



April 9, 2020

For Immediate Release

Media Contact: Claudia Leung, cleung@calhum.org, 415.391.1474 x303

California Humanities Announces Awardees of 2020 California Documentary Project Grants

16 Grantees Awarded \$420,000 for Production, Research & Development

(Oakland, CA) — California Humanities is pleased to announce \$420,000 in awards to 16 new projects through the 2020 California Documentary Project grants. Twelve of the awards are for Production Grants, and four are for Research and Development Grants.

The California Documentary Project (CDP) is a grant program that supports high-quality humanities-based media productions that seek to document California in all its complexity. Projects use the humanities to provide context, depth, and perspective; enhance our understanding of California and its cultures, peoples, and histories; and should be suitable for both California and national audiences.

This year, twelve Production Grants totaling \$380,000 and four Research and Development Grants totaling \$40,000 are awarded in support of documentary projects from independent filmmakers, podcasters, and public media organizations that shed light on current California issues, untold histories, and creative futures. From the first feature-length documentary to cover mothers of children who have been victims of racist violence, to a virtual reality project bringing to life the experience of a Japanese American teen in an incarceration camp during World War II, to a seven-part podcast and radio series exploring the people and culture of the San Joaquin Valley, each new project adds a layer to a complex and growing portrait of California.

The process in 2020 was highly competitive, with 168 proposals submitted, requesting a total amount of \$5.3 million. In all, California Humanities is able to fund 8% of the California Documentary Project requests it has received for 2020. Since 2003, California Humanities has awarded roughly \$5.5 million to film, radio, and interactive documentaries that inform and engage broad audiences through multiple means, including but not limited to radio and television broadcasts, podcasts, online, community screenings and discussions, classroom and library presentations, film festivals, and more.

“We’re grateful to have received so many applications and know that California is full of important stories that illustrate the diversity and richness of our state,” said Julie Fry, President & CEO of California Humanities. “We congratulate our newest grantees, knowing that the voices amplified by these grants will grow our collective understanding of the people and cultures of California. We’re pleased to be able to support more grantees this year than in prior rounds of the California Documentary Project, with more funds going to support filmmaking, audio production, and new media, thanks to first-ever investment this year by the State of California.”

2020 Research & Development Grants

BLACK MOTHERS

Project Director: Debora Souza Silva

Sponsor Organization: Kovno Communications, Inc.

BLACK MOTHERS is the first feature-length documentary to examine the “Mothers of the Movement”, a growing, nationwide network of mothers whose children have been victims of racist violence. With unprecedented access, the film follows the journeys of women working to disrupt the cycle of violence, including Wanda Johnson, a California mother who channels the pain of the murder of her child, Oscar Grant, into organizing for justice and accountability.

DELIVERING JUSTICE: A MOVEMENT IS BORN

Project Director: Jen Gilomen

Sponsor Organization: The Performance Zone, Inc

In the US, more and more women, especially women of color, die in childbirth each year. This feature documentary will investigate why, following women from all walks of life—pregnant mothers, midwives, researchers, and leaders—who are building a movement to achieve “birth equity.”

LIVE AT THE DEAF CLUB

Project Director: Delbert Whetter

Sponsor Organization: Film Independent

This documentary tells the story of how fledgling punk rockers in the late 1970s, desperate for a friendly venue at which to play their then-nascent punk rock, found an unlikely partner in the perpetually cash-strapped San Francisco Deaf Club. Faced with their surprising commonalities, the two marginalized groups work together to reinvent their lives and cultures.

NEW WAVE

Project Director: Elizabeth Ai

Sponsor Organization: Women Make Movies

NEW WAVE is an historical coming-of-age documentary about displaced Vietnamese refugee youth who fled their country by boat and then in the 1980s redefined their identities in suburban Orange County, California, through New Wave music. Through intimate accounts from Southern Californian Vietnamese music industry veterans, viewers will learn of how they healed and transformed by building a raucous music scene that the Vietnamese diaspora and fans worldwide still celebrates today, nearly 40 years later.

2020 CDP Production Grants

CITY LIGHTS

Project Director: Starr Sutherland

Sponsor Organization: Media Process Educational Films

One scrappy independent bookstore has survived the changing tides of the publishing world for seven decades—City Lights. A mainstay of San Francisco’s bohemian North Beach neighborhood since 1953, it is among the nation’s oldest independent bookstores and an icon in the industry. It also holds a special place in American literature as the rebellious publisher of unique voices, from the Beat poets of the 1950s to US Poet Laureates and a new generation of artists, poets, and activists keeping the City Lights spirit alive today.

DOG WALK HOME

Project Director: Vicki Topaz

Sponsor Organization: International Documentary Association

Set in Northern California, DOG WALK HOME tells the story of three US military veteran families struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the highly trained service

dogs that help alleviate its symptoms. Within the context of an ongoing national crisis in veterans' mental health care, the film explores how alternative treatments such as canine therapy can provide an unexpected and meaningful solution to the legacy of PTSD.

HOW TO ESCAPE FROM PRISON

Project Director: Elizabeth Mirzaei

Sponsor Organization: Film Independent

Each year thousands of California prisoners serving life sentences fight to get parole; one resolute Dominican nun has made it her mission to see them succeed through a training course of mock hearings and self-critique. HOW TO ESCAPE FROM PRISON traces the threads of four interwoven lives as they navigate California's fractured criminal justice system. Through these stories, the film amplifies the often-unheard voices in the conversation on recidivism, restorative justice, and prison reform.

LUSO-FORNIA

Project Director: David Grabias

Sponsor Organization: Filmforum, Inc.

Set in California's Central Valley, LUSO-FORNIA takes an impressionistic view of the relationship between humanity, nature, and spirituality. The film focuses on generations of immigrants in an isolated town who turn to their Portuguese heritage to find meaning and community through an annual religious and cultural celebration that culminates in a "bloodless" bullfight. LUSO-FORNIA documents and celebrates California's dairy lands and the often-overlooked beauty of its residents' lives.

NOVEMBER IN MY SOUL

Project Director: Lee Romney

Sponsor Organization: Independent Arts & Media

November In My Soul is a ten-part podcast series told through the voices of people who are incarcerated or civilly committed due to mental illness and their families, experts, and scholars. Grounded in legal, medical, cultural, and social history, the series contextualizes one of the greatest philosophical dilemmas and public policy challenges in California and throughout the US.

OH HAPPY DAY!

Project Director: Krystal Tingle

Sponsor Organization: International Documentary Association

The gospel music mega-hit "Oh Happy Day!" made international history when its joyous sound broke into mainstream radio in 1969, the first gospel song to achieve such heights. Behind the record's meteoric rise is a little-known story about the Hawkins family and their unassuming youth gospel choir from Oakland, California, who first recorded the hit. At the height of the civil rights movement, the teenage choir shattered walls of racism, religion, and homophobia and revolutionized gospel music.

THE OTHER CALIFORNIA PODCAST

Project Director: Alice Daniel

Sponsor Organization: Valley Public Radio

This seven-part podcast and broadcast series features in-depth audio storytelling about the people and culture of the San Joaquin Valley. Through reported pieces, interviews, and first-person narratives from each of the seven counties served by Valley Public Radio, the series brings listeners stories of life in a part of California that is at times overlooked by other media outlets. The station will conduct community engagement sessions for the series, and each episode will feature a segment driven by the voices of local youth.

SONG OF SALT

Project Director: Emma Baiada

Sponsor Organization: Center for Independent Documentary

This 90-minute film is a haunting yet hopeful glimpse into the everyday life of a small California desert town as it grapples with economic despair, isolation, and recovery following a series of powerful earthquakes. A microcosm of contemporary rural America, the town of Trona, California reflects the complexities, hardships, and small beauties that are revealed when we look beyond prevailing stereotypes to more closely observe a community's struggles and celebrations.

THE STANLEY HAYAMI VIRTUAL REALITY PROJECT

Project Director: Nonny de la Peña

Sponsor Organization: The Alliance for Media Arts + Culture

Using cutting-edge, immersive media, this virtual reality project brings to life the story of Japanese American teenager Stanley Hayami. Told through his letters, wartime diary, and personal artworks, the project traces his journey from home in the San Gabriel Valley to life in a concentration camp and military service during World War II. The interactive exhibit will on display at the Japanese American National Museum and online.

THE STOOP

Project Director: Leila Day

Sponsor Organization: Left of Center Gallery

THE STOOP is a podcast and radio series featuring stories from across the Black Diaspora that explore issues of identity, race, and questions that both African American and black immigrant communities are curious about. Using a combination of journalism, storytelling, music, on-location interviews, and creative sound design, THE STOOP is hosted by two black women journalists—an African American, and an African immigrant—based in the San Francisco Bay Area.

THIRD ACT

Project Director: Tadashi Nakamura

Sponsor Organization: LTSC Community Development Corporation

THIRD ACT is a documentary about 83-year-old filmmaker Robert (Bob) A. Nakamura, "the Godfather of Asian American film," as he reflects on his influential 50-year career, the intergenerational trauma and psychological wounds resulting from his family's incarceration during World War II, and his recent diagnosis of Parkinson's Disease. Directed by his son Tadashi, the film poses a question at once personal and universal: how can a father and son say goodbye?

VIVIEN'S WILD RIDE

Project Director: Vivien Hillgrove

Sponsor Organization: Swell Cinema

When veteran film editor Vivien Hillgrove starts to lose her eyesight, she embarks on an unconventional endeavor to create her own documentary memoir. Beginning in a home for unwed mothers in the era before Roe v. Wade, Hillgrove careens through San Francisco in the 1960s and reflects on her adventures as an editor and 50 years of Bay Area filmmaking. On her personal odyssey, she redefines kinship, conjures ghosts, develops a sensory survival manual, finds her artistic voice, and reminds us that disabilities can also open doors.

About California Humanities

California Humanities, a nonprofit partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities, promotes the humanities—focused on ideas, conversation and learning—as relevant, meaningful ways to understand the human condition and connect people to each other in order to help strengthen California. California Humanities has provided grants and programs across the state since 1975. To learn more, visit calhum.org, or like and follow on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).