

# Meet Michael Washington, Babatunde Akinloye, Justin Jemerson and Richard Stevenson Jr.

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Today we'd like to introduce you to Michael Washington, Babatunde Akinloye, Justin Jemerson and Richard Stevenson Jr. of The Collective Films

**Michael, Babatunde, Justin and Richard, can you briefly walk us through your story – how you started and how you got to where you are today.**

[Rich] My dad was a photographer and loved classic film and television, but he worked as a warehouseman for most of his life. He never stopped shooting though. It rubbed off on me. Though I was on another path, going to school for educational policy, one of my mentors encouraged me to take some classes and try to turn my passions into a career. I of course fell in love with it. [Mike] I've been a writer for as long as I can remember but, finding people you can

trust to help you bring those visions to life has always been tough. Finding these fellas was an absolute blessing.

[Tunde] We're all born and bred in Inglewood, so it's not surprising we found each other through six degrees of separation. I went to undergrad at UCLA to study film which is where I met Justin and Mike through a mutual best friend that went to Inglewood High with them. Rich came to UCLA the year behind me and there it is. Destiny in the making! I would call on the guys to help me shoot my first projects and we just stayed in touch over the years.

[Justin] The Collective Films all came together from me one night up late just thinking how there were never any black camera ops onset or even an all black production company's out there. So I started a group text with some friends I've worked with on previous projects and asked them if they were interested in starting a production company.

**Overall, has it been relatively smooth? If not, what were some of the struggles along the way?**

[Justin] It hasn't been smooth at all. Filmmaking is a very competitive industry. We weren't afforded some of the same privileges others have. Everything we have today was built and acquired from the bottom with hard work.

[Mike] Definitely wasn't a smooth road at all. For starters not having the access to certain equipment & funding as others can be daunting, but I also think not having that made us push ourselves to think outside of the box and that thinking has been beneficial along the way.

[Rich] My road would have been a lot tougher without having folks like Tunde and Issa Rae looking out for me. I directly benefitted from their community-mindedness, their Mentorship, and their belief in me. Though I didn't not have access early on to film and technology education, it's folks like them that introduced it to me and showed me its promise. That along with a family that supported my goals made all the difference.

[Tunde] It definitely has not been a smooth road, but that's what make it that much sweeter to see how far we've come. Most of us have kids, full-time jobs and significant others, so it's a tough balancing act. I think our strength is in numbers. We can all shoot and step in if someone can't make it out. For me, since we got started, I've went back to grad school to get my MFA in film producing and had two kids. There's no way we can all make every shoot, but we find a way to get it done.

**Please tell us more about your work, what you are currently focused on and most proud of.**

[Rich] This spirit of community building, sharing, and learning is at the core of what TCF does. I am most proud that we are all investing in ourselves and each other and are finding ways to produce content that is dynamic, honest, and that represents our people in the way they deserve. I am most proud that we have been able to build a corps of indie filmmakers that can call on each other for support and creative collaboration in our day to day. Though we have goals to scale it up, there is something really special about this stage that we're at now. TCF has become a consistent resource for companies like Issa Rae Productions to source specialized labor from our community, with the goal of supporting the growth of black men and women on their own paths.

[Tunde] There's not too many people that look like us in this industry with our skillset. We all know filmmaking from A to Z. We're all shooters, so we're able to provide full production service for any narrative, non-fiction or live project.

[Mike] Being an all black production company is something to be proud of along with the high level of content we produce is what I feel sets us apart. You see four black men, but we understand it is also our responsibility to bring our black women in, that is something we're very conscience of. Also showing people that you don't always have to be in front of the camera to make a difference in the content we see.

[Justin] What I'm most proud of is being able to build a strong network of black creatives in the city of LA. Being able to mentor up and coming

cinematographers, directors & producers on how to shoot and compete at a high level has been amazing. Showing people that they're talented black creatives in this industry is a must. Happy that we can lead the charge.

### **Any shoutouts? Who else deserves credit in this story – who has played a meaningful role?**

[Tunde] Our kids, our significant others and family deserve a lot of the credit. We definitely sacrifice time at home when we're out on set shooting.

Inglewood and UCLA for bringing us together. Issa Rae for being our biggest and longest client. We also have made a point of growing our team when we have larger shoots. We're all about paying it forward and giving young people that look like us opportunities to learn and grow in this business.

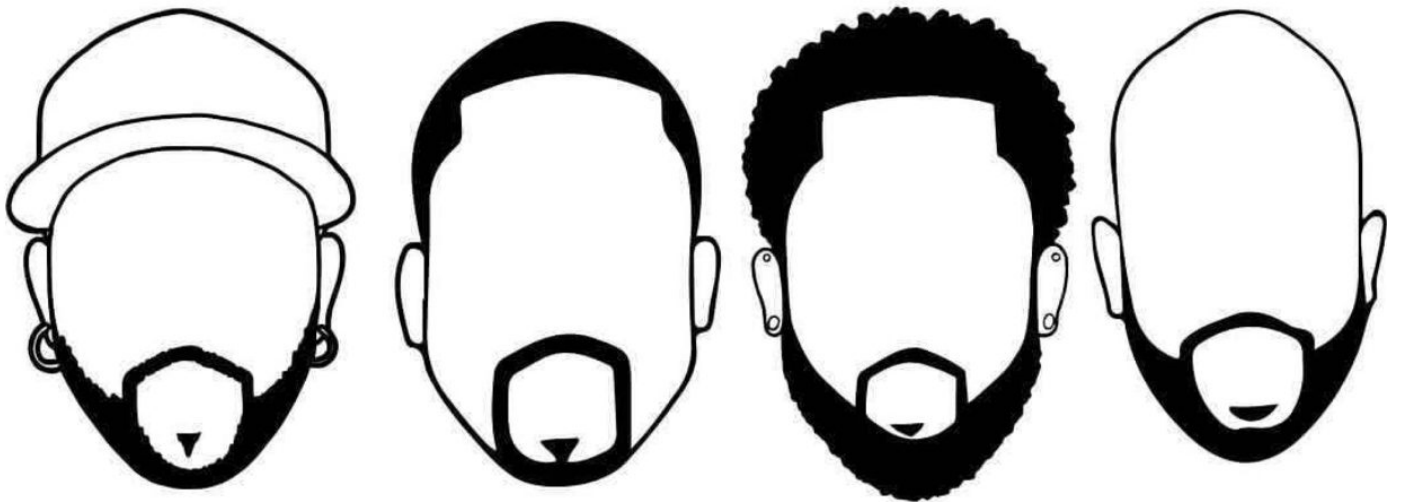
[Mike] I definitely agree, our families deserves a lot of credit. My wife and kids, most of what I do is because of them. Personally my mom, she's really the writer in the family. That passion for film comes from her. My older sister deserves the bulk of the thanks, she's been my inspiration on so many levels. Issa Rae! Not only in trusting us with bringing some of her visions to life but most importantly showing us how to build a successful unit. Her team over at IRP, Denise, Montrel, Jahbrielle, Vanessa, Benoni, Brit & Rich included are nothing short of amazing. Of course Justin, Tunde and Rich. We continue to push and support each other's growth. I couldn't ask for a better squad to tackle these productions with.

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