene from the documentary "Born to Fly: Elizabeth Streb vs. Gravity." (Aubin Pictures)

By **Sheri Linden**

SEPTEMBER 25, 2014, 6:15 PM

**W**hen choreographer Elizabeth Streb gives her performance pieces such names as "Impact" or "Ricochet," she's not merely striking a metaphoric pose. As a new documentary about her work makes evident, and viscerally so, Streb believes that "anything too safe is not action."

The dancers in her troupe embrace that ethos; they're athletic warriors bringing a muscular, geometric beauty to extravagant leaps and blows and shockingly close calls with I-beams.

Catherine Gund's documentary "Born to Fly: Elizabeth Streb vs. Gravity" captures the Extreme Action Company in rehearsal, performance and offstage conversation, all with a vérité immediacy that's in sync with the business at hand. (Prolific documentarian Albert Maysles, whose credits include "Gimme Shelter" and "Grey Gardens," is one of the film's three cinematographers.) On a giant hamster wheel in their Brooklyn studio, and in spectacular feats on London landmarks, performers seemingly defy the

laws of physics. Without question they reject conventional notions of what's humanly possible or wise.

Gund pinpoints salient biographical information, in particular the bricklaying job of Streb's adoptive father and how its intense physicality impressed her. Without overstating the case, the director shows the connective tissue between the self-described "action architect" and her artistic family, troupe members who point to pain and rage as ways of feeling fully alive. In a solo piece that Streb herself originally performed — one that takes its gentle-sounding name, "Little Ease," from a medieval torture device — the effect is one of frenzied precision, breathtaking and unforgettable.

Dance purists might dismiss Streb's work as circus gymnastics, but a bracing aesthetic is inseparable from the corporal shocks, as is an insistence on challenging accepted constraints. Through Gund's film, a wider audience stands to be not just amazed but provoked.

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"Born to Fly: Elizabeth Streb vs. Gravity."

**MPAA rating:** None.

**Running time:** 1 hour, 23 minutes.

**Playing:** At Laemmle's NoHo 7, North Hollywood.

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