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## **BLACK PERSPECTIVES PROGRAM LINEUP ANNOUNCED FOR 54TH CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**

Headlined by Steve McQueen's *Widows* and George Tillman Jr.'s *The Hate U Give*; Highlights include Tessa Thompson drama *Little Woods* and Lesbian Love Story *Rafiki*, banned by the Kenyan Government

CHICAGO – The **54th Chicago International Film Festival**, presented by Cinema/Chicago, today announced its 22nd **Black Perspectives Program** featuring nine feature-length films and a program of seven short films showcasing excellence in filmmaking from African American filmmakers and the African diaspora.

The diverse and star-studded lineup includes *Widows*, directed by Steve McQueen, who was honored at the 52nd Chicago International Film Festival, and starring Oscar® -winning actress Viola Davis, about four strong women brought together by a common cause, and *The Hate U Give*, directed by George Tillman Jr., who was honored at the 49th Chicago International Film Festival, and starring Amandla Stenberg as a young girl caught between two worlds.

The Black Perspectives Program was founded in 1997 in collaboration with Spike Lee to highlight the strength and range of African American filmmaking. Since the Festival began its annual Black Perspectives Tribute, Cinema/Chicago has consistently honored actors and filmmakers of the highest caliber, including Sidney Poitier, Halle Berry, Ruby Dee, Forest Whitaker, Morgan Freeman, Viola Davis, and Steve McQueen, among others. By arranging select screenings and panel discussions, the Festival creates a unique environment in which audiences can gain valuable insights into the challenges and triumphs of African American filmmakers and actors.

In addition to the eight films, this year's Black Perspectives Program features a tribute to **Ruth Carter**, costume-designer extraordinaire who has been nominated for two Academy Awards® for her work on *Malcolm X* (1993) and on *Amistad* (1996). Carter most recently worked on the Afrofuturist designs of Marvel's box office record-setting *Black Panther*. Award-winning actress

and playwright Regina Taylor will lead a wide-ranging conversation with Carter as the acclaimed costume designer reflects on her body of work and opens up about her creative process.

Other films and programs in the 54th Chicago International Film Festival's Black Perspectives Program include:

***The Hate U Give*** – Dir. George Tillman Jr., U.S.

*Thursday, October 11, 7 p.m.*

*The Hate U Give* tells the story of Starr Carter, a young woman who is constantly switching between two worlds: the poor, mostly black, neighborhood where she lives and the rich, mostly white prep school she attends. The uneasy balance between these worlds is shattered when Starr witnesses the fatal shooting of her childhood best friend Khalil at the hands of a police officer. Now, facing pressures from all sides of the community, Starr must find her voice and stand up for what's right. *129 min.*

***Little Woods*** – Dir. Nia DaCosta, U.S.

*Friday, October 19, 5:45 p.m.; Sunday, October 21, 7:45 p.m.*

Tessa Thompson (*Thor: Ragnarok*) delivers a knockout performance as Ollie, a strong woman who must make tough choices to survive and protect her loved ones in a North Dakota town. A former opioid dealer, Ollie is planning to go straight. But just when she's about to finish parole and start a new life, she's pulled back in. Nia DaCosta's remarkably assured debut is a tense and poignant family drama. *105 min.*

***The Mercy of the Jungle*** – Dir. Joël Karekezi, Belgium/France

*Friday, October 12, 8:15 p.m.; Sunday, October 14, 12:45 p.m.*

At the outbreak of the Second Congo War, veteran Sergeant Xavier and young Private Faustin are accidentally left behind. With only each other to count on, the two men embark on an odyssey across the most violent jungle on earth. Together they dodge the perils, both natural and man-made, that confront them at every turn, facing the depths of their own war-ravaged souls in this unrelenting thriller. *French, Swahili with subtitles. 91 min.*

***Mr. Soul!*** – Dir. Melissa Haizlip, U.S.

*Saturday, October 13, 8:45 p.m.; Monday, October 15, 12:30 p.m.*

The brainchild of pioneering producer Ellis Haizlip, *SOUL!* was the only national TV series made by and for African Americans. The groundbreaking program aired from 1968 to 1973 and featured a dazzling array of guests including Stevie Wonder and Maya Angelou. *Mr. Soul!* takes viewers behind-the-scenes of the show, chronicling its inception and its struggles to stay on the air. Turns out the revolution really was televised. *115 min.*

***Olympia*** – Dir. Gregory Dixon, U.S.

*Monday, Oct. 15, 5:30 pm; Tuesday, Oct. 16, 8:30 pm; Friday, Oct. 19 1 p.m.*

Making her dazzling feature debut, Chicago writer-actor McKenzie Chinn stars as a struggling artist, navigating work and romance in the Windy City. When her boyfriend asks her to drop

everything and move cross-country, she soon discovers that her biggest obstacle may be herself. Featuring quirky animation and a revelatory central performance, *Olympia* is a heartfelt story for anyone who's ever felt adrift on the rough seas of adulthood. *93 min.*

**Rafiki** – Dir. Wanuri Kahiu, Kenya

*Thursday, October 11, 6 p.m.; Saturday, October 13, 1:30 p.m.; Thursday, October 18, 12 p.m.*

A tender tale of forbidden first love told in an electric, colorful Afropop style, *Rafiki* tells the story of the tender but illegal and taboo romance between Kena, a skateboarding tomboy blessed with great grades and soccer skills, and Ziki, the charismatic daughter of a conservative local politician. When rumors begin to swirl about the nature of their relationship, the young lovers find themselves in great jeopardy. *83 min.*

**Say Her Name: The Life and Death of Sandra Bland** – Dirs. Kate Davis, David Heilbroner. U.S.

*Tuesday, October 16, 8:15 p.m.; Wednesday, October 17, 1 p.m.*

In 2015, Sandra Bland, a politically active black woman from Chicago, was arrested for a traffic violation in a small Texas town. Three days later, Sandra was found hanging from a noose in a jail cell. Combining Bland's video blogs with extraordinary access to her family's testimony and their legal team, *Say Her Name* is both an engrossing murder mystery and a disturbing account of systemic racism and neglect. *105 min.*

**Widows** – Dir. Steve McQueen, U.S.

*Saturday, Oct. 13, 7 p.m.*

*Widows* is directed by Academy Award®-winner and 2016 Festival honoree Steve McQueen (*12 Years a Slave*) and co-written by bestselling Chicago-based author Gillian Flynn (*Gone Girl*).

The film is a blistering, modern-day thriller set against the backdrop of crime, passion, and corruption, telling the story of four women with nothing in common except a debt left behind by their dead husbands' criminal activities. Set and filmed in Chicago amid a time of turmoil, tensions build when Veronica (Oscar®-winner Viola Davis, also a Festival honoree), Linda (Michelle Rodriguez), Alice (Elizabeth Debicki), and Belle (Cynthia Erivo) take their fate into their own hands and conspire to forge a future on their own terms. *128 min.*

**United Skates** – Dirs. Dyana Winkler and Tina Brown. U.S.

*Friday, October 12, 6:15 p.m. (with After-Party at The Rink, 1122 E. 87th. St.; Saturday, October 13, 1:30 p.m.*

A rousing tribute to roller-skating's pivotal role in the African-American community, *United Skates* careens around the country, offering an intimate look at a lively subculture that's under threat. Facing discriminatory policies and rink closures, committed skaters from around the country—including Chicago's own Buddy Love—fight to preserve a space for people to come together and express themselves in sliding, bouncing, snapping glory. *89 min.*

**Shorts Program: Beyond a Boundary – Black Perspectives**

*Sunday, October 20, 2 p.m.; Sunday, October 21, 11:30 a.m.*

**Edgecombe** (U.S.) reveals a portrait of a shared history, place, and experience in the historic South — where maintained plantations and Confederate monuments stand as reminders of an ongoing struggle. Faced with an **Emergency** (U.S.) situation, a group of young black and Latino friends carefully weigh the pros and cons of calling the police. **Walker's** (U.S.) observes an historic black barbershop in Wilmington, NC and its lively, loyal customers. In **Room Tone** (U.S.), a freelance sound mixer can't seem to let go of his unfulfilled dream. **Rebirth is Necessary** (UK) is an archival exploration of the magic and dynamism of blackness in a world where time and space are altered. **The Life of Esteban** (Belgium) follows the story of a boy destined to for Olympic greatness. **Black 14** (U.S.) uses archival footage to tell the story of a racial protest at the University of Wyoming in 1969. 91 min.

### **Festival and Ticket Information**

The 54<sup>th</sup> Chicago International Film Festival runs Oct. 10-21, 2018 at the AMC River East, including a vast diversity of offerings, with numerous competitive categories and several highlight programs such as Black Perspectives, Cinemas of the Americas, International Comedy, Spotlight: Italy, Women in Cinema, Out-Look, After Dark and the City & State program (showcasing films made in Chicago and throughout Illinois.) Festival passes (\$110 - \$270) are currently on sale. Individual tickets (\$8 to \$20) and Gala Presentation tickets (\$20 to \$150) will go on sale Sept. 18 for Cinema/Chicago Members and Sept. 21 for the general public. Discounted parking is available at AMC River East 21 (322 E. Illinois Street). For more information, visit [www.chicagofilmfestival.com](http://www.chicagofilmfestival.com) or call 312-683-0121.

### **Festival Sponsors and Partners**

The 54th Chicago International Film Festival's sponsors include Premiere Sponsors: Bloomberg Philanthropies, Wintrust Community Banks; Official Wine Sponsor: Chloe Wine Collection; Education Sponsor: HBO; Participating Sponsor: British International School of Chicago; Airline Partner: LOT Polish Airlines; Headquarters Hotel: St. Jane Hotel; Event Partners: AMC Theaters, The Gwen Hotel, Little Goat Diner; Platinum Media Partner: NCM; This program is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts and a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency. Additional support provided by the Illinois Film Office, Chicago Film Office, the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE), and Lagunitas Brewing Company.

### **About Cinema/Chicago**

[Cinema/Chicago](http://Cinema/Chicago), the presenting organization of the Chicago International Film Festival, is a year-round nonprofit arts and education organization dedicated to fostering better communication between people of diverse cultures through the art of film and the moving image. Cinema/Chicago's programs include the Chicago International Film Festival, International Screenings Program, Chicago International Television Festival, CineYouth Festival, and year-round Education Program. Celebrating its 54<sup>th</sup> edition October 10-21, 2018, the Chicago International Film Festival is North America's longest-running competitive film festival. For more information, please visit [www.chicagofilmfestival.com](http://www.chicagofilmfestival.com) or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Vimeo](#) and [Twitter](#).

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