



**British Film Institute**



In Association With  
**Smoking Dogs Films**

Presents

# **The Stuart Hall Project**

**A John Akomfrah Film**



**Sundance Premiere Screening**  
**18 Jan, Friday, 3:00 p.m.**  
Yarrow Hotel Theatre, Park City

**Press & Industry Screening**  
**20 Jan, Sunday, 9.00 a.m.**  
Holiday Village Cinema 2, Park City

**Other Sundance Screenings**

Saturday, January 19, 12:30 p.m. - Redstone Cinema 1, Park City

Sunday, January 20, 9:45 p.m. - Broadway Centre Cinema 3, SLC

Wednesday, January 23, 6:00 p.m. - Temple Theatre, Park City

Friday, January 25, 12:15 p.m. - Holiday Village Cinema 2, Park City

Saturday, January 26, 3:00 p.m. - Screening Room, Sundance Resort

**Contacts at Sundance**

World Sales: John Flahive +44 7968 772 792  
Publicist: Alex Klenert +1 917 400 1739  
Producers: Lina Gopaul +44 7867 517 086  
Producers: David Lawson +44 7879 424 645

[john.flahive@wavelengthpictures.co.uk](mailto:john.flahive@wavelengthpictures.co.uk)  
[ak@prodigypublicrelations.com](mailto:ak@prodigypublicrelations.com)  
[lina@smokingdogsfilms.com](mailto:lina@smokingdogsfilms.com)  
[david@smokingdogsfilms.com](mailto:david@smokingdogsfilms.com)

# The Stuart Hall Project

## Film Synopsis



From the award winning documentarian John Akomfrah, comes ***The Stuart Hall Project***, a ground-breaking film that pioneers a new archival and sonic approach to forgotten histories, forgotten ideas and the untold stories of the politics of change.

Visionary director John Akomfrah weaves between the musical archeology of Miles Davis, the political narratives of the new post-war Left and the life and works of its key architect, the cultural theorist Stuart Hall - one of the new left's most prominent and influential intellectuals.

Akomfrah carefully constructs archival sequences of rare, forgotten and long since seen historical material together with Hall's extensive broadcasts and personal archives, taking the audience on a kaleidoscopic journey through the ideas and personal story of Stuart Hall. Imagined through a sonic and Miles Davis sound track, Akomfrah creates a vivid landscape of the twentieth century's defining political moments making a powerful portrait of Hall.

Covering over fifty years and beginning in the 1950's, ***The Stuart Hall Project*** takes you into an ever-changing world riddled with political flux and turbulence, highlighting the grave and fragile moments in world history, whilst charting some of the key moments of a new brand of politics – the politics of the new left which challenged the old world order and cultural hegemony.

With Britain at the end of its colonial power and at the crossroad of profound political change, a new and bold left emerged with Stuart Hall as its champion, tackling issues from the domestic to the global. From the 1950's and 1960's the nuclear threat and the cold war arms race; post war migration to Britain; rebellious youth movements and culture; the independence and civil rights movements; Vietnam and the rise of Feminism.

In the 1970's and 1980's saw the rise of neo-liberalism in the West and the breakdown of Soviet socialism in the East; growing authoritarianism of governments. The 1990's saw the emergence of multicultural Britain; the coming of the information age; growing globalization and an upsurge of ethnic nationalism.

Never shying from the intellect Akomfrah brings a cinematic language and sensibility, a distinct personal style through his handcrafted use of archive – what Akomfrah calls the 'recycled aesthetics of the past' – giving both Hall and the New Left a context through which he creates an astonishing visual and sonic world that sets the new bar for the intellectual documentary portrait.

## **Principal Credits**

<b>Written &amp; Directed</b>	John Akomfrah
<b>Producers</b>	David Lawson and Lina Gopaul
<b>Director of Photography</b>	Dewald Aukema
<b>Editor</b>	Nse Asuquo
<b>Composer</b>	Trevor Mathison
<b>Sound Design</b>	Trevor Mathison and Robin Fellows
<b>Dubbing Mixer</b>	Robin Fellows
<b>Archive Research</b>	John Akomfrah, David Lawson, Lina Gopaul
<b>Colourist -</b>	Tom Russell
<b>5.1 Re-mix</b>	Brendan Nicholson
<b>Senior Production and Development Executive, British Film Institute</b>	Lizzie Francke
<b>Executive Producer, Smoking Dogs Films</b>	Paul Gerhardt
<b>BBC Executive Producers</b>	Tony Ageh, Bill Thompson
<b>Production Company</b>	Smoking Dogs Films
<b>Co-production Companies</b>	British Film Institute Film Fund, Arts Council England, BBC Archive, Arts Council England, Creation Rebel Films, The Open University, Time/Image

## **Technical Information**

<b>Original title</b>	The Stuart Hall Project
<b>Original Language,</b>	English
<b>Duration</b>	100 minutes
<b>Original Theatrical Release Format</b>	DCP
<b>Ratio,</b>	185
<b>Sound</b>	5.1
<b>Year</b>	2013

## Director's Statement



I've been making projects on memory for a while now, but this one feels like the one I have been 'preparing' for a very long time indeed, possibly all my working life.

In our teenage years, there is always at least one person we meet or see perform or watch on the screen who in that first encounter leaves such an indelible mark on our soul that we end saying to ourselves: "when I grow up, I want be just like that; I want to be that cool, that hip, that confident, that compelling".

Of course we always change our minds later since this is after all our 'growing up' years. But whatever reasons we subsequently give ourselves for our change of mind, for that shift in our thinking, secretly we also know that it usually coincides with the growing realization that we don't have the talent or the brains or the wherewithal to become that person.

Once we accept we are never going to be exactly like our heroes, something very interesting begins for us because the initial burst of enthusiasm they sparked off, the charismatic example they offered about the purpose and direction one's own life could take, these remain with you, moulding and shaping one's expectations and, crucially, what 'deals' we end up making with this unfolding thing called life.

For many of my generation in the seventies, Stuart Hall was just such a figure. In those heady, mono - cultural days, he was one of the few people of colour we saw on television who wasn't crooning, dancing or running. I loved all the athletes and singers and dancers too but when you are a black teenage bookworm in seventies West London, let's just say a public intellectual of colour disseminating ideas on television offered other more immediate compensations.

Stuart Hall was a kind of rock star for us; a pop icon with brains whose very iconic presence on this most public of platforms - television - suggested all manner of 'impossible possibilities'. By just being there in our bedrooms and living rooms, he

opened up pathways into that space that he has referred as the place of 'the unfinished conversation', that space in which the dialogue between us and the external world begins, that place of identity. With him and through him we begun to ask the indispensable questions of that conversation: who are we, what are we and what could we become.

Throughout the making of The Stuart Hall Project, I've thought a lot about this questions of identity and of our 'debt' to this man. I've also thought a lot about the poignancy of the eulogy delivered at the funeral of Malcolm X by Ossie Davis, especially the section where Davis talks about "the presence of his (Malcolm's) memory". And the section I find the most affecting in that eulogy, the one I returned to again and again to the point where it became the organizing motif for this piece, comes at the end when Davis says "... in honoring him, we honor the best in ourselves".

The presence of memory. What a wonderful way of describing all our lives. And for me, the question of 'honoring' begins there; with memory, with uncovering the stems of memory, the ghosts of history, sifting through the debris and detritus of past events for traces of the phantoms. It begins with searching and rummaging through all those itineraries, those collective unfinished conversations that tell us something about how a very bright young Rhodes scholar from colonial Jamaica, became 'Stuart Hall'.

In understanding him and the movements he shaped and was shaped by, we begin to understand something about how we became what we are: the Suez crisis, the Hungarian revolution, the anti-colonial project, the Vietnam war, the civil rights movement, the new Left, feminism, class politics, cultural studies. All these interventions, these unfinished conversations.

And, in honoring him, we honor the best in ourselves. Amen to that.

## John Akomfrah - Biography



John Akomfrah is a filmmaker whose feature films and documentaries have won critical acclaim in, Europe, North America and Africa.

A Super 8 Film-maker and enthusiast in his teenage years, Akomfrah became an avid fan of the art-house cinemas of post-war Europe, India and Japan during the late 1970s. And in the 1980's he began to explore African cinema and African American Independent cinema. Two films would have a decisive influence on him – Charles Burnett's *Killer Of Sheep* and Djibril Diop Mambéty's *Touki-Bouki*.

On the subject of *Touki-Bouki*, he says that it was 'such a shocking revelation [to see] that an African film needn't be attuned to poverty and socio-economic problems, but [could be] marked instead by the kind of youth traumas that have been a stock-in-trade of cinemas all over the world.'

Akomfrah was a key figure in the Black British cinema movement of the eighties. In 1982 he helped found the **Black Audio Film Collective**, a seminal British filmmaking collective, which produced critically acclaimed works for the next fifteen years.

His 1986 début documentary, **Handsworth Songs** that explored the racial disturbances in 1980's England that really brought him to International prominence winning seven international prizes, including the prestigious **John Grierson Award**. Now known as 'The classic' film on 'race' and 'civil disorder', it has become one of the most influential and studied films on Britain of the 1980's.

Akomfrah's début feature film, **TESTAMENT**, a moving story on African political exile, launched him into the heart of the international arena, premiering at **Cannes, Semaine De La Critique**. **TESTAMENT** went on to win the Grand Prix, at Riminicinema International Film Festival; Special Jury Prize: African Film Festival, Perugia; Honourable Mention: San Francisco International Film Festival; Special Mention, FESPACO; Honourable Mention: Vues d'Afrique, Montreal; Special Jury Award for First Drama, Delhi

**TESTAMENT** was the film that first took Akomfrah back to Ghana and African filmmaking. Since then, Akomfrah has returned to every corner of the continent for film and television projects: Namibia and South Africa for **African Footsteps (1994)**, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Liberia for African **Political Broadcasts (1995)**; Tunisia, Senegal and Egypt for **The Last Angel Of History (1995)**; and Nigeria for **Wetin Dey (2005-6)**.

Akomfrah's second feature film **Who Needs A Heart**, on the emergence of Black Power in Britain, equally enjoyed international acclaim, winning several international prizes including Grand Prize Festival Del Cinema Africano, Milano.

He has also directed over 30 critically acclaimed and award winning creative documentaries, several short films and several features for international release.

Akomfrah's documentaries have explored the lives of such historic African American figures as **Malcolm X, Seven Songs for Malcolm X, 1993** and **Martin Luther King, Days of Hope 1997**.

Akomfrah is also one of the earliest exponents digital film making with films such as **The Cheese And The Worms (1996)**, **Goldie (1999)**, **Stalkers (2000)** and **Digitopia (2001)**.

In 2000, Akomfrah was awarded the prestigious Gold Digital Award at the **CHEONJU INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL** in South Korea for "the most impressive use of digital technology" on three films: **RIOT (2000)**, **THE CALL OF MIST (1998)** and **THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF LOUIS ARMSTRONG (1999)**.

John's most recent feature documentary **THE NINE MUSES**, launched at Venice International Film Festival 2010 and went on to several film festivals including **SUNDANCE 2011**, London, Karlovy Vary and winning the **Silver Award for Documentary** at **DUBAI INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2010** and was theatrically released in UK, Europe and USA in 2012.

John's most recent short fictional drama **PERIPETEIA** premiered at Toronto International Film Festival 2012 and is currently the centre piece of his 'Hunatologies' art show which is currently touring international galleries.

He is a director of the film and television production companies, **Smoking Dogs Films** (London) and **Creation Rebel Films** (Accra).

## John Akomfrah – Selected Filmography

1986. HANDSWORTH SONGS Documentary  
1989. TESTAMENT Fiction  
1991. WHO NEED A HEART Fiction  
1993. SEVEN SONGS FOR MALCOLM X Documentary  
1995. THE LAST ANGEL OF HISTORY Drama/Documentary  
1997. SPEAK LIKE A CHILD Fiction  
1998. THE CALL OF MIST Fiction.  
1999. THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF LOUIS ARMSTRONG Feature Documentary  
2000. DIGITOPIA Fiction  
2003. STALKERS Fiction  
2006. WETIN DEY Drama,  
2008. THE GENOME CHRONICLES Gallery Installation  
2010. MNEMOSYNE Gallery Installation  
2010. The NINE MUSES Documentary/ Fiction



## Stuart Hall – Profile

Born in colonial Jamaica Stuart Hall came to the UK in 1951 to study at the prestigious Oxford University. He would later become one of the most inspiring voices of the European New Left.

Founder and contributing editor of the New Left Review he was a central figure in the anti nuclear campaigns of the 50's and 60's and as the director of the first Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies is credited with playing a role in expanding the scope of cultural studies to deal with race, gender and the media. His work, as well as being hugely influential and the foundation of contemporary cultural studies, has tackled a wide range of issues including feminism, cultural identity, class, race and ethnicity.

Through his work as the professor of sociology at the Open University (an educational opportunity and social justice institution) Hall made a number of broadcasts around issues of cultural studies.

During his later career, Hall has had a long-standing relationship with the creative arts. Helping to establish the Institute of International Visual Arts (INIVA), he has fought for the permanent space and funding for a Black art movement in Europe.

## Smoking Dogs Films

Smoking Dogs Films is the film and television production company founded in London, 1998, by three members of the acclaimed British cine-cultural group Black Audio Film Collective. The founders of the company are film director **John Akomfrah** and producers **Lina Gopaul** and **David Lawson**.

Smoking Dogs Films was conceived to produce works of imagination and innovation within the fertile worlds of film, television and new technologies.

From its inception, Smoking Dogs Films has sought to produce challenging work on a variety of media, from 35mm to digital cinematography expanding upon the narrative possibilities of creative documentary, feature films and art based films.

**Lina Gopaul (Producer):** Lina Gopaul has a considerable track record in film and television production. She has made over 30 award winning documentaries, dramas and feature films. Recognized for their creative, innovative and cutting edge approach to production, she has to date produced a range of distinctive, stylized and dynamic works for cinema and television.

**David Lawson (Producer):** In 1998, together with the director John Akomfrah and Producer Lina Gopaul, David set up the production company and atelier *Smoking Dogs Films* and has since produced range of work including creative documentaries, feature films and film installations. He has produced over 20 award winning films for broadcast and theatrical release.

Their most recent film *The Nine Muses*, a 95 minute feature documentary, premiered at the Venice International Film Festival 2010 and went on to several A-list film festivals including Sundance and London. *The Nine Muses* enjoyed huge film festival success winning the Silver Award for Documentary at Dubai International Film Festival 2010.