HEALING BULB PRODUCTIONS

in Association with

INSPIRE JUSTICE PRODUCTION



SET HER FREE

A FILM BY

DR. JAMILA T. DAVIS

Social Impact Award
Orlando Urban Film Festival
2026

Winner
KNOXVILLE INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN FILM FESTIVAL
2026

BEST HOMEGROWN NJ DOCUMENTARY
New Jersey Documentary Film Festival
Set Her Free

Finalist Best Documentary
Whistleblower Summit & Film Festival
2026

24TH OAKLAND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
SEP 9-19, 2026
OIFF.ORG

OFFICIAL SELECTION
International Black Film Festival
2026

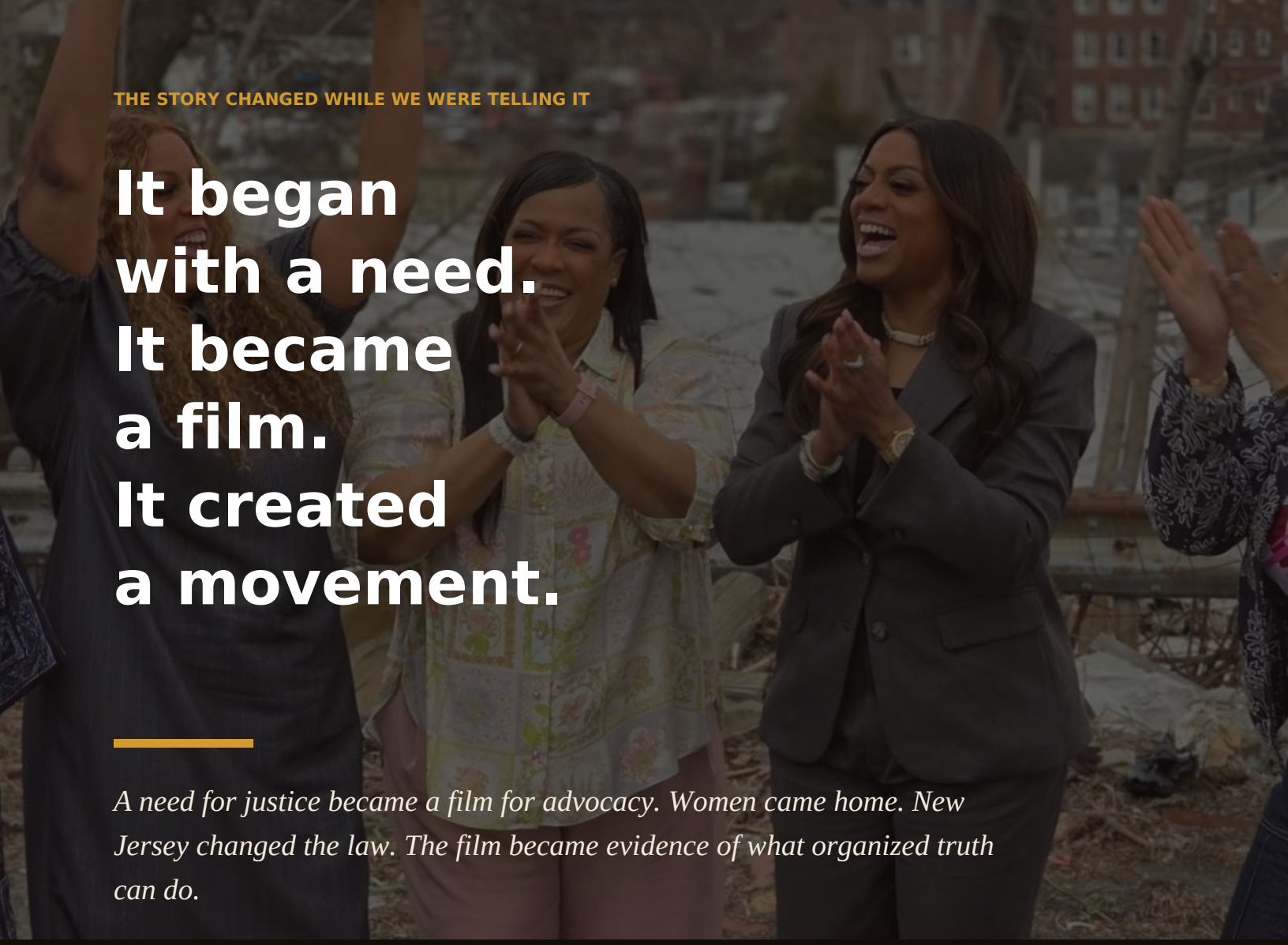
OFFICIAL SELECTION
LightReel Film Festival
2026

OFFICIAL SELECTION
Greenwood Film Festival
2026

OFFICIAL SELECTION
2026 SJV BlackSno Film Festival
2026

OFFICIAL SELECTION
Queen City Film Festival
2026

OFFICIAL SELECTION
Teaneck International Film Festival
2026



THE STORY CHANGED WHILE WE WERE TELLING IT

It began with a need. It became a film. It created a movement.

A need for justice became a film for advocacy. Women came home. New Jersey changed the law. The film became evidence of what organized truth can do.

SET HER FREE

A film about survivors became a platform for public testimony, coalition-building, policy reform, clemency, commutation, and a national conversation still growing.

CHAPTER ONE | THE INVITATION

The Day It All Began

Before there was a film, a campaign, or a bill, there was a community gathering inside a Newark church.



From left: Deputy Mayor Lakeisha Ury; Nafeesah Goldsmith; Commissioner Victoria L. Kuhn, Esq.; Dr. Jamila T. Davis; and Talitha Turner.

At this town hall, Dr. Davis met Nafeesah Goldsmith and New Jersey Department of Corrections Commissioner Victoria L. Kuhn, Esq. Nafeesah made the introduction that opened the door for Dr. Davis to visit the women at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility.

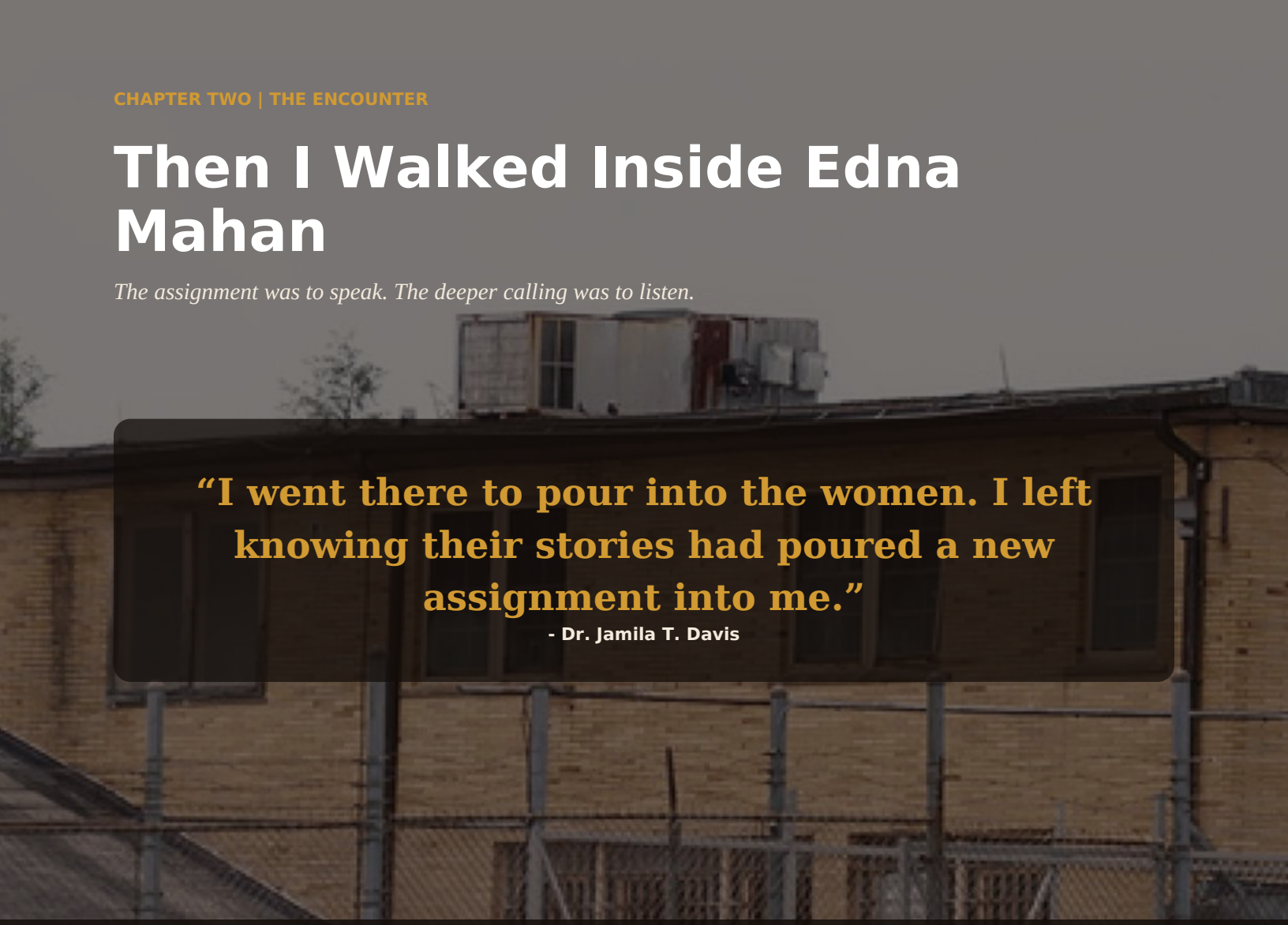
ONE INTRODUCTION BECAME AN INVITATION. ONE INVITATION CHANGED THE DIRECTION OF THE WORK.

Nafeesah would become a principal cast member, survivor advocate, and essential voice in Set Her Free.

CHAPTER TWO | THE ENCOUNTER

Then I Walked Inside Edna Mahan

The assignment was to speak. The deeper calling was to listen.



> **“I went there to pour into the women. I left knowing their stories had poured a new assignment into me.”**
>
> **- Dr. Jamila T. Davis**

Dr. Davis entered the facility expecting to encourage the women. Instead, she encountered a loving community whose lives had been shaped by domestic violence, untreated trauma, and sentences that rarely reflected the full truth of what they had survived.

Although her own incarceration had been in the federal system, the connection was immediate. Their humanity, resilience, and unfinished stories made it impossible to walk away unchanged.

THE VISIT DID NOT END AT THE PRISON DOOR. IT BECAME A COMMITMENT TO HELP BRING WOMEN HOME.

Exterior photograph: Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women. Photo via New Jersey Monitor.

Cass Kept Saying Her Name: Natasha White

Long before the documentary had an ending, friendship gave the movement its clearest promise.



Natasha White while incarcerated; Natasha in the free world; and the community campaign calling for her freedom.

Cassandra “Cass” Severe had been Dr. Davis’s mentee and life-coaching client when Dr. Davis began her doctoral work at Newark’s Shani Baraka Women’s Resource Center after coming home from prison.

Cass repeatedly spoke about her friend Natasha, a domestic-violence survivor incarcerated at Edna Mahan. Her request was personal and unwavering: Natasha needed to come home.

THE FILM WOULD ASK THE PUBLIC TO SEE NATASHA. THE MOVEMENT WOULD REFUSE TO LET THE SYSTEM FORGET HER.

Her freedom became both a central story in the film and a measure of whether advocacy could produce a real-world outcome.

JLove Helped Give the Movement a Cinematic Voice

Advocacy held the urgency. Direction gave that urgency shape, rhythm, intimacy, and reach.



JLOVE CALDERON

DIRECTOR | PRODUCER | STORYTELLER

When Dr. Davis recognized the need for a documentary, she reached out to JLove, a trusted collaborator and filmmaker grounded in justice-centered storytelling.

JLove helped transform lived experience, survivor testimony, and a developing policy campaign into a coherent cinematic story - one that could protect the women's dignity while helping audiences understand the systems surrounding their lives.

Her direction helped the film hold pain and possibility at the same time.

The need came first. The film became the advocacy tool. JLove helped make that tool emotionally honest, visually powerful, and capable of traveling far beyond the rooms where the work began.

STORYTELLING DID NOT REPLACE THE ADVOCACY. IT HELPED THE ADVOCACY REACH PEOPLE.

JLove Calderon on set during production of Set Her Free.

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

From film to State House

The film reached festival audiences. The women carried their stories into the campaign for sentencing reform.

12 Festival recognitions

3 Festival wins

2 New Jersey bills enacted

4 Cast members received commutations



At the New Jersey State House, survivors stood with advocates and lawmakers during the campaign for reform.

New Jersey Senate announcement

Set Her Free Was Born in Newark

The women were never case studies. They were the witnesses, advocates, experts, and architects of change.







A movement enters production: testimony on camera, a committed crew, and every frame built with purpose.

Dr. Davis called filmmaker and longtime collaborator JLove Calderon with a clear idea: create a documentary that could serve the advocacy. Filming began at Newark City Hall and the Shani Baraka Women’s Resource Center, the same community where Dr. Davis had begun her own work after prison.

- **Cass Severe, Nafeesah Goldsmith, and Donna Hylton** shared testimony rooted in survival and leadership.
- **Made the trauma-to-prison pipeline** visible and understandable.
- **Connected Natasha White's case** to a broader demand for survivor justice.
- **Turned storytelling** into an instrument for organizing, education, and reform.

Four sentence commutations

The experiences of four women in the film show what a second look at a sentence can mean.



Advocates together at the New Jersey State House. Previously featured in All News Black Women's Boots on the Ground series.

DECEMBER 2024

Governor Phil Murphy granted clemency to Dawn Jackson, Denise Staples and Myrna Diaz, commuting their sentences.

JANUARY 2026

Governor Murphy also commuted Natasha White's sentence. Natasha shared her story in the film in an interview recorded from prison.

ACLU-NJ: December 2024 announcement

ACLU-NJ: January 2026 announcement

A Proven Idea Crossed State Lines

Donna Hylton helped bring the lessons of New York's survivor justice law to New Jersey. Senator Angela McKnight helped move those lessons into legislation.



Donna Hylton brings survivor-centered policy experience before New Jersey lawmakers.

A5968

ABUSE MAY BE CONSIDERED AS A MITIGATING FACTOR AT SENTENCING

A5969

EXPANDED CRIMINAL-RECORD EXPUNGEMENT RELIEF FOR SURVIVORS

Dr. Davis invited Donna Hylton into the work because Donna had helped win New York's Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act. Dr. Davis introduced her to Senator McKnight, and advocates, survivors, and the senator's team worked together over months as the film continued. The New Jersey reforms moved lived experience into law.

RECOGNITION AND REACH

The Work Entered the Public Record

The movement was recognized by the New Jersey Senate and documented as a model of survivor-led reform.





Black Girls Bond coverage and the New Jersey Senate resolution honoring Set Her Free and its contributors.

EARNED MEDIA

Black Girls Bond published “From Prison to Policy,” documenting how justice-impacted women helped pass the Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act.

STATE RECOGNITION

A Senate resolution by Senator McKnight honored the people who made Set Her Free possible and recognized their advocacy for survivors.

Together, the coverage and resolution preserve the movement as more than a moment: they place the women, the film, and the policy victory in the public record.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Screenings Became Organizing Spaces

Viewing became dialogue. Dialogue became relationships. Relationships strengthened action.



Cast members and movement leaders at the Set Her Free screening at Kean University.

- **NJPAC** presented the film through Women@NJPAC and PSEG Foundation Social Impact programming.
- **Kean University** expanded the film's academic and cultural reach.
- **Festival screenings** carried the story beyond New Jersey to new regional audiences.
- **Talkbacks** connected survivors, lawmakers, advocates, reentry leaders, artists, and community members.

THE CONVENING POWER IS PART OF THE IMPACT.

The film gives people who do not ordinarily share a room a shared language for trauma, accountability, healing, and freedom.

CULTURAL REACH

When Powerful Voices Stand With the Story

The Kean University event helped the film reach beyond policy spaces and into culture.



Dr. Jamila T. Davis with Ms. Lauryn Hill and members of the Set Her Free community at Kean University.

Ms. Lauryn Hill came to support the film and offered reflections on the spiritual dimensions of trauma, truth, and freedom. Excerpts shared online drew strong, positive response, showing that Set Her Free can unlock conversations that are legal, emotional, cultural, and spiritual at once.

WHY VISIBILITY MATTERS

A recognized cultural voice can bring new audiences into a story. That visibility is strongest when it remains rooted in the women, the issue, and the movement the film was created to serve.

Event appearance shown using production-supplied photography. Expanded use of remarks, music, or formal credit remains subject to separate agreement.

FESTIVAL MOMENTUM

12 festivals. 3 wins.

Each recognition is listed by its highest distinction. Finalists, nominees and selections are not counted as wins.



Social Impact Film Winner

Orlando Urban Film Festival



Gold Award

Knoxville International Christian Film Festival



Best Homegrown NJ Documentary

New Jersey Documentary Film Festival

FINALISTS, NOMINEE & HONORABLE MENTION

Social Justice Feature Finalist
Jackson Doc Fest

Best Documentary Finalist
Whistleblower Summit & Film Festival

Best Documentary Nominee
Queen City Film Festival

Honorable Mention
SJV BlackSno Film Festival

OFFICIAL SELECTIONS

Oakland International Film Festival

International Black Film Festival

LightReel Film Festival

Greenwood Film Festival

Teaneck International Film Festival



Cast and guests at the NJPAC premiere and talkback.

Photo: Heartwork Media

Jackson Doc Fest finalist listing

Teaneck festival film roster

A LIVING DOCUMENTARY

The Film Changed Because History Changed

The definitive edition carries outcomes that did not exist when production began.







As the advocacy advanced, the film captured celebration, solidarity, and history changing in real time.

01 **NEW FOOTAGE**

Screenings, advocacy, policy victory, clemency, commutation, and women coming home.

02 **ORIGINAL SCORE**

New music and sound work strengthening the emotional journey.

03 **FINAL FINISHING**

Color correction, mix, captions, clearances, and delivery materials.

04 **NEW POSITIONING**

Set Her Free: When the Movement Wins reflects the full-circle story.

The work beyond the film

Survivors told their own stories. Public screenings brought those stories into community spaces and policy conversations.



NJPAC premiere talkback / Heartwork Media

Survivor leadership

The women spoke on screen and before lawmakers, bringing firsthand experience into the debate.

Policy and clemency

New Jersey enacted two reforms. Four featured women received sentence commutations through a separate executive clemency process.

Festival reach

Twelve festival recognitions, including three wins, brought the film to audiences in documentary, social-impact and community spaces.

THE NEXT CHAPTER

Bring the film to audiences

Set Her Free is seeking screening hosts, educators and distribution partners who can carry the story into new communities.

Distribution and acquisition

Broadcast, streaming, theatrical and documentary partners may request a private screener.

Host a screening

Invite a campus, cultural institution, faith community or justice organization to screen the film and convene a discussion.

Education and impact partnerships

Explore facilitated use in classrooms, professional training, survivor support and community learning.

Contact the Set Her Free team

THE STORY CONTINUES

Natasha White

Natasha told her story in her own words in an interview the film recorded while she was incarcerated.



Natasha White during her Set Her Free interview.

Cassandra “Cass” Severe kept speaking about her friend Natasha and why her story needed to be heard. In January 2026, Governor Phil Murphy granted Natasha clemency and commuted her sentence.

Read the ACLU of New Jersey announcement



CLOSING REFLECTION

The Movement Won Something Real

> **“This film is my love letter to every woman who ever thought her story was over.”**

DR. JAMILA T. DAVIS

When Set Her Free began, there was no guarantee the law would pass or that women would come home. Today, the film stands as a record of survivor leadership, friendship, faith, advocacy, coalition, policy change, and freedom.

NOT SIMPLY FOR US - BUT FOR EVERY WOMAN THESE CONVERSATIONS CAN HELP SET FREE.