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CONFRONTING PALM SPRINGS' PROBLEMATIC PAST, "RACIST TREES" PREMIERES ON INDEPENDENT LENS JANUARY 22

DECEMBER 14, 2023

Historically Black Neighborhood Fights To Uncover City's Prejudiced History And Uproot Towering Symbol Of Segregation

(San Francisco, CA) December 14, 2023—Local politics, news media, race, class, and gentrification intersect in "Racist Trees," set to premiere on INDEPENDENT LENS on January 22, 2024. The documentary captures an inside look at the frustrations of residents of the historically Black Lawrence Crossley Tract neighborhood, who are cut off from the glitz and glamour of Palm Springs, due to the planting of 60-foot tamarisk trees that overshadow the community and are viewed as a symbol of segregation.

"Racist Trees" will debut on PBS's INDEPENDENT LENS on January 22, 2024, at 10 p.m. (check local listings). The film will also be available to stream on the [PBS App](#).

Co-directed and produced by Sara Newens and Mina T. Son, the insightful and thought-provoking documentary investigates the timely story of racial conflict in an unlikely, liberal pocket of America, uncovering an even darker racist history that few would equate with the city's progressive image. Intimate, sobering, and at times humorous, "Racist Trees" reveals a microcosm of racial tension that continues to percolate across the country today.

Allegedly planted by the city in the late 1950s to line the 14th fairway of a city-owned golf course, these trees have become the focal point of frustration and animosity for locals who see the trees as an enduring symbol of segregation. For decades, residents have been forced to put up with the tangled overgrowth from a species so invasive, they officially have been categorized as a pest by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"After spending time with the community, we learned of the troubling legacy of systemic racism that extended even beyond these trees," said co-Directors

and Producers Sara Newens and Mina T. Son in a joint statement. “It quickly became clear that this story about the erasure of a small community—consisting of only 76 homes in a far-off corner of Palm Springs—is a microcosm for the issues that people face across the United States today.”

Much of Palm Springs inhabits Indigenous land, and the Agua Caliente tribe rented land to Black and Latino families who were discriminated against elsewhere in the city. After the land gained value, residents were forcibly displaced throughout the 1950s and ‘60s as the local government set fire to homes without providing a place to relocate. Many families had no choice but to take up residence just outside city limits or leave town altogether, but others found refuge in Crossley Tract.

In stark contrast, some Palms Springs residents oppose the tree removal, denying any racial animus while others have spent decades advocating for removal motivated by property values and agricultural issues in addition to the racial optics. When the conflict makes headlines, a firestorm of local politics and international media puts into question the progressive reputation of Palm Springs.

“‘Racist Trees’ reveals how cities can be racist and how even good people, when operating in an unjust system, perpetuate institutional racism,” said Lois Vossen, INDEPENDENT LENS executive producer. “A row of 60-foot tall tamarisk trees opens a window into segregation’s history for African Americans and Native American Cahuilla Indians on a local scale, that also played out in communities large and small across the U.S.”

Visit the [“Racist Trees”](#) page on INDEPENDENT LENS to learn more about the film.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Sara Newens, Producer/Director

Sara Newens is an award-winning filmmaker and editor based in Los Angeles. She received Primetime Emmy® Award nominations for her work on “Pretty Baby: Brooke Shields” and “Allen v. Farrow” and served as editor/writer for “On the Record.” She has directed two features with Mina T. Son, “Top Spin” and “Racist Trees,” through their company Wild Pair Films.

Mina T. Son, Producer/Director

Mina T. Son is a Korean-American filmmaker based in Los Angeles. She founded Wild Pair Films with Sara Newens. Their debut documentary feature,

“Top Spin,” streamed on Netflix. “Racist Trees” is Wild Pair Films' second documentary feature. Mina is in post-production on a longitudinal documentary about Japan's 2011 tsunami.

Joanna Sokolowski, Producer

Joanna Sokolowski is an Emmy Award-winning producer and creative nonfiction storyteller. Her documentary work has been broadcast on HBO, Netflix, and PBS. Her podcasts have won Webby Awards and are streamed on Stitcher and Spotify. Her critically-acclaimed feature documentary “Ovarian Psychos” premiered at SXSW and on PBS's INDEPENDENT LENS.

CREDITS

Director and Producer

Sara Newens & Mina T. Son

Producer

Justin Baldoni

Andrew Calof

Joanna Sokolowski

Co-Executive Producer

Courtney Parker

Executive Producer

John Legend

Mike Jackson

Ty Stiklorius

Steve Sarowitz

Endyia Kinney-Sterns

Lois Vossen

ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS

INDEPENDENT LENS is an Emmy® Award-winning PBS documentary series. With founding executive producer Lois Vossen, the series has been honored with 10 Academy Award nominations and features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, INDEPENDENT LENS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Acton Family Giving, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and National Endowment for the Arts. Stream anytime on the PBS App. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens.

ABOUT ITVS

Independent Television Services (ITVS) is the largest co-producer of independent documentaries in the United States. For more than 30 years, the San Francisco nonprofit has funded and partnered with documentary filmmakers to produce and distribute untold stories. ITVS incubates and co-produces these award-winning titles and premieres them on our Emmy Award-winning PBS series, INDEPENDENT LENS. ITVS titles appear on PBS, WORLD, NETA, and can be streamed on various digital platforms, including the PBS App. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Acton Family Giving, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Wyncote Foundation. For more information, visit itvs.org.

ABOUT WAYFARER STUDIOS

Wayfarer Studios is an independent production studio actively developing, producing, and fully financing a slate of highly original, genre-defining, and globally impactful feature films, episodic television, documentaries, unscripted series, and podcasts. Co-founded by Justin Baldoni and Steve Sarowitz and led by President Jamey Heath, their work highlights the power of connection, debunking the typical studio model by championing inspirational stories which unite as true agents for social change. Wayfarer Studios current slate includes CODE 3, IT ENDS WITH US, BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL, THE SENIOR, EMPIRE WAIST, THE ALGORITHM, PAC-MAN, and BADASS BIKER CHICKS OF MARRAKESH. The feature film, EZRA, premiered in September 2023 at the Toronto International Film Festival and has been acquired by Bleeker Street for U.S. distribution. The documentary feature film THE HERRICANES premiered in 2023 at SXSW where it received a Special Jury Award as well as a Documentary Spotlight, and RACIST TREES premiered domestically at the Palm Springs International Film Festival. In 2020, Wayfarer released the critically acclaimed feature film CLOUDS, the first feature-length movie launched on Disney+, directed by Baldoni. In 2021, Wayfarer entered a first-look multi-faceted partnership with Procter & Gamble spanning across film, TV, and new media, with the first project being the highly successful and Webby-nominated, The Man Enough Podcast. For more information, please visit www.wayfarerstudios.com.

ABOUT GET LIFTED FILM CO.

Get Lifted Film Co. is led by Emmy® and Tony® Award-winning producer Mike Jackson, EGOT recipient and award-winning producer John Legend, and Emmy® Award-winner and CEO of the management, media and social impact company Friends At Work, Ty Stiklorius.



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Their upcoming projects include PHANTOM, a reimagination of Phantom of the Opera and Misha Green's feature film B-SIDES. Get Lifted's latest projects include STAND UP AND SHOUT, 1000% ME: GROWING UP MIXED, and theater projects THE SOUL TRAIN MUSICAL, IMITATION OF LIFE, and BASQUIAT.

Notably, Get Lifted produced David E. Talbert's acclaimed holiday film JINGLE JANGLE: A CHRISTMAS STORY and executive produced HBO docu-series ATLANTA'S MISSING AND MURDERED: THE LOST CHILDREN, which received the AAFCA TV Honor for Best Documentary and was awarded "Best Multi-Part Documentary" by the International Documentary Association. Get Lifted also executive produced the HBO documentary 40 YEARS A PRISONER, the Netflix documentary GIVING VOICE and the WGN series UNDERGROUND. Among Get Lifted's other recent documentary credits are CITIZEN ASHE, THE LEGEND OF THE UNDERGROUND and A CRIME ON THE BAYOU. Additionally, SHERMAN'S SHOWCASE on IFC and AMC, RHYTHM + FLOW for Netflix, which won the 2020 NAACP Image Award, ABC's "John Legend and Family: A Bigger Love Father's Day.", Damien Chazelle's Oscar®-winning musical LA LA LAND, as well as NBC's 2018 Emmy®-winning JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR LIVE and the 2017 Tony® Award winning August Wilson play JITNEY.

Aside from film/TV, Get Lifted have partnered with Zando to form Get Lifted Books, which builds upon Get Lifted Film Co.'s mission of spotlighting stories from dynamic creatives. The imprint publish brilliant authors, who transform the conversation, in both adult fiction and nonfiction as well as titles for young readers. The imprint kicked off with Rosewater, the debut novel from Liv Little, a deliciously gritty and strikingly bold debut novel about discovering love where it has always been. Their second book, Black Love Letters featuring a foreword by John Legend, is a collection of letters and illustrations on the subject of Black love and celebrates Blackness in all its forms and published in October 2023.

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