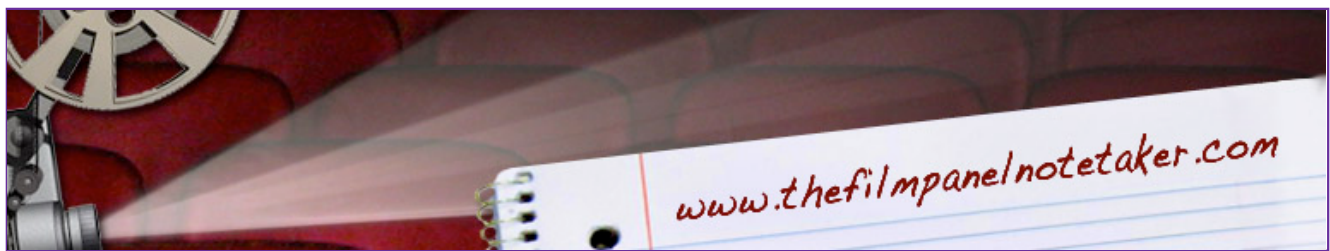


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## 10th Annual Media That Matters Film Festival – June 2, 2010

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### 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Media That Matters Festival

June 2, 2010

New York, NY

By [Brian Geldin](#)

A screening of the tenth annual Media That Matters collection took place June 2 at the SVA Theater in New York (and simultaneously in Minneapolis). 12 incredible thought-provoking, mostly social issue documentaries, each 12 minutes or less, were screened. Themes included health insurance, race relations, gender identity, human rights violations, the environment and more. Felix Endara of [ArtsEngine](#)'s [DocuClub](#) moderated the festival's panel of filmmakers after the screening. The discussion streamed live via [UStream](#), and questions were also taken via [Twitter](#) from Minneapolis.

At the end of the discussion, documentary filmmaker Liz Nord spoke about ArtsEngine's [Peer2Peer](#) fundraising program [Full Disclosure: Nord is an Associate Notetaker here at The Film Panel Notetaker]. Nord said she has been using Media That Matters films in her media education workshops for years training and inspiring underrepresented young filmmakers to tell their own stories. As the Supervising producer of [MTV's Choose or Lose](#) Campaign in 2008, she hired 51 citizen journalists from every state plus Washington, D.C., to cover youth-related election issues. She had the daunting task of bringing every one of them to New York and teaching them a crash-course in journalism and filmmaking. She showed them films from past Media That Matters festivals. Because state education budgets are being slashed, Nord said Media That Matters will need to play an increasing role in getting educators to connect their students to important issues covered in the films. With the Peer2Peer Campaign, Nord said she is going to pledge some of her

own personal funds to help bring the Media That Matters films into schools, and she asked everyone in the audience to do the same. Donations can be made online [here](#).

The 12 films selected and screened during the 10<sup>th</sup> annual Media That Matters festival were [Denied](#) (Directed & Produced by Julie Winokur), [I'm Just Anneke](#) (Directed & Produced by Jonathan Skurnik), [I Am Sean Bell](#) (Directed & Produced by Stacey Muhammad), [No One Bothered](#) (Directed by Josephine Boxwell & Produced by Laurie Nicholls), [Shades of the Border](#) (Directed & Produced by Patrick Smith), [My Hotness is Pasted on Yey!](#) (Directed & Produced by Gus Andrews), [Day Job](#) (Directed & Produced by Sara Hopman), [The Last Town](#) (Directed & Produced by Yan Chun Su), [Justice Denied: Voices From Guantanamo](#) (Directed by Joel Engardio and Produced by Joel Engardio & Ateqah Khaki), [Aquafinito](#) (Directed & Produced by Annalise Littman), [Uninsured in the Mississippi Delta](#) (Directed & Produced by Katie Falkenberg), and [Lessons From a Tailor](#) (Directed by Galen Summer & Produced by Caitlin Dourmashkin).

Below are some highlights of the post-screening Q&A with the filmmakers.

Endara asked *I'm Just Anneke* director Jonathan Skurnik how he found Anneke, a gender non-conforming adolescent girl in Vancouver, British Columbia. Skurnik said he had been researching and filming on the topic for a while. He attended a conference for families of gender non-conforming children in Seattle and started filming a boy who transitioned into a girl in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, but her family didn't want anyone to know "she" had been a "he," so Skurnik stopped filming. Eventually he found Anneke and her mom who were really excited about being filmed. Since shooting the short, Skurnik said there's a possibility he might shoot for another year as Anneke goes into high school as she transitions further.

Endara next asked about the meaning behind the title of *My Hotness is Pasted on Yey!* Director Gus Andrews said the title came from a "meme" or idea from the Internet to indicate how stupid some Photoshop jobs are done in magazines. For example, if a person has a photo of oneself standing next to Elijah Wood, but Elijah Wood's head has been Photoshopped into the picture over someone else's head.

*Lessons from a Tailor* wasn't so much a social issue documentary, but more of rather a character portrait of a Holocaust survivor who became a successful tailor in New York City. Endara asked director Galen Summer how he met Martin, the tailor. Summer said he met Martin through producer Caitlin Dourmashkin who worked for an organization that Martin founded in East Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Originally he wanted to make this film to honor Martin's life and what he's done for the neighborhood, but it developed into a larger personal story.

Audience Question (To *The Last Town* Director Yan Chun Su) – For the first half of the film, there's no dialogue. Was this a choice that she made?

Chun Su said she was concentrating on the town itself. When she went there, she didn't know who would talk to her. Her main focus was to get the picture of this place before it was gone. After several days, people started noticing and talking to her.

Audience Question (To *Aquafinito* director Annalise Littman) – What made her choose such a ubiquitous subject as bottled water?

Littman said she made the film when she was a junior in high school. She became interested in water-related issues as a member of a school organization. She went to see a speaker in her town from Corporate Accountability International, who appears in the film. This was the first time she learned about problems with bottled water. She was totally unaware of the environmental and societal problems that bottled water presented. In her film class, she decided to make a documentary to educate people of these problems.

Audience Question (To *I Am Sean Bell* director Stacey Muhammad) – What did you she hope to accomplish?

Muhammad said her main point was to show how people are desensitized to police brutality. She expected there to be anger and protests after the "not guilty" verdict of the police officers in the Sean Bell murder trial. She felt by hearing children, there could be important conversations. It would not just be an African-American issue, but could also be

brought into a human rights arena and get a larger community concerned, angry and disgusted by what is prevalent in the African-American and Hispanic communities. Muhammad said that it's "police terrorism," and not just "police brutality."

Audience Question: (To all of the filmmakers) – Of all of the social issue documentaries that have come out recently (citing *Up the Yangtze* as an example), has their style influenced your work at all?

Chun Su said she didn't see *Up the Yangtze* before she made *The Last Town*. She just had the urge to go there. After making her film, she did see *Up the Yangtze*. She wishes she could have had more time to spend there and to get to know more people and spend more time with them.

*Denied* director Julie Winokur said she had seen Michael Moore's healthcare film *Sicko*, but what inspired her most was watching documentaries in general. Her research was about finding particular people and their hardships going through healthcare problems without insurance. When they first found Sheila (the subject of the documentary who was denied health coverage though she was sick with cancer), they published her story in New York Times Magazine and people became shocked that this was going on in America. The readers saw themselves in Sheila's story, and sent her family \$50,000 in donations, which helped them save their home and gave them some stability while they tried to cope with the illness. Winokur said that outpouring compelled her to make the film. "We can't tell the same stories enough," Winokur said. "If there are five other films on the uninsured, all the power to all of us, because we need to keep telling them until the problems are solved."

*Justice Denied: Voices From Guantanamo* directed Joel Engardio said one thing that interested him was the opportunity to show detainees as real people that wouldn't normally be seen in the general media, and understand who they were before Guantanamo, in addition to what happened to them there, and what have they been doing since their release. His process of filmmaking is to have people tell their own stories.

*Day Job* director Sara Hopman said she made her film as a school project, so she only had three weeks to shoot it and very little time to do research. She had seen other films about day laborers, and she chose to include a lot of statistical information in her film.

*Shades of the Border* director Patrick Smith said he made his film before the earthquake took place in Haiti. He said there will be an onslaught of films about the earthquake, and he hopes these films will also touch on the race issues there. The poverty and infrastructure that's there stems from the racism that has been there for so long.

Audience Question from Minneapolis (to Muhammad) – Why didn't she reach out to authority figures, specifically police officers who are also against police brutality?

Muhammad said they weren't willing to talk. Her intent was to speak to the children. The day of the verdict, she was near a playground and saw a black boy cross the street, and it occurred to her, will he have an opportunity to grow up? She said we hear from the public figures, the politicians, the officers, and the adults, but we don't hear from the children.

Audience Question from Minneapolis (to Smith) – Does Smith feel as if the journalist interviewed in the film was an elitist nationalist, racist or what?

Smith said the journalist was a really interesting character that he feels he couldn't give a great over-arching portrayal in the film. He was extremely welcoming to them as filmmakers. Everything he said on camera was obviously honest, even if it was a little bit offbeat or completely wrong. He doesn't speak for the entire Dominican population, but he's in the upper crust. He's okay in reporting that the violence happens between Dominicans and Haitians, but the problem is not understanding the root of it. Smith said he believes this man and the vast majority of journalists there want to believe that it's not racism. Because no one will agree what the cause of it is, it won't get fixed. The point of the film is to open up a dialogue.

**Tags:** [ArtsEngine](#)·[DocuClub](#)·[Media That Matters](#)·[SVA Theater](#)

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- [1 Liz Nord](#) // Jun 8, 2010 at 3:57 am

Thanks for the great coverage, Brian!

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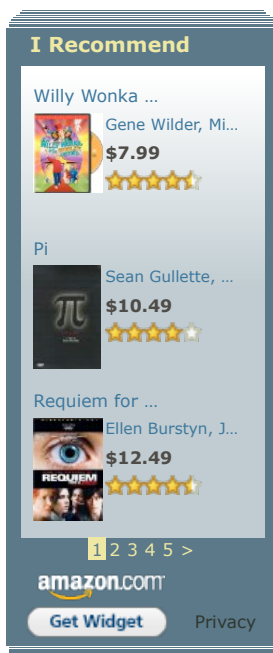
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