



*Willie's
Letter*

PRESS KIT



Jarrett Michael Collins as "Willie Lynch"

A depressed, failure-ridden man contemplates life and fatherhood, as his son embarks on a journey to face his trauma and revisit the place of his father's demise.

Ezekiel Ajeigbe as "Kyndall Lynch"



Jarrett Michael Collins as "Willie Lynch" and Jessica Fontaine as "Debra Lynch"



About

TAGLINE
Break the Will to Resist

Short Film

COUNTRY: United States of America

LANGUAGE: English

GENRE: Drama

RUN TIME: 15 minutes and 39 seconds

FORMAT: 4K, Stereo, 2:35:1

Synopsis

Set against a southern landscape, Willie's Letter tells a parallel story of sacrifice and resurrection across two generations. A depressed, failure-ridden father contemplates life, while attempting to hold on to his silver lining: his son. A PTSD-diagnosed son embarks on a journey to revisit the place of his father's demise, and makes an unexpected discovery that brings him closer to healing.

The film, Willie's Letter, is inspired, in part, by propaganda piece "The Willie Lynch Letter, 1712." The letter discusses the generational trauma of slave descendants, the aspect of mental slavery, and the separation of the black family — dynamics that are embedded in this film's father-son relationship, and echo structures that define the black family today.

Director's Statement

Willie's Letter started from a conversation I had in 2016 with my co-writer, Vanessa Westbrook. At the time, the news was overcome with headlines about the death of Philando Castile, who was shot and killed by a Minnesota police officer in front of his girlfriend and her young child. We — like the rest of the world — watched the viral video, not only processing its effect on us, but also how that trauma impacted the 4-year-old girl who witnessed Castile's death firsthand. In seeing her — hearing her — we knew she joined a group of other black children and adults who've experienced similar tragedies — most, without the cameras, and headlines, and vitality to amplify their stories.

From there, Vanessa and I began combing the web for other stories surrounding the black experience in America, institutional racism, and black mental health. Through that search, Vanessa was reacquainted with the Willie Lynch Letter, 1712. We immediately recognized its relevance regarding generational trauma and systemic control — even if it had been proved to a propaganda piece. I knew, then, that we needed to create this film.

Our titular character, Willie, is inspired by my own estranged father. He yearned to be self-made, but had the tendency to often give up. Ultimately, the consequences of his path — ripe with failures and successes — affected my mother's well being and my own. A conversation with my mother, about what led her to divorce my father, is what fueled the development for Willie's wife, Deborah. But, at the center of this film is Kyndall, Willie and Deborah's son. His journey was captured by the Willie Lynch Letter's proclamation to "pay little attention to the generation of original breaking, but concentrate on the future generation." It brought me back to the young child in the back of Philando's car. It brought me back to Kyndall, who — like all of us — had to unpack his experiences with his parents — and dynamics stemming from generations past — in order to truly heal.

In film, the best characters are flawed characters. They are who we connect to most. Who we learn from most. As a director, I wanted capture the complexity of a flawed family, and spotlight the trauma that is inextricably tied to the black experience in America. Willie's Letter is relatable, truthful, and open. It's about me. It's about my co-writer, Vanessa. It's about the actors who drew from real-life experiences to bring our script to life. And we hope, that you see a bit of yourself — the good, the bad, and the redemptive spirit — in it, too.

-Kiana Woodson

Team



Kiana Woodson WRITER AND DIRECTOR

Kiana Woodson is an award-winning director and screenwriter from Atlanta, Georgia. Embodying an unwavering passion for storytelling and filmmaking, she has devoted herself to shed light on stories centering around people of color, women, and their underrepresented voices. She is a graduate of Clark Atlanta University and an MFA candidate in Film at Savannah College Art and Design, where she was named Director of the Year in 2017.

She is a proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, initiated in the notable Alpha Pi chapter. She lives by the words of award-winning and best-selling author Toni Morrison, "Make a difference about something other than yourselves."



Vanessa Westbrook WRITER AND PRODUCER

Vanessa Westbrook is a Writer and Producer from Decatur, GA. Using her repertoire of personal life thrills, ranging from high school to post college, it is the art of life that inspires her passion for writing and creating. As a Clark Atlanta University alum, she has spent many years gaining experience in several fields of entertainment from Music, Radio and landing in TV/Film, initially getting her start in Casting. Shortly after she's began to develop and produce original content for several major brands in the black beauty space. She is determined to create and share stories that expose more depth and understanding to topics often shied away from.



Angel Lenise PRODUCER

A storyteller at heart, Angel Lenise's true passion lies at the intersection of hip-hop, pop culture, and high style. A former correspondent for BET's 106 and Park, her current post is at Hearst Digital Media, where she directs and produces nearly 40 fashion, beauty, and entertainment videos per month for Harper's BAZAAR and ELLE magazines.

Backed with degrees from Clark Atlanta University and the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, the Texas native can write, edit, shoot, and do it for the 'gram; but she finds herself most at home in front of a camera—preferably HD.

Team



Blair Winders

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Blair is an Atlanta based Director of Photography and Camera Operator. She has worked on commercials for clients such as Adobe and Cobb County Travel & Tourism.

This past year she shot her first feature film, *Indomitable*, and had the opportunity to shoot three music videos in New York for up and coming artists as part of the launch of startup, *Angels Like Rebels*.

Much of her lighting and operating styles have been influenced by watching and learning from cinematographers she's had the opportunity to work under as a camera assistant, such as Nancy Schreiber, ASC and Jacek Laskus, ASC PSC.

Fun Fact:

The Willie's Letter production team consisted of **majorly women in key roles** and **majority of the crew being people of color, along with an all-Black cast.**



Ezekiel Ajeigbe as "Kyndall Lynch"

Credits

Directed By:
Kiana Woodson

Written By:
Kiana Woodson and Vanessa Westbrook

Produced By:
Vanessa Westbrook and Angel Lenise

Executive Produced By:
**M. Hines
Sharon Westbrook**

Cinematography By:
Blair Winders

Production Design By:
Faye Coleman

Edited By:
Tedd Pfeiffer

Sound Design By:
Mike Sal

Composed By:
**Joey Quavon Scarver
Dasmyn Grigsby**

Casting By:
Deanna Smith

1st Assistant Director
Antonio Curren

2nd Assistant Director
Future Criglar

Production Coordinator
Terri Nash

Location Manager
Brittany Kirkland

Camera Operator
Chad Brock

1st Assistant Camera
Will Culick

1st Assistant Camera
Amber Bournett

2nd Assistant Camera
Angelica Perez

2nd Assistant Camera
Rachel Waldon

2nd Assistant Camera
Cameron Wingo

DIT
Keanna Johnson

Gaffer
Venessa Brown

Key Grip
Paul Woodie

Grip
Justin Nesbitt

Sound Recordist
Mike Sal and Gerald Coleman

Hair and Make-up
Tania Brantley

Production Assistants
**Angelica George
Ladaya James
Vanessa Johnson**

Researchers
**Camille Douthit
Asha Belk**

Vocalist
Chris D. Smith

Saxophonist
Mariama Tatum

Colorist
Jeff Spott

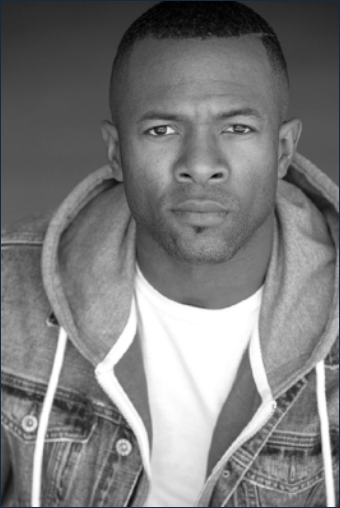
Visual Effects
Denys Bereza



Photo Credit: Terri Nash



Cast



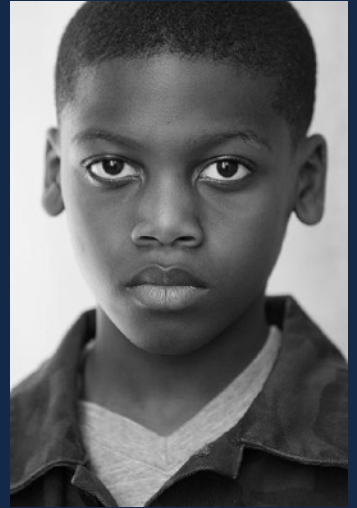
JARRETT MICHAEL COLLINS
"WILLIE LYNCH"



JESSICA FONTAINE
"DEBORAH LYNCH"



EZEKIEL AJEIGBE
"KYNDALL LYNCH"



DE'JON WATTS
"YOUNG KYNDALL LYNCH"



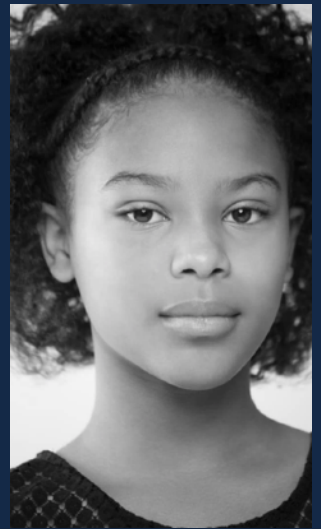
GWEN HUDSON
"NORMA LYNCH" "YOUNG"



JAY JONES
"JAMES LYNCH"



JEREL XAVIER ALSTON
"BOY NEIGHBOR"



LEILANI STALLINGS
"GIRL NEIGHBOR"



Ezekiel Ajeigbe as "Kyndall Lynch"

Contact

Press Contact

Kiana Woodson

kianawoodson@gmail.com

(770) 656-1462

Screeners, interviews, and press images available upon request.