

LIGHTREEL FILM FESTIVAL 2026 ANNOUNCES BLACK BUTTERFLY AWARD WINNERS

*Festival honoring excellence in
multicultural filmmaking honors
Storytelling, Craft & Cultural Impact
Across Five Categories*



WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES,
June 8, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The

[LightReel Film Festival](#), Washington, DC's premier multicultural film festival, announced the winners of the 2026 Black Butterfly Awards — LightReel's highest honor, presented to filmmakers whose work exemplifies excellence in storytelling, craft, and cultural impact. The awards were announced on the Closing night of the festival's 7th annual edition, held June 3–6, 2026 at the Angelika Pop-Up at Union Market, Washington, DC, under this year's theme: From the District to the Diaspora.

"The Black Butterfly represents the very soul of what we do at LightReel," said Tim Gordon, Executive Director of LightReel and Founder of the Black Reel Awards. "Every filmmaker we honored throughout the weekend told a story that needed to be told - - stories that reflect the richness, complexity, and beauty of the Black and multicultural experience. We are proud to lift them up on this stage and share their work with the world."

Three Colors: Pan-African, directed by Elijah Davis, Allison A. Waite, and Tyler Ocasio Holmes, claims LightReel's top prize for Best Narrative Feature. The film's selection as this year's top narrative honor reflects the festival's commitment to bold, diaspora-centered storytelling, the beating heart of the From the District to the Diaspora theme.

The Best Documentary Feature award goes to Cole: Bridge to Justice, directed by Antonio Tarrell and Castel V. Sweet, a film that brings an urgent, powerful story to the center of public discourse. Documentary storytelling has long been a cornerstone of LightReel's programming, and this year's winner exemplifies the form at its most essential.

In the short film categories, Tia A. Smith's The Heir earns Best Narrative Short for its precision and emotional resonance, while Kamilah Thurmon's Making Their Pointe wins Best Documentary Short — a tribute to the filmmakers whose short form work commands as much attention as any feature.

The Best Screenplay honor is awarded to Fordang Nibalum for Sankofa. The title — a word from

the Twi language of Ghana meaning "go back and fetch it" — speaks directly to the spirit of this year's festival. To honor work rooted in that philosophy on LightReel's closing night feels entirely right.

Congratulations to all of this year's Black Butterfly recipients for their outstanding contributions to multicultural storytelling and for helping embody the 2026 festival theme.

ABOUT THE [BLACK BUTTERFLY AWARD](#)

The Black Butterfly is LightReel Film Festival's highest honor — a symbol of transformation, resilience, and the enduring power of storytelling. Awarded across five categories, the Black Butterfly recognizes films and screenplays that demonstrate exceptional craft and meaningful cultural impact. Winners are selected by LightReel's independent festival jury from films screened in official competition during the 2026 festival.

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ABOUT LIGHTREEL FILM FESTIVAL

Now in its 7th year, the LightReel Film Festival is Washington, DC's largest multicultural film festival and a cornerstone platform for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) storytelling. Presented by the Foundation for the Augmentation of African-Americans in Film (FAAAF), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, LightReel showcases films from across the global diaspora alongside industry panels, special screenings, and community events. This year's theme, From the District to the Diaspora, celebrates the richness and global reach of multicultural storytelling. Support for LightReel is provided in part by EDENS-DC, the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, and the DC Office of Cable Television, Film, Music & Entertainment.

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