

# From script to screen

*Port Chester film and television production student Ebony Washington discusses current, future projects*

BY JAMIE KERNER

Port Chester's Bethesda Baptist Church was out of its usual order late last week. A film crew took the place of the clergy, its regular congregation was replaced with actors, and the church's usual musician adopted the role of pastor.

What is the reason behind this abnormality? Ebony Washington.

Washington, a graduate student studying film and television production at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Conn., turned the 136 William St. church into a film set from July 5-7 to work on a short movie she wrote and produced.

Per a class assignment, the Indian Road resident and her peers were tasked with creating their own short films. The students had to write the script, raise funds to use as a budget and secure a location for their set.

Washington realized she already had the perfect location: the very church where she practically grew up. As the daughter of Reverend Gerald Washington, pastor of Bethesda Baptist Church, Ebony spent a lot of time there throughout her life and knew all the ins and outs of the building. She even knew when the Bible that laid on the pulpit in front of the church's altar was opened to a different page.

"It was always open to this page when I was little, so now whenever I see it, I flip back to it if it's not already there," she said as she turned the pages of the Bible to find the one that showed the picture of Daniel in the lion's den.

Washington used her resources to solidify the church for her film set.



**Ebony Washington's graduate school colleagues shoot film footage outside Bethesda Baptist Church from July 5-7. Washington's father, Rev. Gerald Washington, is pastor of that church.**

COURTESY OF EBONY WASHINGTON

"If you're a film student, you have to find places you have access to," the 26-year-old said. "I had access to the church, so I wrote the script for [it]. That was how I got inspired by that."

Washington's short film, titled "Blessed Are the Hypocrites," tells the story of a retiring pastor looking to pass the church down to one of his two sons. As the elder son vies for the approval of his father, he soon learns this is something not attainable after watching him hand the church over to his younger brother.

Inspired by television shows, dramas and her favorite showrunner Shonda Rhimes, Washington knew her film had to include a big twist. In the end, the protagonist learns that he cannot get the approval he desires because he is not actually the pastor's son.

The film's 10-person crew was comprised of Washington and her colleagues, who took on various other jobs related to film production, such as director, production assistant and sound person.



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**Indian Road resident Ebony Washington discusses her current and future film projects and career aspirations at Bethesda Baptist Church at 136 William St. on Monday, July 9.**

SARAH WOLPOFF | WESTMORE NEWS

According to Washington, she and her peers take on different responsibilities on each other's sets. That way, they can experience all the movie-making elements.

"I wrote it and produced it, so someone else directed it," she said. "Now, I am going to direct somebody else's, and another day I'm going to maybe be a PA (production assistant) on someone's set or do something like makeup."

Now that filming has concluded, one of Washington's classmates will edit it, which she thinks will take about one or two months. Following the editing process, and depending on how the final project turns out, Washington hopes to submit it to film festivals.

"We're going to look and see what film festivals we can submit it into," she said. "As many as we can, if it comes out great."

Aside from working on this short film, the aspiring script-writer spends time writing for her own endeavors. For the last year, she has been writing a script for the Lifetime television network in France. She finished the final draft of it last month.

The movie will be filmed in the U.S., dubbed in French and then released in France on their Lifetime network, she said. Until they begin filming, Washington is unable to release further details about it.

Because Washington has lived in Port Chester, which she described as a tight-knit community, her whole life, she prefers working with small film crews.

"On set, I like to work with the same people sometimes instead of new ones because I know I am familiar with them," she said. "Like family, community. It's just like a small town and that's influenced...me because I like that about Port Chester."

The short film assignment was designed to help students build up their portfolios and prepare for a larger piece, a thesis project, they will have to shoot next year. Because Washington is inspired by television dramas and wants to pursue a career in writing for such shows, she said she is focusing her thesis on a television pilot.

"I want to tell stories that people don't really hear all the time," she said. "I like the feeling I get when I watch TV and I'm in someone else's world and I can't stop watching and I want to binge it. I want to provide that for other people and give them something else to focus on other than what's going on now in the world."