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INDEPENDENT LENS TO PREMIERE AWARD-WINNING DOCUMENTARY “FERGUSON RISES” NOVEMBER 8, CENTERED ON THE FATHER OF MICHAEL BROWN JR. AND A COMMUNITY WHO RALLIED BEHIND HIS PAIN

Winner of the Tribeca Film Festival Audience Award, Mobolaji Olambiwonnu’s Poignant Film Documents How A Father and A Small Town in Missouri Turned Pain into Purpose and Organized A Movement for Black Lives Before It Took Hold Around the World



Photograph by Rafael Roy

(San Francisco, CA) Tuesday, July 13, 2021 — Before the global uprising condemning the murder of George Floyd and calls for police accountability echoed internationally, there was a small town in Missouri that erupted in protest after the Aug. 9, 2014 killing of Black teenager Michael Brown Jr. by a white police officer. Filmmaker **Mobolaji Olambiwonnu**’s documentary **“Ferguson Rises”** shines a spotlight on this small town that inspired a new global civil rights movement and chronicles a father’s journey as he grapples with the pain of losing a son.

“Ferguson Rises” explores the depths of the protests following Michael Brown Jr.’s killing through the eyes of his father, Michael Brown Sr., and many diverse voices in the community: from residents to police officers, to business owners and activists who took to the streets in protest for a record 400-plus days straight. “Ferguson Rises” will make its U.S. broadcast premiere on PBS’s INDEPENDENT LENS on November 8, 2021 at 10:00 p.m. ET ([check local listings](#)). The film will also be available on the PBS Video app.

At the center of the documentary is Michael Brown Sr., who is interviewed at great length about his son’s death and the ways he overcame the pain that engulfed him and his family in the years that followed. In doing so, Olambiwonnu sheds light on the grief a Black father must cope with after the murder of his son, and the resiliency he builds alongside a community that rises up against racial injustice. The film follows Brown Sr. as he finds himself among families of victims of police brutality, all thrust into activism not by choice, but circumstance, and by a failed criminal justice system.

At the time of Michael Brown Jr.’s death, 67 percent of Ferguson residents were Black. The town, however, was patrolled by a police department in which only three out of 53 officers were Black,

and perspectives on law enforcement's treatment of Michael Brown Jr. were split, with some showing support and others who came out vehemently against it. The strikingly different perspectives come to the forefront of the film, and in interviews with both opponents of the Black Lives Matter movement and the activists leading it, audiences see a glimpse of the polarizing emotions that are still ingrained in justice reform conversations today.

"With 'Ferguson Rises,' I have tried to convey several things: the reality of what happened that day in Ferguson and what happens to Black people on a continual basis; the generally unrecognized human suffering; the rarely seen vulnerability and the strength of Black fathers and Black men in this country; the common humanity that we all share; and the reframing of our suffering into hope, togetherness and action," said Olambiwonnu. "I also hope that through the stories of Michael Brown Sr. and the community of Ferguson, we can learn not to judge things and people on a surface level. And perhaps most importantly, I hope the film reminds America of all that they can learn from Black people when it comes to resilience, strength and faith. With this mindset, we can then stop harping on the pathologies of Black Americans, and rather, focus on honoring their contributions."

"Ferguson Rises" is a part of INDEPENDENT LENS' [Stories for Justice](#) initiative, created to spark community conversations and boost the work of people on the front lines of justice reform. By connecting documentaries, docuseries and journalism to community-led engagement, Stories for Justice is a multi-year commitment to bold storytelling about racial inequities in systems across America.

Visit pbs.org/fergusonrises for more information about the film.

About the Filmmakers

Mobolaji Olambiwonnu (Director, Producer)

Mobolaji Olambiwonnu is a graduate of UCLA and AFI. He is the recipient of the Directors Guild of America Student Filmmaker Award. Besides freelance film work, Mobolaji has also worked in the fields of education, conflict resolution, and community organizing. His community-based experience is the conscience behind his work. "Ferguson Rises" is Mobolaji's first feature film.

David Oyelowo (Producer)

David Oyelowo, is a multiple Golden Globe, BAFTA, and Emmy-nominated actor and producer. Oyelowo recently made his directorial debut with the critically acclaimed, "The Water Man," released domestically by RLJE Films and internationally by Netflix in Summer 2021.

Oyelowo stars alongside Lonnie Chavis and Rosario Dawson, as well as, produces under his Yoruba Saxon banner that he founded with his wife, Jessica. Yoruba Saxon is focused on creating values-based content, across all platforms and for all quadrants, with an aim to shift the culture and color outside the lines. As artists and filmmakers, the Oyelowo's are committed to expressing their love of storytelling and passion for people through entertainment for a global audience. Yoruba Saxon has a first-look deal with Walt Disney Pictures for feature length films.



Previous film and television projects include: “Nightingale” (HBO), “Captive” (Paramount), “A United Kingdom” (Fox Searchlight), “Come Away” (Relativity Media), “Five Nights in Maine” (FilmRise), the upcoming “Solitary” (BRON Studios) and “First Gen” (Disney+).

CREDITS

Director	Mobolaji Olambiwonnu
Producers	David Oyelowo Jessica Oyelowo Tanayi Seabrook Tj Odebunmi Daisy Mo Lisa Smithline Tamika Lamison Nick Moon
Executive Producers	Sandra Evers-Manly T.J. Martin Gigi Pritzker Kai Bowe
Editors	Brandinn French Jeff Striker

ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS

INDEPENDENT LENS is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series, with Lois Vossen as executive producer, features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS, Acton Family Giving, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens. Join the conversation: facebook.com/independentlens and on Twitter [@IndependentLens](https://twitter.com/IndependentLens)

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