



*M*aking **S**weet *T*ea

the lives and loves of southern black gay men



## Synopsis

**Making Sweet Tea is a documentary film that chronicles the journey of southern-born, black gay researcher and performer, E. Patrick Johnson, as he travels home to North Carolina to come to terms with his past, and to Georgia, New Orleans, and Washington, D.C. to reconnect with six black gay men he interviewed for the book, *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South—An Oral History***

Johnson transformed that book into several staged plays over the course of a decade. The film combines documentary moments from the men's lives a decade after the publication of the book and from Johnson's life, depicting both how the men have changed and been changed by the book and play. The film also covers the complexities of Johnson's relationships with the men, with his family, and with his hometown in western North Carolina. One experimental component of the film is Johnson's re-staging the performance of the men's narrative in their homes, in their churches, or on their jobs, sometimes with them directing him and/or with them in the scene. Blurring the line between art and life, *Making Sweet Tea* offers a rare glimpse into the lives of people rarely given a platform to speak, while also demonstrating how research, artistry, and life converge.

*Run time: 90 minutes*



## Credits

### Directors

John L. Jackson, Jr. & Nora Gross

### Executive Producers

John L. Jackson, Jr. & E. Patrick Johnson

### Producers

Stephen J. Lewis & Nora Gross

### Cinematographers

Steve Milligan, Nora Gross, & Stephen J. Lewis

### Editors

Stephen J. Lewis & Aden Hakimi

### Original Score

Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr. & Vince Anthony

### Post-Production Supervisor

Anthony Uro

## Filmmaker Bios



### John L. Jackson Jr. | *Executive Producer/Director*

John L. Jackson, Jr., is a filmmaker, anthropologist, and author based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His films, which have been screened nationally and internationally, include *Four Days in May*, *Bad Friday: Rastafari after Coral Gardens*, *Divided We Stand* (fiction), *African Americans and the Bible*, and *Get it Together*. Jackson earned his B.A. in Communication (Radio/TV/Film) from Howard University, completed his Ph.D. in Anthropology from Columbia University, and served as a junior fellow at the Harvard University Society of Fellows before teaching cultural anthropology and documentary studies at Duke University and then the University of Pennsylvania. He is currently Walter H. Annenberg Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication and Richard Perry University Professor at the University of Pennsylvania.



### E. Patrick Johnson | *Executive Producer*

Johnson is the Carlos Montezuma Professor of Performance Studies and African American Studies at Northwestern University. A scholar/artist, Johnson performs nationally and internationally and has published widely in the areas of race, gender, sexuality and performance. He is the author of several books, including *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South—An Oral History*, *Black. Queer. Southern. Women.—An Oral History*, and *Honeypot: Black Southern Women Who Love Women*.



## Filmmaker Bios



**Nora Gross** | *Director/Producer/Cinematographer*

Nora Gross is a PhD candidate at the University of Pennsylvania in Education and Sociology and part of the leadership of CAMRA, the Collective for Advancing Multimodal Research Arts. Her ethnographic research focuses on the relationship between adolescents' gender, racial, and academic identities, particularly when they confront trauma and loss. Gross has participated in several participatory and ethnographic filmmaking projects with young people. She holds an MA in Sociology of Education from NYU and a Graduate Certificate in Documentary Media Studies from The New School.



**Stephen J. Lewis** | *Editor/Producer/Cinematographer*

Stephen J. Lewis is an Emmy Award winning producer with more than two decades of experience in journalism and video production. In 2014, Stephen founded a boutique production company, SouthPaw Video Productions, where he focuses on short form story telling. Stephen shoots, produces and edits videos for non-profit organizations, theater groups, authors, and many other clients. In 2015, Stephen and SouthPaw Video teamed with CAMRA at Penn in the Annenberg School for Communication to co-produce the forthcoming feature documentary, "Making Sweet Tea" chronicling the lives of gay black men. In 2018, Stephen joined documentary filmmaker, Luchina Fisher as Director of Photography and Cinematographer for the forthcoming film "Mama Gloria", which tells the life story of a 73-year-old black transgender woman. Stephen is currently on staff at Northwestern University where he serves as Senior Media Specialist for the School of Communication..

# Cast



## Charles

(1969, Hickory, NC)

Of all the men interviewed for this project Charles' biography is the most intricate. He still lives in his small southern hometown of Hickory, NC, where his life has undergone many transitions. Once identifying as a pre-operative trans woman and drag performer, who went by Chastity, he has since denounced his female identity and has resumed his life as Charles. His story is one of courage that speaks to the resilience of the human spirit.



## Freddie

(1944, Madison, GA)

Freddie is a wonderful storyteller—being almost as talented at that art form as at his profession of painting. Although quite soft-spoken, Freddie has a captivating storytelling style that draws the listener in. One has to pay close attention to his use of words to catch the subtle humor and deft critiques of society and other characters in his stories. Although semi-retired, he still takes commissions for paintings and works part-time at a gallery in downtown Atlanta.



## Duncan

(1960's, Kansas City, MO)

Duncan is a Unitarian minister and a member of the now defunct black gay performance art/spoken word group, Adodi Muse. They've performed around the country and have produced a cd. Duncan's life's work has been activism around HIV/AIDS in the black community and more recently, prostate cancer. He lives in Atlanta with his husband, David.



## E. Patrick

(1967, Hickory, NC)

E. Patrick is our film's narrator and the author of the book on which the film is based. He was inspired to write the book to fill a void in the history of black queer southern life. He is a professor at Northwestern University and performing artist. He and his partner, Stephen, live in Chicago.



## Countess Vivian

(1912 - 2012,  
New Orleans, LA)

Countess Vivian was the eldest man interviewed for this project. Ninety-six at the time of his last interview, he was unbelievably agile and lucid. Before he passed away in 2012, he lived in the Treme community in New Orleans. A survivor of Hurricane Katrina, in addition to a century of black queer life in New Orleans, Countess's life stands as an inspiration for generations of black gay men who come after him.



## Harold

(1936 - 2017, St. Louis, MO)

Harold Mays and his partner, Harold Herman (affectionately known as "The Two Harolds") appear together in the film in the house they shared for over fifty years in Washington, D.C., in the upscale northeast section. They passed away a year apart from each other in 2016 and 2017, respectively. Harold Mays was a member of the Boy Scouts of America for most of his youth, and went on to become an Eagle Scout. According to him, he is one of the few African Americans to achieve that status.



## Shean

(1970, Durham, NC)

Shean is the youngest of the men interviewed for this film and was also interviewed for the original book. Although his story is not performed in the play, he came into the project after he agreed to host a dinner party for some of the other men in *Making Sweet Tea* who live in Atlanta. Shean is an architect and home stylist who lives in Atlanta.



