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BLACK STORIES PUSH FORWARD AT BLACK PUBLIC MEDIA'S PITCHBLACK

Creatives will vie for up to \$150,000 in funding at the nation's largest pitch competition for Black stories, as BPM honors filmmakers Stanley Nelson and Marcia Smith

NEW YORK (April 8, 2026) — [Black Public Media](#) (BPM) will bring its **PitchBLACK Forum & Awards** back to Harlem on Wednesday, April 29, and Thursday, April 30, at The Apollo Stages at the Victoria for the second year in a row. Sponsored by **Netflix** and **Andscape**, **PitchBLACK** is the nation's largest pitch competition for independent filmmakers and creative technologists creating Black content.

Founded by BPM in 2015, PitchBLACK has supported numerous film and immersive projects, many of which have gone on to national primetime premieres on public media broadcast and streaming platforms. Now, despite a devastating \$1.8 million loss in federal support following Congress's 2025 public media rescission vote, the Harlem-based national nonprofit is forging ahead — continuing to fund, champion and elevate Black stories through PitchBLACK.

Five documentary film teams and five immersive media teams will take to the stage to vie for up to \$150,000 in production funding for films and \$50,000 for immersive media projects, with projects judged by panels of industry professionals. Competing in the film segment of the PitchBLACK Forum are: **Reniqua Allen-Lamphere** (producer **Crystal Whaley**); **Luchina Fisher** (producer **Yvonne Welbon**); **Thomas Allen Harris** (producer **Don Perry**); **Malkia K. Lydia** (producer **Khalil Munir**); and **Fiz Olajide** (producer **Nerenda Eid**). Creators competing in the immersive segment of the PitchBLACK Forum include: **Mia Imani**; **Roshmond "Sum" Patten**; **Connor Wall**; **Jonathan Williams**; and the team of **Georgiana Wright** and **Naomi Urey**.

"PitchBLACK continues to spotlight bold storytelling and innovation from creatives whose work expands how Black stories are told and experienced," said **Leslie Fields-Cruz**, executive director of BPM. "At a time when public media is facing devastating cuts, PitchBLACK is both a celebration and a declaration. We are moving forward with urgency and conviction to ensure these stories are not only told, but supported and seen."

Winners will be announced at the PitchBLACK Awards on Thursday, April 30, at 6:30 p.m. ET. The program will honor 2026 BPM Trailblazers **Stanley Nelson** and **Marcia Smith**, documentary filmmakers and co-founders of Firelight Media. The awards program includes an Artists' Chat with the married duo, moderated by NPR journalist and podcast host **Brittany Luse**.

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In honor of Nelson and Smith's remarkable accomplishments, BPM also will present a two-week, online retrospective of their films, Monday, April 27, through Sunday, May 10. The 2026 BPM Trailblazer Retrospective includes a special in-person screening on Monday, April 27, at City College of New York's Shephard Hall, 6-9 p.m. Admission is free, but advance registration is recommended as seating is limited. Go here to register: https://bit.ly/RETRO_26. The streaming portion of the Trailblazer Retrospective includes nine films: *We Want the Funk!* (2025), *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution* (2015), *Freedom Riders* (2010), *Jonestown: The Life and Death of People's Temple* (2007), *A Place of Our Own* (2004), *The Murder of Emmett Till* (2003), *Marcus Garvey: Look for Me in the Whirlwind* (2000), *The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords* (1999) and *Two Dollars and a Dream* (1989). All PitchBLACK registrants will gain free access to stream the full slate on-demand throughout the two-week streaming window.

[Registration](#) is required for the PitchBLACK Forum, which can be attended in person or virtually. Tickets for the awards program are \$300.00 and are available through Ticketmaster at: <https://www.apollotheater.org/event/pitchblack-awards-ceremony-2>.

The recipient of BPM's 2026 Nonso Christian Ugboke Fellowship — a memorial award named after BPM's first director of digital initiatives recognizing artists under 30 working in immersive media — will be announced.

Each year, the PitchBLACK Forum & Awards draw leaders from public media, commercial media, documentary film, emerging media and funding worlds.

To find out more about or support PitchBLACK, visit blackpublicmedia.org or follow BPM (@blackpublicmedia) on Instagram, Facebook and TikTok.

ABOUT BLACK PUBLIC MEDIA (BPM)

BPM supports the development of visionary content creators and distributes stories about the global Black experience to inspire a more equitable and inclusive future. For 45+ years, BPM has addressed the needs of unserved and underserved audiences. BPM-supported programs have won five Emmys®, 10 Peabodys, five Anthem Awards, 14 Emmy® nominations and an Oscar® nomination. BPM continues to address historical, contemporary and systemic challenges that traditionally impede the development and distribution of Black stories.

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