

m a l i k i s a s i s | b i o g r a p h y

I was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and dreamt of becoming a novelist as long as I could remember. I read Shakespeare, Stephen King, but it wasn't until I read Richard Wright's *Black Boy at 14 years old*, that I really connected to wanting to be a writer. I began looking for other African American authors such as James Baldwin, and Langston Hughes. Wright and Baldwin expanded my emotional and intellectual horizon, giving me the courage to think beyond the borders of my neighborhood and I did. I began imagining what life would be like outside of Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

In 1988 when I turned 16 years old I had went out to see a small film called *School Daze* by an up and coming filmmaker named Spike Lee. The film was about African American students on a college campus. I began keeping everything Spike. At one point I had a photo album full of articles and clippings from magazines and newspapers of Spike Lee. It was then that I knew I had to be a filmmaker; the film had such a profound affect on me. It was the first time that I had actually considered college as an option but by then, my chances of getting into anybody's college was by the way of the Dodo bird.

I enlisted into the US Navy upon graduating near the bottom of my class in 1990. Dreams deferred, I served 36 months on the tiny island nation of Guam. My dreams were again germinated by Spike's *Malcolm X*. Upon exiting the military I enrolled into the University of Washington, in Seattle--briefly considering film school, but not having the courage to follow through on the idea of paying so much for a skill I can learn by just doing, so I studied Social Work.

After an 8-year hiatus from my dreams of wanting to be a writer and filmmaker I began plotting how I would make a movie while in college, without money, without skills, without a crew and without knowing exactly where to start. Overwhelmed, I started up an online arts and literary magazine, *Born Magazine* with a friend. After being the editor for a year, I had written a script and decided that I should devote full time to my dream of becoming a filmmaker, so I resigned my post to make my first film in 1998.

My first film was an emotional disaster, but it needed to happen. It was my baptism into independent filmmaking. Never again, would I disrespect the art form. The biggest lesson I have gain from being a filmmaker, is that it really is about *people* and community.

Our environment shapes our sense of who we are and who we believe ourselves to be. It nurtures our view of the world; it nurtures our instincts. It defines who we will become. It informs our compassion, passion and drive. My environment, with all of its social ills and environmental hazardousness informed my art, my sense of poverty, and my sense of social injustice. It is why I became a filmmaker; it is why I became a social worker.