

WHY

A DOCUMENTARY FILM PROJECT

OTIS DAMÓN

A CHANCE TO LIVE
A CHANCE TO DREAM



[PLAY TRAILER](#)

PRESS KIT

ISBN 817525766-0



9 788175 257665

LOG LINE:

Battling depression and suicidal thoughts, a boy finds an unlikely ally in his teacher and hope in hat-making. This story is his inspiring testimony of overcoming and finding success.

As a teen, Otis Damón faced the daunting challenges of mental illness, confronted by depression and suicidal thoughts.

Otis grew up in New York City. From the age of 5, his father was no longer in the picture. Left with his sisters and a now single mother, Otis took on the responsibilities of “man of the house”—a self-assigned role often found amongst boys in fatherless households, and an all too familiar story that often overlooks the psychological woes of children at that developmental age.

Overwhelmed by his trials and recurrent bouts of despair and thoughts of taking his own life, a chance encounter in his school hallways with a teacher turned out to be Otis's saving grace.

Through her compassion, guidance and support, Otis not only survived but also developed a passion for hat-making that grew from the sewing lessons she taught. His life took an entirely unanticipated turn, from the brink of desolation to becoming today a milliner highly sought after by celebrities and the world of high fashion.



Otis's story shines a light on taboo topics, providing a sensitive yet unflinching look at the impact of mental illness on the life of a young Black man and the transformative power of those who perceive the signs and extend a helping hand.

Otis's journey underscores the urgency of suicide prevention and the need for understanding and destigmatizing mental health issues, particularly in the Black community--as well as identifying early signs of mental health problems within the community at this moment when the suicide rate amongst Black youth is at an all-time high in U.S history.



SYNOPSIS



*Between 2007 and 2020, the suicide rate
among Black youth 10-17 rose by 144%.*

Director's Statement

"Nowadays, It is almost cliché to talk about mental illness."

— Otis Damón

There are many stories about mental illness and therapy that have played out publicly, on social media and in the mainstream media, in recent times. In the midst of this rise in popular awareness, a silent killer plagues mostly Black communities: Black youth ages 10-19 have the highest suicide rate compared to their peers of other racial and ethnic groups. The suicide rate amongst Black youth increased by an alarming 144% between 2007 and 2020.

This film tells the story of Otis Damón, a gifted and successful hat designer who battled decade-long depression and suicidal thoughts at the age of 15—at a time when it was strictly taboo to talk about mental illness within the Black community, particularly regarding Black men. We revisited Otis's journey and asked him to relive pivotal moments, and reveal how he overcame his mental struggles on the bumpy path to finding success—and peace.

Otis's story brings to light how proper nurturing from one's environment can change the trajectory of a life. It also poses questions to the viewer, especially in our distracted world of constant media bombardment: can you spot the signs of depression in a child or a teenager? And how can one redirect a child from self-destruction toward self-realization?

Our goal for this film was to bring awareness to the suicide crisis affecting Black Americans with a focus on overcoming, guidance and support, and finding one's passion as the central themes.

Our approach to this film is different in the way it is both structured and narrated, in that it is composed of interviews, re-enactments, and generative AI animations to immerse us into Otis's world—as it was, and can be today for a child who is struggling with mental health and suicidal thoughts. We used a first-person point of view—Otis narrating as an adult—while presenting much of his story from a childlike perspective of the world.

Everyone is the hero of their own story, but true heroic stories do have an impact—and can inspire others not only to accept a potentially frightening and unsettling life-changing decision, but to actively seize and embrace it. Such is Otis's testimony: a heroic journey abetted by perceptive and empathetic mentors whose honest—and sometimes tough—lessons and unwavering faith in him guided and supported him on his way.

Crowning THE WORLD

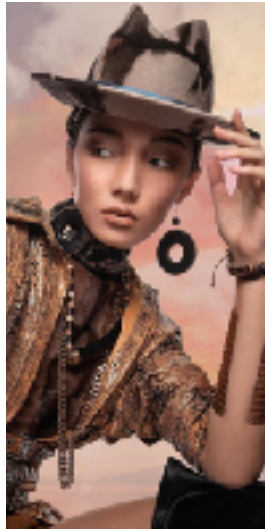
OTIS DAMÓN

HEAD TRANSFORMATIONS AND TIMELESS PIECES

Otis Damón focuses not on creating trends but rather timeless pieces. While Otis covers the heads of others, his struggles to cover himself and his head are what most shaped his life and career trajectory.



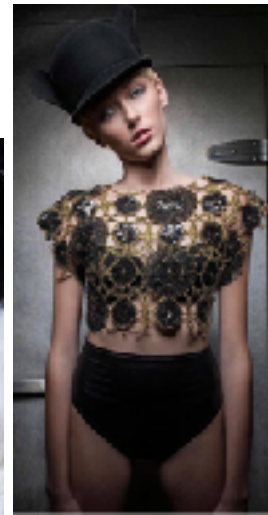
Hats by Otis Damon - Images courtesy of Otis Damón



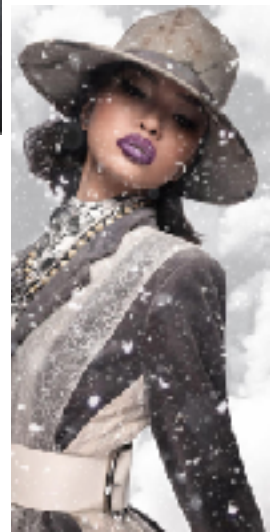
Otis Damón has created pieces for singers Alicia Keys, Patti LaBelle, and Robin S., Salt-N Pepa's DJ Deidra "Spinderella" Roper, and actress Victoria Rowell...



Influenced by '20s, '30s, and '40s style, Otis Damón incorporates the past with the present to orchestrate an artistic flow with each creation that has its own personality and style without duplication.



His breathtaking couture designs have sold on Fifth Avenue in Fortunoff and Henri Bendel, been seen in off-Broadway productions "Look What The Cat Dragged In," and continue to top off New York's Fashion Week.





GUIDANCE

❧ WHY HATS? ❧

At age 15, Otis Damón met teacher Gleora Sibley in the halls of his high school and confided in her about his suicidal thoughts. Mrs. Sibley insisted Otis come to her home economics classroom every day at lunch, and there she began to teach him sewing techniques and about entrepreneurship.

These sessions and the mentors he met along the way—Horace Weeks and Lola Ehrlich—set the stage to help Otis Damón find a fiery passion in millinery that will lead him to success, healing from decades long depressions...and to hope in hats.



Top Left: Otis Damón
Top Right: Gleora Sibley
Bottom Right: Horace Weeks
Bottom Left: Lola Ehrlich

**SUICIDE RATES ARE GROWING
AMONG CHILDREN OF
COLOR
AS WELL AS
AMONG YOUTH
WHO IDENTIFY AS
LGBTQ+**

In 90 countries studied, suicide was the fourth-leading cause of death among young males, and the third for young females.



THE TEAM

WHY

OTIS | PRESS KIT

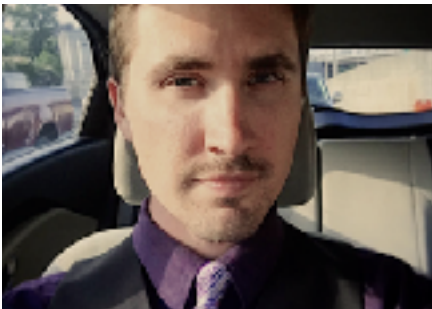


Director Eric Bomba-Ire is a Ghanaian filmmaker living in Atlanta who melds reality, fiction, and meditation into his storytelling. A strong supporter of independent creativity, he is the co-founder of CinemATL.com, an online platform that has shone a light on the independent film scene in Atlanta and the Southeast since 2005. Eric is a 2019 Sundance Screenwriting Intensive Fellow and New Orleans Film Society Producers Lab Fellow; his feature screenplay "I Hear You" is currently in development. Eric's films are an invitation to the inner world of his subjects, a connection through empathy.



Producer Tandi Reddick, a Georgia native, is an accomplished public relations and communications professional. She has served as Media Relations Manager for the Bronzelens Film Festival, as well as Communications Director for the Georgia Lottery. She has recently pivoted into the film industry, and is rapidly expanding her repertoire from independent documentaries to studio projects.

Credits: "Olympic Pride", "The Tuskegee Legacy Stories", "The Crown Act", "Illegal Rose", "Medusa", "Wingspan", "Confine"



Director of Photography John Pruner is a member of the International Cinematographers Guild and the Society Of Camera Operators. He produced the award-winning feature "Poe's Mystery Theater" that aired as a Halloween special for several years on many PBS affiliate stations. John is also the founder of the 20/21 Project—an artists' retreat focused on healing the traumas of the pandemic through creative expression.

Credits: Disney: "Ms. Marvel", Netflix: "The Curse Of Bridge Hollow", HBO: "The Staircase", "Hard Knocks", "Star Trek: First Frontier, More Than A Game"







*Black youth ages 10-19
have the fastest growing
suicide rate compared to
their peers of other racial
and ethnic groups.*



Interview:

Eric Bomba-Ire, Director

“Ultimately,
we want to
make a feature
version of
Otis’s story.”



What camera did you use to shoot?

We used the Sony FS 9 camera.

Why did you choose to use generative AI?

It was a difficult decision to make in the midst of the industry strike, in which AI was a hot button topic. Although we wanted to animate those sequences initially, we decided to experiment with AI because we had many albums of family photos and shows that Mr. Otis had provided that could serve as a generative source. We also understood that as AI is entering the space for productivity, it will eventually be accepted into the story space. It will depend on how it is used. It is still a tool—not the story.

How long did the project take?

The first initial six months were spent with Mr. Otis. We talked most of that time, weekly and then regularly. We got to know one another, and it helped me really understand the intricacies of his life and journey—and also research and document the subject matter. Pre-production took 1½ months. It was a two-day shoot. Picture editing took eight months, sound and grading took two weeks. From my first sit down with Mr. Otis to the film we have now, it was 14 months.

What was the favorite part of the production?

The team that gathered to tell this compelling story. Everyone had the right attitude, professionalism, and passion, and dedicated time and care towards the production. You can only be grateful for that kind of atmosphere when working to tell a story like Otis’s.

What is your goal with the film?

The goal is to bring awareness to the suicide rate of black youth and emphasize the importance of empathy and perceptive intervention to guide them through those challenging times. We want to inspire conversation between educators and students, parents and children, mental health experts and patients. Mr. Otis deserves his flowers now. His story needs to be heard—now.

What are your hopes for distribution?

First, we want to see it do well in film festivals. Our hope is it could be used to start discussion in many spaces—in schools, for education, for mental health practitioners, and for parents and their children. One of the most devastating things any parent has to endure is when a child dies at their own hand—and they never saw it coming. Ultimately, we want to make a feature version of Otis’s story.

A chance to live. A chance to dream.

Otis

A DOCUMENTARY FILM BY ERIC BOMBA-IRE



CREDITS

Cast:	Otis Damón
Director / Producer / Editor:	Eric Bomba-Ire
Producer:	Donna Wong
Executive Producer:	Bernard Bomba-Ire
Associate Producer	Tandi Reddick
Director of Photography:	John Pruner
Editor:	Charo Chanel Davis
Wardrobe Supervisor:	Alain Fouda
Art Director:	Calista Moore
AI Animation:	Wayne Joyner
Extra Casting	Lance Forrest
Extras:	Tyrabia Womble
	Zakiya Oliver-Thomas
1st AC / Gaffer:	Justin "Magic" Noel
2nd AC:	Daryus Hawkins
Camera P.A:	Jaqueline Flores-Fernandez
Camera P.A:	Nate Bavely
Sound / Boom:	Dave R. Watkins
Set dresser:	Ryan Tortora
Art P.A:	Michael Moreno
Production Assistants:	Valeria Cervello
	Mykiah Conyers

Shooting Format:	Digital
Ratio:	16:9
Running Time:	16min:55sec
Genre:	Documentary
Languages:	English
Production Company:	Tengan Terra
Country of Production:	USA
Date of Completion:	2024
Subtitles:	N/A
Company:	Tengan Terra

Special Thanks

Jason James
Charles Judson

Thanks

Bernard Miller
Ezinna Anosike
Linda Burns | PA Academy
Tim & Shelby Haberber | Push Push Arts



EXCELLENCE

Our crown has already been
bought and paid for. All we have
to do is wear it.

– James Baldwin

Hats | Otis Damon
Images courtesy of Otis Damón

PUBLICITY & MEDIA INQUIRIES

Office: +1 646.535.6206
Direct ATL: +1 404.435.0916
Email: telluswhynow@gmail.com

Instagram: @Otis_lives



PLAY TRAILER

