



Directed by Dana Flor & Toby Oppenheimer

2016, 91 minutes, USA

[www.checkitfilm.com](http://www.checkitfilm.com)

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## LOGLINE

CHECK IT is a feature-length documentary about a black gay gang struggling to survive in one of Washington D.C.'s most violent neighborhoods.

## SYNOPSIS

At first glance, they seem unlikely gang-bangers. Some of the boys wear lipstick and mascara, some stilettos. They carry Louis Vuitton bags, but they also carry knives, brass knuckles and mace. As vulnerable gay and transgender youth, they've been shot, stabbed, and raped.

Once victims, they've now turned the tables, beating people into comas and stabbing enemies with ice picks. Started in 2009 by a group of bullied 9th graders, today these 14-22 year old gang members all have rap sheets riddled with assault, armed robbery, and drug dealing charges.

Led by an ex-convict named Mo, Check It members are now creating their own clothing label, putting on fashion shows and working stints as runway models. But breaking the cycle of poverty and violence they've grown up in is a daunting task.

Life for the Check It can be brutal, but – it's also full of hope and an indomitable resilience. At its heart, CHECK IT explores the undying friendship that exists between these kids – an unbreakable bond that is tested every day as they fight to stand up for who they are in a community relentlessly trying to beat them down.



## STATEMENT, DANA FLOR + TOBY OPPENHEIMER

When we tell people about the Check It, almost everyone says: “How could this be?” That, too, was our response when we first met the gang and it’s one of the reasons that made us want to make this film. It IS hard for us to understand how kids in the nation’s capital can grow up in abject poverty, be bullied, abused, thrown out of school, forced to band together for protection and, ultimately, sell themselves on the streets to survive. Even more unbelievable to us is the setting itself: the Check It constantly gather to steal, fight, and prostitute literally a few blocks from the White House. They operate in the shadows of the emblem of all the hopes and dreams America has to offer while the Check It, in many ways, embodies many of its biggest failures.

CHECK IT is that increasingly rare, all-access journey into an American subculture that has barely, if ever, been acknowledged, much less a centerpiece for a thoughtful, clear eyed documentary. We strongly believe that the hidden world of the gang and the complex social issues that they wrestle with needs widespread illumination.

The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the African American community has largely condemned homosexuality, forcing many deeper into the closet. This has helped create a public health emergency with astounding statistics: black gay men under 30 now have HIV rates on par with sub-Saharan Africa and are infected 50% higher than their white counterparts. Specifically, Washington, D.C. has the highest rate of HIV in the country, making it the epicenter of the AIDS crisis in the United States. The Check It kids embody this disaster. Many consider prostitution as their only option and too many are HIV-positive.

We live in an age where gay bashing worldwide is increasingly met with zero tolerance, but in the Check It’s neighborhoods and those like it, it happens with mind-numbing regularity and no media coverage. The Check It is one small gang in one city, but it reflects a national issue. Being gay in poor, violent African-American neighborhoods carries a dangerous stigma. For the Check It and those like them, standing up for who they are is more than an issue of gay pride—it’s risking their lives. While these kids are often living on the edge of danger—ultimately, their story - this story - is a universal one about hope and redemption against all odds.

## DIRECTOR Q+A

### ***What influenced this work***

We are both natives of the Washington D.C. area and have long been influenced by the fact that nowhere in America is the gulf between black & white and rich & poor wider, deeper and more evident than in the 69 square miles that make up the symbolic capital of the free world.

### ***What was your WOW moment during the film***

Throughout the making of our film, we had a recurring WOW moment when we would hear about the abuse, daily threats and contempt the kids in Check It have dealt with all of their lives and in spite of this, they manage to be full of joy, hope and pride. Wow.

### ***Obstacle in the making and how you overcame it***

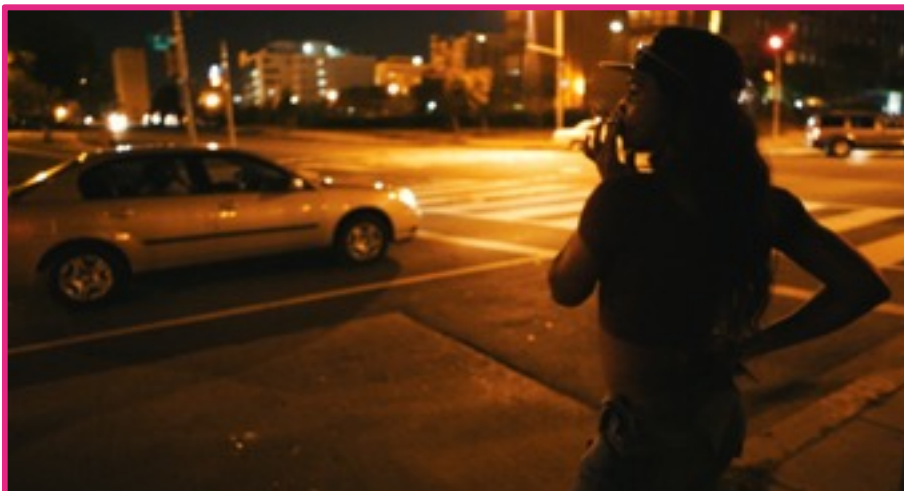
It's a challenge to gain the trust of kids who have been let down by many people and institutions that they have encountered in their lives. It took patience but most importantly time. We had to show that we were there for them for the long haul.

### ***One quality every filmmaker should have***

Every filmmaker should have a deep and abiding love if not obsession with their story. There are any number of demoralizing and enormous difficulties one encounters during the making of any film (looking for financing, distilling real life into story and exhaustion just to name a few) but we've found that what keeps us going is an intense fascination with our character's lives and the passionate conviction that their story needs widespread illumination.

### ***What social issue are you interested right now***

The growing disparity between the rich and poor. One of the biggest challenges we will face in the future.



## **CREW BIOS**

### **DANA FLOR – Director/Producer-Macro Pictures, LLC**

Dana Flor is a documentary director and producer based in Washington D.C. Teamed up with Toby Oppenheimer, she co-directed and produced **THE NINE LIVES OF MARION BARRY** – a feature length documentary about the infamous former DC mayor and politician that appeared on HBO and played Closing Night at the 2009 Silverdocs Film Festival. In addition to **THE NINE LIVES OF MARION BARRY**, Flor wrote and directed the Emmy award-winning documentary **LATINOS IN BEISBOL** and the Emmy-nominated documentary **CESAR CHAVEZ** for NBC. Flor also works on a wide range of stories for Reuters Television, CNN, National Geographic, and others, covering breaking news and producing in-depth features throughout Latin America and around the world.

### **TOBY OPPENHEIMER – Director/Producer/Cinematographer – Macro Pictures, LLC**

Toby Oppenheimer is a documentary director, producer, and cinematographer based in Brooklyn, NY. Along with Dana Flor, he co-directed/produced and shot **THE NINE LIVES OF MARION BARRY** – a feature-length documentary about the infamous former D.C. mayor and politician that appeared on HBO and played Closing Night at the 2009 Silverdocs Film Festival. Oppenheimer directed two documentaries in 2011 for MSNBC Films – **THE MCVEIGH TAPES AND THE ASSASSINATION OF DR. TILLER** – and co-produced **DEVIL’S PLAYGROUND**, the Emmy-nominated film about Amish teenagers that premiered at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival. He has directed, produced and shot on a wide range of subjects for PBS, CNN, BBC, A&E, Pivot, The History Channel, VH1, The Sundance Channel, Bravo and many others.

Along with directing and producing **CHECK IT** with Flor, the team is also shooting a feature-length film about Randall Terry, the Koran-burning, anti-abortion, anti-gay, pro-Tea Party founder of Operation Rescue and his extraordinary family made up of staunchly feminist aunts, an adopted African-American gay activist son, and a Muslim convert daughter.

### **WREN ARTHUR – PRODUCER**

Wren Arthur is a producer who for many years worked for the legendary American film director, Robert Altman, helping him to develop and produce **THE GINGERBREAD MAN**, **COOKIE’S FORTUNE**, **DR. T & THE WOMEN**, **THE COMPANY** and **GOSFORD PARK**. She also developed and produced **A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION** and **TANNER ON TANNER**. In 2008, Arthur formed **OLIVE PRODUCTIONS** with Steve Buscemi and Stanley Tucci. At **OLIVE**, she has produced the Emmy-winning documentary, **MEDORA**, the Emmy-nominated web series, **PARK BENCH**, the HBO documentary, **A GOOD JOB: STORIES OF THE**

FDNY, Amber Tamblyn's directorial debut, PAINT IT BLACK, and BLUE ANGEL, directed by Richard Levine and starring Stanley Tucci.

### **OLIVE PRODUCTIONS – Executive Producers**

OLIVE PRODUCTIONS is a New York based production company formed by **Steve Buscemi**, **Stanley Tucci**, and **Wren Arthur**. OLIVE is diverse in its tastes and casts a wide creative net. The company seeks to produce narrative and documentary films, and an eclectic array of TV projects. OLIVE has numerous projects in development with a myriad of talented directors and writers. Using their combined and extensive experience, the company's mandate is to tell stories with great characters, humor, compassion and truth above all. Recent credits include the Emmy-winning documentary, MEDORA, the Emmy-nominated web series, PARK BENCH, the HBO documentary, A GOOD JOB: STORIES OF THE FDNY, Amber Tamblyn's directorial debut, PAINT IT BLACK, and BLUE ANGEL, directed by Richard Levine and starring Stanley Tucci.

### **RADICALMEDIA - EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS**

RadicalMedia is a global studio that creates some of the world's most innovative content across all forms of media. The company develops, produces, and distributes television, feature films, commercials, music programming, live events, mobile applications, digital content and location-based experiences.

Radical has produced a number of films telling nuanced, multi-faceted stories including: the Academy Award-nominated, Grammy-nominated documentary *What Happened, Miss Simone?* and the acclaimed *Keith Richards: Under the Influence*, both for Netflix; the Academy Award and Independent Spirit Award-winning documentary, *The Fog of War*; Grammy-winning *Concert for George*; *Under African Skies*, Joe Berlinger's Emmy Award-winning documentary examining the making of the groundbreaking and controversial Paul Simon record Graceland; The Ron Howard-helmed Jay-Z documentary, *Made In America*; Joe Berlinger's critically-acclaimed and Independent Spirit Award-winning documentary, *Metallica: Some Kind of Monster*; the Academy Award and multiple Emmy-nominated, *Paradise Lost 3: Purgatory*; and *Whitey: The United States vs. James J. Bulger*.

Television credits include five seasons of *Oprah's Master Class* (OWN), six seasons of *Iconoclasts* (Sundance), *David Blaine: Real or Magic* (ABC), *Telescope* (Discovery), and the web-based series for AOL, *Park Bench with Steve Buscemi*. Upcoming projects include *American Idol: American Dream* on FOX, *MARS* for National Geographic, *Hamilton's America* for PBS, and *Judgment Day: Prison or Parole?* for Investigation Discovery.

## ***CHECK IT in the Press...***

“Check It is consistently compelling, with a brisk pace and vivid personalities making up for the occasional unanswered question. Assembly is aptly not over-slick but energetically well-turned.” -**Variety**

“Oppenheimer and Flor capture striking, unmediated moments of humor, violence, insight, and beauty.” - **Brooklyn Magazine**

“Check It is full of broad strokes illustrating the abhorrent realities of disparity, but nuances sneak up on you as these kids share their world views in casual conversation.” - **Gawker**

“The new documentary 'Check It' gives a voice to a forgotten subculture for which self-expression is simultaneously dangerous and all-important.” - **Vice i-D**

“Hope and motivation for a life away from gang violence came through an unusual outlet: fashion. The film shows Day Day, Tray, Star and Skittles as they work to produce a local fashion show and eventually travel to New York Fashion Week to work the shows backstage. A clothing line, Check It Enterprises, was launched afterwards; the unisex clothes are designed and made by Check It members and, for now, are available only online.” - **WWD**

“Living in one of the most dangerous neighborhoods of nation's capital, the gang is now working to create their own clothing label, hosting fashion shows and working jobs as runway models.” - **Indiewire**



## **CREDITS**

**DIRECTED AND PRODUCED BY**  
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JEFF KEILER

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ALL THE GIRLS ON K STREET  
THE SUGAR RAY LEONARD BOXING GYM  
TWO SHARP AND JAMES JOHNSON  
THE WOODLAND TERRACE COMMUNITY CENTER  
REVERAND TONY LEE AND THE COMMUNITY OF HOPE AME CHURCH  
CESAR GALINDO  
THE JARMAL HARRIS PROJECT  
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ADDITIONAL RECORDING BY ED MCENTEE AT STERLING SOCIETY SO-  
CIAL CLUB, BROOKLYN  
ASSISTED BY KATE LUCAS

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BILL DOBROW - DRUMS  
DAVE EGGAR - CELLO  
ROB JOST - BASS  
PETER LALISH - ELECTRIC GUITAR  
ELIZABETH ZIMAN - KEYBOARDS



**MUSIC (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)**

SHOW MY ASS  
PRODUCED BY: DAVID ALEXANDER  
PERFORMED BY:  
DOMINIQUE YOUNG UNIQUE  
LABEL: ART JAM

UNDER THE BOARDWALK  
SONGWRITERS: RESNICK ARTHUR, YOUNG KENNY  
PERFORMED BY: THE DRIFTERS  
PUBLISHERS: ALLEY MUSIC CORP, TRIO MUSIC COMPANY

GETTING LOOT  
PERFORMED BY: LIL BENNY- FEATURING SHORTY CORLEONE  
PUBLISHER: INNOVATIVE RECORDINGS

COFFEE SHOP  
PERFORMED & WRITTEN BY REACTION

GEORGIA BOY  
WRITTEN BY: FAIRFAX REUBEN JR, AL GREEN AND JORDAN FRED  
PERFORMED BY: AL GREEN  
PUBLISHERS: AL GREEN MUSIC INC, IRVING MUSIC INC

LAURA  
WRITTEN BY DAVID SCOTT HOFFMAN, JASON SELLARDS  
PERFORMED BY: SCISSOR SISTERS  
PUBLISHERS: B2D2, FILTHY GORGEOUS

GOODIE GOODIES  
PERFORMED & WRITTEN BY CAKES DA KILLA

I RUN THIS CLUB  
PERFORMED & WRITTEN BY CAKES DA KILLA

MY CREW  
PERFORMED & WRITTEN BY LAMONT CLEMONS

GOING MY WAY  
PERFORMED BY DART PARTY  
COMPOSED BY GARRISON HENDRICK, MICHAEL HURTT

MATTER  
WRITTEN BY WARREN BECHTOLT, CLAIRE EVANS, ROB KIESWETTER

PERFORMED BY:YACHT

THE ENTERTAINMENT  
WRITTEN BY WARREN BECHTOLT, CLAIRE EVANS, ROB KIESWETTER  
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**FOOTAGE**

ABC NEWS- WJLA



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**R.I.P DENARD WRIGHT  
SEPTEMBER 28, 1994-JULY 19, 2014**