

LEROY: Ok, my name is Leroy Moore. I'm from Berkeley, California. I'm a Black, Disabled activist. I'm involved with the National Black Disability Coalition out of New Jersey. Also involved with Krip-Hop Nation and a whole host of other groups. I'm also a poet and a journalist and also collect Black, Disabled history. So that's me.

JACKIE: Hi, my name is Jackie Pilgrim, and I am a Black woman diagnosed with Asperger's Disorder. I also have a young son who is also on the spectrum. And I am an advocate for Autism. I also write and do drawings, painting, sculpting, and I am a blogger.

CHERYL: And I'm Cheryl Green. I am a white, Disabled activist. I'm primarily a filmmaker and blogger and podcaster. And I sometimes do some consulting around technology and media with the National Black Disability Coalition, and I'm on the Board of the Disability Art and Culture Project in Portland.

LEROY: Great. So we're here to discuss the "Best Kept Secret." Right? It's a documentary about-- correct me if I'm wrong--about a group of students in a day program or special education.

JACKIE: Special ed classroom in JFK, yes.

LEROY: Yeah, thank you. One of the reasons that it was so, that it caught our attention because it dealt with a lot of Black, Disabled students.

JACKIE: I think the thing that really caught my attention was that not only that it was about the inner-city students in a classroom, and they were Black students. But it just kinda represented a large population of people that have been, I think, overlooked. I was glad that this film was made so that it would give people a chance who do not experience, do not have the special needs experience on this level. It gives people a chance to kind of peer in and see what's happening or see the kind of dynamic, the mindset behind it, that kind of thing. Cuz a lot of times when it comes to talking about inner-city youth or lower income or however you wanna term it, a lotta times that's not talked about.

LEROY: Mmhmm.

JACKIE: So I think that this is a good thing to happen because now it's actually out there, and we have something to talk about, something tangible that people have been able to see.

LEROY: Yeah.

CHERYL: I don't have anything to add to that. I know that was a lovely description. I think one of the things that brought me to this conversation with the two of you, though, was critiquing the film.

LEROY: Yeah.

CHERYL: There is a lot to praise, but I wanted to join the conversation, actually, to critique it!

JACKIE: Absolutely, absolutely.

LEROY: Yeah.

JACKIE: Cuz there definitely are pros and cons.

LEROY: Yeah, definitely. Definitely, yeah. I got a lotta things to say about the film. Let's start with the filmmakers, if you wanna start there.

JACKIE: Cheryl, did you wanna start us in on that one.

CHERYL: Sure. I would be happy to because this is my main area of criticism that I feel I can give of this film. And that is because I am a white documentary filmmaker, and I am trying to study social justice. And I'm trying to study what it means to do a participatory documentary. Because what typically happens, and what happened with this film, is the white filmmakers say, "Ooh! Look at these people! I can make a great story about them." And what I don't see is these lower-income, Black families having any participation in the film other than having been filmed. I don't see them participating. And my biggest critique and where I see that was in the interview that comes after the film. So you used to be able to watch it free on PBS. The interview with the filmmakers is still up there. I found the interview very troubling, and I found the filmmakers' attitude towards the families and the students extremely troubling. I don't know if you want me to go into more detail about it right now?

JACKIE: Yeah!

LEROY: Yeah, go for it.

JACKIE: Yeah, because I'm ready to chime in. I wanna hear your take on that, and then I was gonna chime in and talk about what I saw when I watched the interview.

CHERYL: Sure. Well, first of all, where do I start? [laughs] One problem is that the--I'm saying "filmmakers." And when I say that, I refer to the Director, Samantha Buck, and the Producer, Danielle DiGiacomo. So those two I'm calling the filmmakers. Neither of them knew anything about Autism or really much about disability or special education before they started. But in the course of making this one film, they now talk as if they're experts on all the topics. That's a problem to me. Another problem is that in the interview, when they're talking about what this film is about, to them it's just about people with autism are people too!

JACKIE: Yeah.

CHERYL: Sadly, we are at that point where we still have to say that. But I actually thought the film was about economic and racial disparity. And they didn't seem to notice that even though they made the film. So that's one of my major critiques of it. They were really moved by the humanity and the universal themes of love and being a teenager. But I don't think that's good enough for a documentary like this. I don't understand why the filmmakers won't talk about race, ethnicity, poverty, inequality, yeah. I have a lot more to say, but I'd like to get a little response from someone else before I keep going.

JACKIE: Can I chime in on that? I wanna respond to that. I don't think that the filmmakers can really grasp disparity because they don't understand it. It takes more than just going into a community and raising a camera and pointing it and looking at a subject and trying to humanize a person who's already human. It takes more than that to convey a message. But they can't understand the impoverishment because that is not a personal experience of theirs. And that's where I tend to come in and say that before you send a person out--or before a person goes--into a community that they're unfamiliar with, that they need to truly grasp and understand what that is like. And I would really stress that they go through some training where they themselves are at least put in the mindset of being in that position so they can understand what it is to not be privileged. If you are privileged, and you go into an unprivileged situation, then you're not going to capture that because that's not in your scope. It's just not possible, in my opinion.

CHERYL: I would add to everything you said that I would like to see people like Samantha Buck and Danielle DiGiacomo partnering with people who already live in that community.

LEROY: Yeah, yeah.

JACKIE: Yeah.

CHERYL: Or letting them make the film instead of coming in as the White Saviors and filming them and saying, "We got your story done for you!" Why do they think no one in that community is capable of making their own film, is my question.

JACKIE: You know what? Again, and I'm gonna put it this way. This is just my take. I think when people come into a situation like that--people outside of the situation--I think there's a measure of notoriety and accolade that they themselves are looking for. And if they hand the reins over to people who know, then they are less likely to get the accolades. You see what I'm saying? Cuz really what I saw was it was all about these two women. One young woman who has a family member that has a special need, and she specified that this family member was in a middle class family but still had some disparity. Because of that, she had some curiosity about that. So then, she partners with another person, and they say, "Hey! Let's see if we can make this happen!" And then we have a political figure who is a friend of Samantha's and says, "Why

don't you come look at the schools in New Jersey?" So it's kind of like [short interruption] it's like they brainstormed one day over a cup of coffee and said, "Hey, let's try this project and see what happens." And then, when they came into it, and they saw the children in there, it was heartfelt and everything. It drummed up an emotion, which leads them to say, "Oh, these subjects have a heartbeat. And they have a life." Well, duh. You know, that's the whole thing. I think the film is good in terms of, when I say it's good, it does give people a chance to kind of peer in, like standing outside looking in. But we're seeing it through the eyes of people that do not know the level of disparity. They have no way of comprehending it.

LEROY: I totally agree about what Cheryl was saying about if you're gonna come into a community and do a whole documentary and not even let the community have control, it's basically you know a Hollywood kinda way of doing movies, which is here comes Superman with his cape hero. If you're gonna do that--which they did anyway--then at least have the parents or the students really talk about it, you know? I mean because it seemed like they had the control of the frame of the film. And the frame of the film is the film, you know? So you have that control of the frame, and you don't have the people inside the frame talking about their real issues, then for me it's a no-brainer. It's like it's really not a film about them. It's a film about what they see, what the filmmakers see.

JACKIE: Yeah, from their perspective. Absolutely.

CHERYL: Yeah. I think it's a very dangerous trap for white filmmakers to fall into. And it's certainly something that I have been taught in studying filmmaking. One thing that I've been taught is if you have the passion for a certain subject, then you are qualified to make the film about that subject. And I take great issue with that because that's just gonna continue to perpetuate people who have access to resources swooping into a community, whipping out a film, and running off and being the spokespeople for that film. I mean, that is what happened here. And sadly, that is part of the training in some areas in documentary that that's Ok to do that.

LEROY: Yeah.

CHERYL: I think that not enough white filmmakers--and I would add to that, non-disabled filmmakers--recognize that disability status, that race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, all of these different things are pieces of culture. And just because you're a little more privileged doesn't give you the right to just storm in and say what someone else's story is.

LEROY: And that's another thing that I'd like to bring up is that the whole film really doesn't talk about disability culture, the history, the arts. It's only talking about some research. So once again, you're missing the whole, the whole back story. And probably--we don't know, but probably--in that community, they probably, that back story around disability culture, disability

art is not there because to tell you the truth, the disability rights arena is so one color that people of color with disabilities don't have the access to really enjoy disability culture, the arts. I do Krip-Hop, disabled hip hop artists. And when I do my events and my workshops, some Black parents think, "Oh. We never heard of this." So that's another avenue, if the filmmakers are really down with the community, would really add that into the film, you know?

CHERYL: There are a bunch of documents that Jackie sent us that go along with the film. One of them is called "About the Characters." And I was really, really sad to look at that. They've got very beautiful pictures of the different people in the film.

JACKIE: Yes.

CHERYL: The characters: "Eric. Smart, talkative, good at following directions. He is happy. He has a dream to work at Burger King." "Quoran is able to read, successfully controls his social behavior." I mean, these descriptions!

JACKIE: Yeah.

CHERYL: And the worse one is Robert. "Robert is the biggest mystery and source of heartbreak in the class." You know, when you are describing people like that, I'm not so sure I even wanna watch this movie.

LEROY: Yeah.

CHERYL: These are awful descriptions of characters. I don't see respect for them. I don't see them described as full, complex people. Robert's a source of heartbreak! Eric can read! You know, it's like, what are you setting up?

JACKIE: It's very clinical.

CHERYL: Yeah.

JACKIE: It's very clinical. But that's what you have to understand. When people come in on their Great White Horse, they're not coming in from a perspective of we've got to really send out a message. It's coming in as a source of curiosity. This is the whole thing I'm talking about. I can sit here all day and talk about how wrong this is. But the greater problem is people are not-- they're being sent out into the world uneducated. They're not taught these angles to look at. And it's not part of their genetic makeup. It's not part of the history. So they're not going to automatically just think, look at it from this angle. We have to teach people this. And it starts in the schools when they're training, when they're doing clinical works, when they're learning how to do their videography and all that. That needs to be somebody who teaches them that these people are not just subjects. It's not just a scientific experiment. These are real people, and they

have this rich wealth. Like Leroy was saying, we have all of this community, and we have all of this history, and we have all of these resources that these young people do not know about. It's not being tapped in, not being talked about. But you come in, and you wanna clinically look at someone and say, "Oh, everybody, these are real humans."

LEROY: Mmhmm.

JACKIE: "And let's feel sorry for them so that we can have a heart for them and feel and cry for them and then maybe get some funding for a program for them." And that's what it is.

LEROY: Yeah. And I think also is that we don't wanna put everything on academics cuz academics is almost the same way.

JACKIE: It is. But I put it on academics, Leroy, because that's the start, that's the catalyst. It starts from an "Ooh! Ah!" Or either it's a personal experience--a brief one--or it's an idea moment, an "aha" moment. And they go out, and they use what they learned from books and what they learned clinically to come into a community with no community experience, no experience with the population, no idea what the population is going through. That doesn't come naturally. If people aren't just gonna have a heart, and they're not just gonna come and they say, "Oh, I have a real heart for these people." It just doesn't happen that way. You have to teach people to have a conscious thought about this.

LEROY: Yeah, and I'm saying that we have to teach the academics too.

JACKIE: Yeah.

LEROY: For example, Krip Hop in 2009, did this Krip Hop/Homo Hop event at UC Berkeley. I didn't come into the queer community with a big S on my chest. I let them educate me. It took almost two years--

JACKIE: Yes.

LEROY: --to put that conference together because I wanted to observe and let them educate me. So when that education started, and we approached UC Berkeley, we approached UC Berkeley as a partnership.

JACKIE: Right. I do recognize that you're gonna have to take it to a book level for many of these people that are out here because they see our culture, my culture, my race as a science experiment.

LEROY: Mmhmm.

JACKIE: They're not looking at us from the heart. That's the problem.

CHERYL: I wanna sort of add on to what you're saying, Jackie, but also clarify. Because I feel like if the filmmakers were here, they would say, "But I am coming from a place of the heart." And in fact, they say things like--And I agree with you completely. What I think the place where they're coming from, what they would call their heart is actually a place of pity--

JACKIE: Yes.

CHERYL: --and a little bit of loathing. So they use phrases like, "These films are--" When they talk about other Autism-related films, they say things like, "These films were amazing, and I cried like a baby watching the films."

JACKIE: Yes.

CHERYL: And the Social Worker in "Best Kept Secret": "She was amazing, and I love her." And so they use this vocabulary that sounds like it's coming from the heart, and for them it is coming from the heart. But they are, what they are not recognizing is that is dehumanizing--

JACKIE: Yes.

CHERYL: --to watch a film about someone with a disability and say, "Oh! That film about you made me cry! What a heartbreak!" And "I just love you cuz you're an activist." This is not really heart; this is pity, this is saying, "I am superior to you. So when I watch your pitiful little story, it makes me cry. And then I can go enjoy a glass of wine and go back to my regular life."

JACKIE: Exactly. And maybe make some money off the situation and pair it with the white people.

CHERYL: Right. So when we're talking about coming from the heart, I agree with you. We need to come from the heart. And at the same time, we need to always be checking what is my level of privilege and entitlement compared to the person I'm looking at here? And am I looking at this person as a human or just as a great source, a great way to make me feel good about myself because I told that pitiful person's story? And I think that these people have a lot of heart, and it is sorely, sorely, sorely being used in the wrong way. And it is pointed completely in the wrong direction because they are objectifying and infantilizing all these families and all these students.

JACKIE: All of us. Not just the families but all of us. Because when people do look at this film, and they see that, then they're going to take their thoughts into their communities.

LEROY: Yeah.

JACKIE: So when someone like me stands up before them and starts advocating for Autism or for special needs or the special needs community, they're going to still have that pitiful, poor you mindset.

LEROY: Yeah! And that's so troubling because this documentary thing gets so much bling. But also you have documentaries with disability justice and real people with disabilities making movies that have strong politics and strong stories. But that won't get the bling because yeah. That's what tears me apart because I see it a lot in my work. I see a lotta Hollywood films or independent films on disability that get the bling, but the politics are just not there. And so that gets mainstream news while our work that has real community input, real disability justice, real politics, real arts, real history, real culture don't get the bling. It just irks me.

CHERYL: With good reason, Leroy! [laughs]

JACKIE: Yeah.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah. I have a question for you two here. Sort of in the language of documentary filmmaking, they're always talking about the universal and the specific. You wanna pick a subject who's specific but that tells some kind of a universal story that everyone can relate to. And I guess my question around that is what do you two think about that? And especially in terms of these white, non-disabled filmmakers working in the community they did with "Best Kept Secret."

LEROY: I think my take is like how can you make it universal if you don't have the specific politics of the community? So if they're saying that the "Best Kept Secret" is universal, I'd be like no, it's not because it doesn't represent me. It might represent the universal of the filmmakers, but [laugh] it doesn't represent me. So from that point right there, it's not universal. No.

JACKIE: See, the thing is, they don't wanna represent us because they don't know we exist. What they want to do is they want funding so that they can continue on projects like this, so that they can have an accolade because they've tied in and they set up and gotten funding for some kind of particular after-care program or something.

LEROY: My thing is just say that. Be point blank and say it.

JACKIE: Oh, they're not gonna say that because then that would kill the fact that, that takes away the cloak of help.

LEROY: Mmhmm.



JACKIE: See, they wanna come across as, "I'm helping you. But in helping you, I'm helping myself too cuz I'm going to get this notoriety because I come in on my Great White Horse, and I have helped this community."

LEROY: Well, you know when they put that out like that, then they're gonna get responses like this video. You know?

CHERYL: [laughs]

JACKIE: But the thing is, there're gonna be so many people that look at this video and feel like I want to help. Those are the people that they're going to try to get checks from for their project.

LEROY: Mmhmm.

JACKIE: That's all this is.

LEROY: You have to realize that we do have a community too. And it's not like you know that they have this big community. We have our activist community, our cultural community. So we don't need to keep on banging our head against their wall. Let them make their kiddie film. But also, we're gonna critique it and go on and make our art and our film.

JACKIE: Right.

LEROY: Which we are doing.

JACKIE: Yeah.

CHERYL: The documentary for Sins Invalid came out this year or late last year?

LEROY: Yeah.

CHERYL: Yeah, so it's nice because the three of us are not sitting here in some ivory tower saying, "Somebody needs to change something." All three of us are making pieces, making culture work from within our communities. That's really important to note for people watching this who don't know us. We're not just arguing that something needs to change. We are changing things. But I think it's gonna be really hard to reach people like these filmmakers because I think they're that really classic white liberal where they say, "I don't see color! I don't see difference! We're all the same!" When you watch this movie, one of the things they said was, "One of the takeaways of this movie is, after you see it, you'll realize that everybody knows somebody with Autism!" And I think what a terrible takeaway! That's not the takeaway! What I took away from this movie is oh my gawd, there is racial and ethnic disparity. Which I know. But here it is presented to me in this film. I didn't take away anything universal about

Autism. I saw a lot of political stuff going on, a lot of economic problems going on, a lot of arguments going on. And I saw no call to action.

JACKIE: And I feel you completely on that, but from their standpoint, I see what they're saying. Because they think that now with everybody talking about oh, Autism awareness, Autism awareness. And they feel like now this film will show you that yes, everybody knows someone Autistic. So you are aware of somebody Autistic. So you need to support our film, number one. And you need to support whatever cause is attached to this film, number two. Because you got a person element now. Oh, you do know So-and-So's mother's aunt's cousin's nephew who's on the spectrum, you know, that you might've seen walking across the street one day. You never talked to him, but you saw him.

LEROY: I wanna point out that in the film, you see the Black students going off to getting jobs as janitors and cleaners. And you see the white students doing arts and other stuff. So that really addressed--After I saw that, it's like, wow. That's a trip to really see. And I think the filmmakers' community--they're a small community--won't see it like that, you know?

CHERYL: Yeah.

JACKIE: No, they're not going to because I noticed, just in life in general when I'm looking at resources and looking at resources that are accessible to my community. And they have all these wonderful technical programs that cost so much that mostly white students go to. Our children don't even get to know that things like that exist. And yes, our children are taught how to clap erasers and clean toilets and what not, as if we are only seen in a measure of servitude, and regardless to where we are in life--disabled or not--that we should stay in this measure of servitude. And it's just so evident. And that these other children white, disabled, with their privileged situation, they get a chance to explore other avenues of their mind, other avenues in the world, technology, filmmaking, all kinds of things. They get to have the voice. And see, part of the problem is we have so many white people coming into our neighborhoods telling our stories because there's not enough of us telling our own stories.

LEROY: Exactly, exactly.

JACKIE: We need to encourage our children and teach our children to be able to tell their own story.

LEROY: It's hard to say this, but I put some--not most, but some--of the blame on the parents because they don't know about disability culture and the arts.

JACKIE: Right!

LEROY: I mean, just looking at the film, I was like, do these kids go to respite care? When I was doing respite care with Autistic youth, these youth were like having parties at home and going to DJ clubs and stuff like that. I didn't get that feeling from the film. I saw that they went to their program, and they went home. That's it.

JACKIE: Right. Right, and because they didn't wanna get involved in the parents' home. I think there were parents, was it Rahamid, his parents--I can't remember cuz it's been a while--whose parents were not really, particularly happy with what was going on in school. And they wanted to put him in a different program. Am I correct? Was that the child?

CHERYL: I don't remember.

LEROY: I don't remember.

JACKIE: Or was it Quran? I can't remember. But I noticed that that father was arguing that he wasn't liking the direction that the child was going into.

LEROY: Oh yeah, yeah.

JACKIE: And he wanted to take him out of that program and put him in a different kind of day program. When no one ever mentioned what kinda day program. No one ever mentioned the other kinds of things that the father looked at to get his child enrolled in. None of that. It was just oh, we're dissatisfied with this classroom, and he's gonna take this child outta this day program and put him with something else, period.

LEROY: Yeah, yeah.

JACKIE: And why was he dissatisfied? I mean really getting into what was it that he was really hoping to achieve from this experience? I don't know. There's a lotta things. The whole thing is there's a whole lot that needs to be said, and no one person is gonna make an entire film that can say it all. We all have to chime in, and we're gonna have to do a series of films from a series of angles to really get our message out. Because it's so rich. It's so rich. And there's so many powerful stories, and there's so much to learn from just accepting other cultures and just seeing life through the eyes of another culture. How do we--Cuz I mean we can talk all day about what's wrong. But then, what can we do to make it right?

LEROY: Yeah. I mean there's films, independent films out there. There's one film that I just interviewed the parents. I forget the name of the film. It's a Black family with a daughter with Down Syndrome, and the daughter's going to be interviewed to be an actress. So it shows her interview, and she gets the part. It also shows the family's camaraderie. It shows sisters and brothers arguing, stuff like that. It shows this whole different side than "Best Kept Secret."

JACKIE: Who's filming it? Who did the filming, Leroy?

LEROY: Because it was the family who filmed it. It was a family film that the husband and the mother filmed it, and the sons and the daughters were all in it. So they had their part in it.

JACKIE: Right. You see, that's the difference. Because it came from a source of knowing as opposed to outsiders coming in with their ideals.

LEROY: Yeah. I mean that's the thing. We can put "Best Kept Secret" out and put this other film up beside it. It's like, Ok, let's really pick it apart. And let's say why is it so different? It's obvious.

JACKIE: Right, right.

CHERYL: Yeah, and like you said earlier, Leroy, I saw that film that you're talking about. It's a very sweet film. It's short, and they don't have the bling that "Best Kept Secret" have. And they didn't have the resources to say, "Hey, PBS, would you like to air my video?" So this is the big problem. When it's coming from within the community, and it's a family film, and it's well done and entertaining, they don't have the bling, they don't have their ready-made audience that you get with a PBS film like "Best Kept Secret." So we need more people to keep making them.

JACKIE: Yeah.

LEROY: Yeah.

JACKIE: Yeah, we gotta find a way to have our own voice be heard and not be heard through filters.

CHERYL: Right. [laughs] Right. And stop calling these children inspirational.

LEROY: Oh, yeah!

JACKIE: Yeah, I'm just so tired of that. It's like, "Oh, hey! You can tie your shoe. You are such an inspiration to me."

LEROY: And the old theme of overcoming. It's like, oh god, you know?

JACKIE: It's like being pat on the head. I feel like a dog being pat on my head when people say things like that about me or my son.

CHERYL: It's very much, I really think it is that way. If I can tell you, "Oh, wow! You're so inspiring for those really easy meaningless things that you do," I feel good about myself. I have nothing to feel guilty about. I gave you a compliment.

JACKIE: Right.

CHERYL: There's just so many ways for the person who says that to feel great about themselves and quickly forget about the other person without ever realizing that when I pat you on the head and say, "Good job for tying your shoes!" I just admitted how low my standards are for you.

JACKIE: Exactly.

CHERYL: But people walk away before they have that reflection. Again, I felt like the film was like that too. "Oh!" Was it Quran? He had, what did they call it? "A crippling fear of plants."

JACKIE: Yes, yes.

CHERYL: I mean, I'm sorry. It was Rahamid. I mean he did. He had a really serious fear of walking by and being near plants.

JACKIE: Yeah, and bushes. Yes.

CHERYL: But to praise him for overcoming this. And then calling it a "crippling fear," I mean, how can you make a movie about people with disabilities and then just off-handedly use the term "crippling?" It just blows my mind. I think I used the word earlier, objectification and infantilizing them, the people in the movie.

LEROY: And that's a good point because when they do that, they're not seeing the real person. I mean I stop so many reporters that say, "Oh, Leroy, you overcome." It's like, "Stop right there cuz you're not looking at me as a whole person." When they say, "Oh, you're overcoming" or "you're just inspirational," they're not looking at my disability as politics, as a critical lens, as a historical lens, as a culture lens. They're trying to take that away. That's what blows me away about the film is like it's supposed to be around disability. But at the same time, you're brushing disability off. It goes against what the film is all about.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah. They look at disability in two ways: one, it's not a defining part of your experience. We can just say it's just this little thing that you happen to have. And the other thing--I forgot what I was gonna say. The other thing that they do with disability is they look at it as solely, it's only part of the person. There's no interaction in the community around it. It's just you. It's you and your impairment that you need to overcome so that I can praise you. And there's nothing society needs to do in relationship with you cuz it's your problem. You're the one with the disability. But then, at the same time saying you just happen to have a disability. It's not really you. It's just this other thing.

LEROY: And then it's so funny. I tell people, "I can't overcome my race. So why should I overcome my disability?" Yeah. It's so ingrained in people, especially reporters and some quote-unquote Hollywood filmmakers. It's so ingrained in the person that it just comes out, and they

don't see disability as a cultural, as a historical, as a artistic way of living. They just see it as overcoming.

JACKIE: Leroy, that's the language that people use. When you hear people talk about disabilities, it's always a measure of disparity and shortcoming and this, that, and the other. So then when they see someone that gets past a particular level of shortcoming, then that's when they come in and say, "Oh, you're such an inspiration because you've overcome this hump of whatever the case." I mean, I've even talk to other people within the community and have found that there's a divide within the community. Some people in the community don't wanna talk about disability as a community. They don't see it that way, and they're offended by it, actually.

LEROY: Yeah.

JACKIE: So when people do talk to us, they're hearing all different kinds of sides. I, for one, believe it's a community. It feels like a community. It feels like an existence outside of the typical existence. It feels better than what typical presents itself to be to me. But when I see people out there that are like me that are fighting it, I see people that are brainwashed, I feel, by the language that they have heard from their therapists and doctors and reading information and documentaries. I think a lotta times people adopt these things as their way of thinking.

LEROY: Yeah.

JACKIE: Does that make sense?

CHERYL: Yeah.

LEROY: Oh, yeah. Definitely, definitely.

JACKIE: Ok.

LEROY: I mean especially in the Black community because we have the history around disability coming from slavery, and disability was a sin. You had the hush-hush about it. Very few people-- or very few people outside academics--know about Harriet Tubman's disability, her head injury, what she had to go through.

JACKIE: Right.

LEROY: But because of that history of Black community of hush-hush and keep it secret, that invites a lot of overcoming and all that stuff, you know? Because it is historically planted in us once we came to this country that disability was a sin.

JACKIE: Yeah. It's the same in many cultures.

LEROY: Yeah.

JACKIE: There are some cultures that when they have a child that's born different--maybe something obvious different like maybe legs are different, arms are different or whatever--that child is taken out into the woods and left to die. I mean, it's just horrible how the history of disability has always put us at the very lowest end of the pool, the most undesired, the most difficult to deal with. We are born as burdens. We have no kind of value to our society.

LEROY: It's so funny because on the flip side is that music started with people with disabilities. The whole entertainment field started with people with disabilities. The blues started with blind people, "freak shows" were the first entertainment before TV. That started with disabled people! Although it's a negative avenue of entertainment, but still, that history is there. One side of the coin is pity and overcoming, and the other side is the historical entertainment of people with disabilities.

CHERYL: Yeah, and in both cases that you just mentioned, Leroy, it's white people who are in charge.

LEROY: Yeah.

CHERYL: The white circus and freak show owners. It's the white documentarians. Yeah. Whether people will admit it or not, there are still so many systems in place to keep society stratified and to keep certain people in "their place." And not enough people asking questions and challenging, wait a minute. Is it true that this is a certain person's place? Or can we rearrange these places? And I think people have really bought into the idea that our places are pre-determined. People are not working--Like with the young men in this film: send Erik off to Burger King. Send the white kids off to their dance classes. These systems in our society to keep people: "Here's your place. You need to stay in it. That way I'll be more comfortable."

JACKIE: Exactly. It is about their comfort level.

CHERYL: Yes, it is.

LEROY: On the good side of the film--cuz there's one good side that I like--is that it included Black fathers. Because usually Black fathers are way gone if the mother had a son or daughter with a disability. So that's one part I really liked when I saw Black fathers really talking about their disabled sons and daughters.

JACKIE: Right, right. And for me, the best part of the film was actually the teacher and her concern over and beyond the scope of her duty.

LEROY: Yeah.

JACKIE: That was what I found most redeeming about that, and the fact that even though she was called by the filmmakers "idealistic," and the Social Worker was the one who knew reality and everything. I'm like, but the thing is, reality needs to be changed. And it takes ideas to change what our reality is. I really applaud Ms. Mino. I really applaud her for her saying that these beautiful, viable children are transitioning into adulthood, and they need something beyond school so that they continue being viable parts of the community and having something to look forward to, something to stimulate them other than just being forgotten. Like society has its cut-off point. We've done all we can do, and once you age out of school at 21, we're done with you!

LEROY: Yeah.

JACKIE: Like we have no more meaning. We can't drain any more funding out of you, so you're useless to us.

LEROY: Yeah.

JACKIE: Which is really unfortunate.

LEROY: Yeah.

JACKIE: It's really unfortunate.

CHERYL: I really liked, too, there was a lovely scene in the car. Janet Mino was in the car with, I forget the Social Worker's name. That's what you were referring to there.

JACKIE: Exactly.

CHERYL: The Social Worker was basically saying, "We have this system. Quit fighting it. Let's just get these kids out of school and into their day program." And Janet Mino was looking like she was fit to punch the steering wheel until it broke and saying, "No, these are human beings. And they deserve and require a stimulating, fulfilling environment where they can learn about life, and they can engage with people and have a satisfying life, not just pass the time until they die." That scene both made me the angriest and the happiest when I watched that film. And I agree with you that Janet Mino, they call it "idealistic," and I find that they used that to be insulting. "Oh, that silly, idealistic young lady."

JACKIE: They said, "I think in Mino, you have the classic idealist who really doesn't give up." Oh, she's got a big heart. She fights the good fight, but it still it just devalued her.

CHERYL: Oh! So devalued her.



JACKIE: To the utmost. And I'm like, you gotta be kidding me. But when you've got this Cynthia Pullen Thompson, that's who that is.

CHERYL: That's right.

JACKIE: She's a realist. She's had 20 years experience. She knows what it is, and she's accepted this.

CHERYL: That's right. And she's "even-keeled." That was another thing that they used to compliment, "Cynthia Pullen Thompson was being even-keeled." And Janet Mino, you know, she's truly tireless, but she's idealistic.

JACKIE: Exactly.

CHERYL: It's subtle. And I don't think the filmmakers understood the difference, but that's really insulting. And what Janet Mino was doing was making a call to action. These are human beings, and they deserve as fulfilling and satisfying and stimulating a life as you and I do. Oh, that idealist!

JACKIE: Oh my goodness.

LEROY: That's why a lot of Special Education teachers get burned out. They get burned out so quick. I read one report that Special Education teachers last only like 4 or 5 years, and they just get burned out because of the system that they always have to fight against.

JACKIE: Right.

CHERYL: Yeah. And the filmmakers said, "Oh, Special Ed is doing fine." I don't know where they got their teaching degrees, and I don't know how they know that.

JACKIE: I don't either.

CHERYL: But ever since the IDEA was passed, the federal legislation, Special Ed has never in this country had adequate funding to meet the basic requirements set out by legislation. So maybe there's a good classroom and there. But I don't see how anybody--especially people like the filmmakers, who aren't experts in education--I don't see how anyone can say Special Ed is doing fine when the teachers are burning out like that? You know they're not.

JACKIE: Well, they're speaking from a place of not knowing. They're speaking of it from a place of ignorance. In other words, we should be satisfied with what few crumbs somebody throws our way. You be happy that someone has paid a little attention to you, and stop asking for more because you're not gonna get it. You know? You're not worth that much to begin with. So get over it, more or less, I feel like is what they're saying to us. And I feel like they say that to

people like Ms. Mino. Even when I look at the section--and I don't know if you guys remember getting this part that I printed out for you--the Ask a Filmmaker, which they very nicely put pictures of four people up here. But you only really hear from DiGiacomo and Buck.

LEROY: Buck, yeah.

JACKIE: You don't really hear anything. I mean Janet Mino, she rarely says a couple sentences. And I'm like she was the one that I think should have had the most input. It shouldn't have been Ask the Filmmakers. It should've been Ask Janet.

LEROY: Yeah, yeah.

JACKIE: So Janet could tell you just where it is and what she feels that her community needs and other communities like hers.

LEROY: Yeah.

JACKIE: But no. We don't get to hear from the Janets of the world. We get to hear from the filmmakers.

CHERYL: Because they're the experts.

LEROY: Yeah.

JACKIE: Right. They're the experts, and they have the high-end friends. Miss DiGiacomo, you know she's got this friend. I want to try to have respect with what Senator Menendez calls himself attempting to do, but I don't. Cuz it just seems like a collaboration between friends, just he's a friend helping a friend. He's not helping the kids in this community. He's helping a friend. It's personal. It's not "universal."

CHERYL: Right.

JACKIE: So I don't know. But I still say, all in all--and I don't know if you guys agree with me or not, and that's fine cuz I love to agree to disagree. I don't have a problem with that. I still think that there is something at least viable about the film. I'm glad it was made because, if nothing else, it's making people talk. If nothing else, it's giving people some kind of viewpoint, even if it's not the full one. It's something. Can it be better? Yeah! It could be a whole lot better. But I'm still glad that this film is in existence even though I don't agree with a lot of the stuff that they did. I still think it makes some points. And I think that we need to see people like Janet Mino who are really out there fighting the good fight for our kids. I think parents need to see that there are people out here that really are caring and trying to do, and maybe that the parents can feel like if she can do it, then I'll join in and help, and together we can make this happen. It's that kinda angle because I tend to be one who sees a little bit of a silver lining even

in the darkest of clouds. And even though this film has a lot of wrong, there's still a little right. But that's just my opinion.

LEROY: I think, for me, I don't know, you know? I don't know if it would help my community. It does start conversations, but I think a lot of films that other people do should start conversations. So I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

JACKIE: I think it does. And I think, from a parent's standpoint, that even if parents that live this, who don't really--Because if you think about it, a lot of us special needs parents have blinders on because we're very caught up in our situation. We don't look at the situation as a whole. Sometimes it takes sitting down and looking at something like this and recognizing that we're not the only ones and that maybe that we could do more, together with other parents. We could do more in our communities. Maybe we could help fill in some of the cracks. I mean anything to get us stimulated. Stimulation is a good thing, even on the lowest level, just to get a conversation going where someone could say, "Well, maybe I could try to do this a little bit better. Or maybe I could try to volunteer more in some of these classrooms." Something! The thing is, though, maybe we don't like to hear that we are an "inspiration," but we do inspire people. We inspire people, hopefully, I hope we inspire people to do better and be better. And I hope that we inspire people to see people as people and not see people as disabilities.

LEROY: I think people do better when they are pushed, they are pushed to be ready. Inspiration is cool. Yeah, whatever. But when people are really, critically taking apart something and saying, "Ok, yeah I'm glad it's out. But you could do this, you could do that," it really depends if the person is open to listen to it, you know?

JACKIE: Well, that's true in any case.

LEROY: Yeah.

JACKIE: That's with any case. Yeah, because you don't know. My thing is, whether a person's willing to listen or not, as long as we keep speaking our truths, and as long as we speak what's really on our hearts and our minds, somebody's gonna hear us. Somebody's gonna hear this, and it's gonna make a difference for them.

LEROY: Yeah. Or better, some funder hears this and say, "Hey! I wanna fund Cheryl Green's new documentary."

JACKIE: Yeah!

CHERYL: [laughs]

LEROY: I wanna fund Krip Hop, you know?

JACKIE: Well, the thing is, that would make a difference. Yeah. That would make a difference. That would be fantastic! You know, you would hope for that. Yeah. Well, like I said, I hope I'm not confusing anyone, but that's just how I see things.

LEROY: Mmhmm.

JACKIE: I see the good and the bad.

LEROY: Yeah, yeah. There's good in everything, I think.

JACKIE: Well, I would like to think that there is at least some small, in this situation, the measure of good is miniscule, but it's still a measure.

CHERYL: [laughs]

JACKIE: It's still a measure.

CHERYL: Yeah.

JACKIE: But the thing is, if we can keep saying this, and if people will take this seriously and will say, "You know what?" Ok, I'm gonna say this because as a person who has dealt with being behind the scenes in human subjects research and seeing some of the teachings and what not and seeing the people that they're pushing out into these communities. And the things that I'm seeing being taught are: dress a certain way when you go into certain kinds of communities. You don't want to wear name brands too much. You don't wanna be too flashy, this, that, and the other. Always carry a bottle of water with you. In case somebody offers you something to drink, you have a good excuse to turn that down. Learning, trying to learn some sort of stagnant kind of language and how to seem relatable to a people to which you don't understand their culture. All these kinds of things are what I'm seeing being taught. But I don't ever see anyone teaching respecting other cultures, embracing other cultures, understanding other cultures. I don't see that being taught, but I see how to navigate them without feeling like you're going to touch something and get something icky on your hands.

CHERYL: Yeah.

JACKIE: That's what I see.

CHERYL: I agree.

JACKIE: And that's why I say, on the educational level, it should be taught. They need to bring it home.

CHERYL: So what do we do with, if what we want is for people to experience as much as they can and respect as much as they can, but what they have access to is a movie like this, what do we do so that people are watching responsibly?

JACKIE: I know much stuff out there that this has been the premise. I'm just glad that people are getting together, we're getting together to talk about the fact that this is not what it really is. This is not a full depiction of what's really happening. The only thing we can do is put our heads together and make change, put our voices together and speak up and keep fighting for people to get the funding that can tell a more realistic story. Not even a depiction, just to show what really is from every angle. But like I said, this situation is so broad, we can do it with the films, we can get into the schools. It's gonna take a whole lot to come together and bring together a realistic view of what's really happening. And I don't know if it can be done in my lifetime [laughs]. But I'm certainly gonna do my best in my lifetime to make some sort of change. I really am.

LEROY: We're not everywhere, but I know this film has more resources than all of us put together.

JACKIE: Yeah, unfortunately.

LEROY: But I think having, going to their Facebook page, which I did, and putting up films like your film, Green, your film. I put up Sins' film on their Facebook page so that when people see their page it's like, "Oh, what's this film?"

JACKIE: Right, right.

LEROY: After they look at "Best Kept Secret," they think, "Ok, lemme look at what Bethany Stevens is doing or what is Sins doing."

JACKIE: Yeah!

LEROY: So they have that balanced view. It's really like putting it in their lap. And now we can do that with social network media. We can put it on their plate.

JACKIE: Right. That post for them. That sounds great.

CHERYL: Well, thank you so much, both of you. I really appreciate it.

LEROY: Yeah, you too.

JACKIE: Thank you for the invitation. I greatly appreciate the opportunity.

CHERYL: Yeah.

LEROY: Yeah.

JACKIE: And it's always a joy to talk to the two of you, always.

CHERYL: Oh, absolutely.

LEROY: Definitely.