

A NARRATIVE DOCUMENTARY PROJECT

IN SEARCH OF
SANCTUARY
PRESS KIT

 PLAY TRAILER



Logline

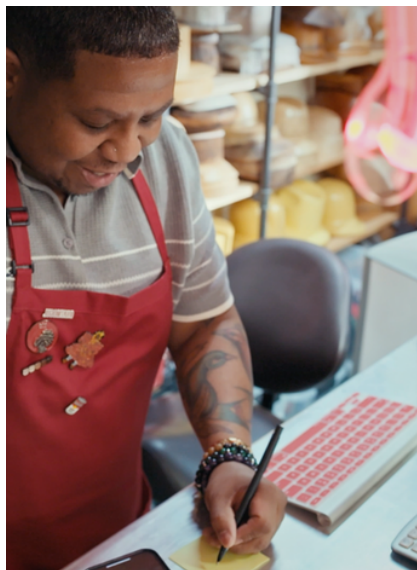
Battling depression and suicidal thoughts, a boy finds an unlikely ally in his teacher and hope in hat-making. This story is his inspiring testimony of overcoming and finding success.

As a teen, Otis Damón faced the daunting challenges of mental illness, confronted by depression and suicidal thoughts.

Otis grew up in New York City. From the age of 5, his father was no longer in the picture. Left with his sisters and a now single mother, Otis took on the responsibilities of “man of the house”—a self-assigned role often found amongst boys in fatherless households, and an all too familiar story that often overlooks the psychological woes of children at that developmental age.

Overwhelmed by his trials and recurrent bouts of despair and thoughts of taking his own life, a chance encounter in his school hallways with a teacher turned out to be Otis's saving grace.

Through her compassion, guidance and support, Otis not only survived but also developed a passion for hat-making that grew from the sewing lessons she taught. His life took an entirely unanticipated turn, from the brink of desolation to becoming today a milliner highly sought after by celebrities and the world of high fashion.



As Otis's story shines a light on taboo topics, providing a sensitive yet unflinching look at the impact of mental illness on the life of a young Black man and the transformative power of those who perceive the signs and extend a helping hand.

Otis's journey underscores the urgency of suicide prevention and the need for understanding and destigmatizing mental health issues, particularly in the Black community--as well as identifying early signs of mental health problems within the community at this moment when the suicide rate amongst Black youth is at an all-time high in U.S history.



Synopsis

Director's Statement

Everyone is the hero of their own story, and the way they make meaning of their experiences is how they begin to heal.

– Eric Bomba-Ire, Director

Every story has a catalyst. For me, it was a handshake when I first met Otis. I left knowing there was more to his story than had been said. The question became: Where did it all begin?

For Otis, it began with a teacher who noticed what others didn't, stayed present when it mattered most, and helped him imagine a future beyond his pain. That relationship became the foundation for everything that followed—and the question that shaped this film.

My exploration of these questions began in 2013 after witnessing a close relative's mental health diagnosis. What started as a deeply personal search to better understand how people make meaning of difficult experiences continued through years of filmmaking and narrative inquiry.

There are many stories about mental illness and therapy in today's public conversation. Yet a quieter crisis continues to affect young people around the world. Between 2007 and 2020, the

suicide rate among Black youth increased by 144 percent. Behind every statistic is a young person, a family, and a community whose story is often left untold.

Through interviews, re-enactments, and generative AI animation, we sought to immerse viewers in Otis's lived experience. By combining his adult reflection with the perspective of his younger self, we invite audiences to experience the world through the eyes of a child trying to make sense of his life.

Revisiting Otis's story became more than an act of remembrance. It became an opportunity for him to reinterpret his experiences, reclaim authorship of his story, and share his testimony on his own terms. I came to see storytelling not only as a way of documenting a life, but as a way of creating the conditions for personal authorship and agency. That realization became one of the film's most enduring lessons.

The questions this film asks—Who notices the signs? Who extends a hand? How do people reclaim authorship of their own stories?—ultimately informed the development of Inceptr's Sanctuary methodology.

In Search of Sanctuary was never meant to be the final word. It was the beginning of a conversation about recognition, guidance, and the possibility of another future.

*Between 2007 and 2020, the suicide rate
among Black youth 10-17 rose by **144%**.*

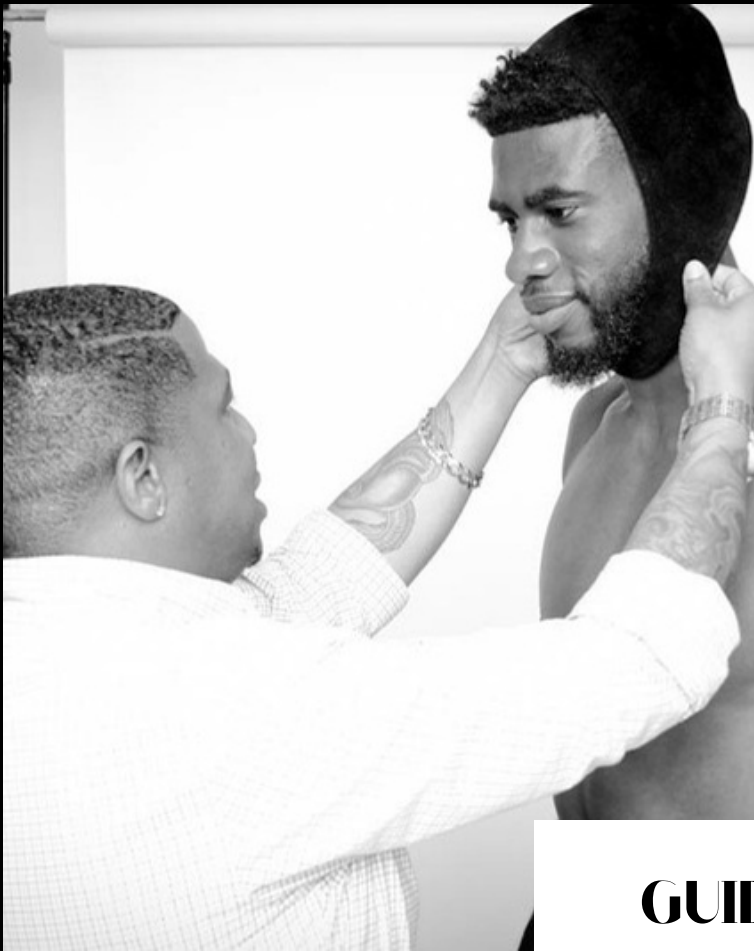
— CDC

Behind every statistic is a person, a family, and a community.

*One in seven adolescents worldwide
experiences a mental disorder, yet
most go unrecognized and untreated.*

— World Health Organization

Every story has a catalyst.



GUIDANCE

❧ WHY HATS? ❧

At age 15, Otis Damón met teacher Gleora Sibley in the halls of his high school and confided in her about his suicidal thoughts. Mrs. Sibley insisted Otis come to her home economics classroom every day at lunch, and there she began to teach him sewing techniques and about entrepreneurship.

These sessions and the mentors he met along the way—Horace Weeks and Lola Ehrlich—set the stage to help Otis Damón find a fiery passion in millinery that will lead him to success, healing from decades long depressions...and to hope in hats.



Top Left: Otis Damon
Top Right: Gleora Sibley
Bottom Right: Horace Weeks
Bottom Left: Lola Ehrlich

Crowning The world

OTIS DAMÓN

HEAD TRANSFORMATIONS AND TIMELESS PIECES

Otis Damón focuses not on creating trends but rather timeless pieces. While Otis covers the heads of others, his struggles to cover himself and his head are what most shaped his life and career trajectory.



Hats by Otis Damon - Images courtesy of Otis Damón

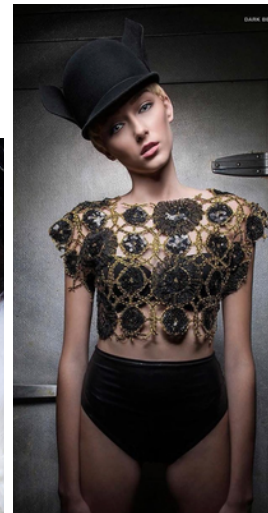


Otis Damón has created pieces for singers Alicia Keys, Patti LaBelle, and Robin S., Salt-N

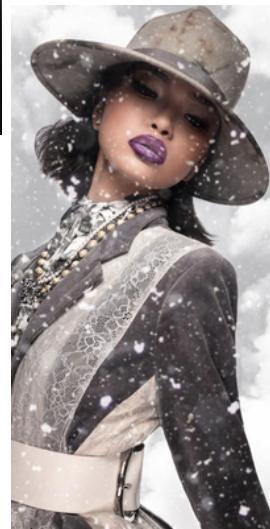
Pepa's DJ Deidra "Spinderella" Roper, and actress Victoria Rowell...



Influenced by '20s, '30s, and '40s style, Otis Damón incorporates the past with the present to orchestrate an artistic flow with each creation that has its own personality and style without duplication.



His breathtaking couture designs have sold on Fifth Avenue in Fortunoff and Henri Bendel, been seen in off-Broadway productions "Look What The Cat Dragged In," and continue to top off New York's Fashion Week.



Interview:

Eric Bomba-Ire

Producer/Director



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Ultimately, we want to make a feature series of sanctuary.

What camera did you use to shoot?

We used the Sony FS9 camera.

Why did you choose to use generative AI?

It was a difficult decision to make in the midst of the industry strike, where AI was a hot button topic. Although we wanted to animate those sequences initially, We chose to experiment with AI animation because we had years of Mr. Otis's own family photos to draw from as a generative source. It remains a tool, not the story.

How long did the project take?

I spent 6 months meeting with Otis once or twice a week. We got to know one another, and it helped me really understand the intricacies of his life and journey—and also research and document the subject matter. Pre- production took 1½ months. It was a two- day shoot. Initial picture editing, sound, and grading were set for two months. But then we had to wait, and more edits over 3 years.

What was the favorite part of the production?

The team. Everyone had the right attitude, professionalism, and passion, and dedicated time and care towards the production. You can only be grateful for that kind of atmosphere when working to tell a story like Otis's.

What is your goal with the film?

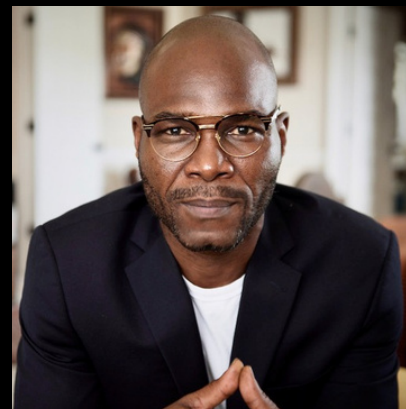
The goal is to bring awareness to the suicide rate of black youth and emphasize the importance of empathy and perceptive intervention to guide them through those challenging times. We want to inspire conversation between educators and students, parents and children, mental health experts and patients. Mr. Otis deserves his flowers now. His story needs to be heard—now.

What are your hopes for distribution?

First, we want to see it do well in the festival circuit. Our hope is it could be used to start discussion in many spaces—in schools, for education, for mental health practitioners, and for parents and their children. One of the most devastating things any parent has to endure is when a child dies at their own hand—and they never saw it coming. Ultimately, we want to make a feature version of Otis's story and continue the series of stories from around the world.

The team

Eric Bomba-Ire is a Ghanaian-born filmmaker, cultural strategist, and founder of Inceptr, where he designs narrative infrastructure at the intersection of story, science, and technology. His films combine documentary storytelling with emerging technologies and participatory narrative to explore questions of authorship, memory, and recognition. His work has been recognized through the Sundance Institute Screenwriters Intensive and the New Orleans Film Society Producers Lab. His feature screenplay, *I Hear You*, is currently in development. He lives and works in Atlanta, Georgia.



John Pruner (Director of Photography) is a member of the International Cinematographers Guild and the Society of Camera Operators. He produced the award-winning feature "Poe's Mystery Theater" that aired as a Halloween special for several years on many PBS affiliate stations. John is also the founder of the 20/21 Project—an artists' retreat focused on healing the traumas of the pandemic through creative expression.

Credits: Disney: "Ms. Marvel", Netflix: "The Curse Of Bridge Hollow", HBO: "The Staircase", "Hard Knocks", "Star Trek: First Frontier, More Than A Game"



Tandi Reddick (Producer) is an accomplished public relations and communications professional. A Georgia native, she has served as Media Relations Manager for the Bronzelens Film Festival as well as Communications Director for the Georgia Lottery. She has recently pivoted into the film industry and is rapidly expanding her repertoire from independent documentaries to studio projects.

Credits: "Olympic Pride", "The Tuskegee Legacy Stories", "The Crown Act", "Illegal Rose", "Medusa", "Wingspan", "Confine"









Cast: Otis Damón
Director / Producer / Editor: Eric Bomba-Ire
Producer: Donna Wong
Executive Producer: Associate Producer: Bernard Bomba-Ire
 Tandi Reddick

Director of Photography: John Pruner
Editor: Charo Chanel Davis
Wardrobe Supervisor: Alain Fouda
Art Director: Calista Moore
AI Animation: Laila Jhané

Extra Casting Extras: Lance Forrest
 Tyrabia Womble
 Zakiya Oliver-Thomas

1st AC / Gaffer: Justin "Magic" Noel
2nd AC: Daryus Hawkins

Camera P.A: Jaqueline Flores-Fernandez
Camera P.A: Nate Bavely

Sound / Boom: Dave R. Watkins

Set dresser: Ryan Tortora
Art P.A: Michael Moreno
Production Assistants: Valeria Cervello
 Mykiah Conyers

Shooting Format: Digital
Ratio: 16:9
Running Time: 16min:55sec
Genre: Documentary
Languages: English
Production Company: Incepttr Media
Country of Production: USA
Date of Completion: 2025
Subtitles: N/A
Company: Incepttr Media

Special Thanks

Jason James
Charles Judson

Thanks

Bernard Miller
Ezinna Anosike
Linda Burns | PA Academy
Tim & Shelby Habberger

Push Push Arts

Credits



Beyond the Film

In Search of Sanctuary begins with one person's story, but it continues through a broader public conversation about mental health, community, and recognition.

Through this work, Inceptr has convened artists, researchers, clinicians, educators, and policymakers across multiple Science Summit sessions during the United Nations General Assembly in New York and Nairobi, as well as year-round civic engagement with the City of Atlanta's Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs through MENTAL.

About Inceptr

Inceptr is a narrative technology studio designing narrative infrastructure at the intersection of story, science, and technology. Through research, film, and interactive media, it develops structured adaptive systems that help people, communities, and institutions navigate complexity, making complex human experiences more structured, adaptive, and accessible. In Search of Sanctuary became the first case study in the development of Inceptr's Sanctuary methodology.

Inquiries

Publicity & Media Inquiries

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PLAY TRAILER

A CHANCE TO **LIVE**. A CHANCE TO **DREAM**



IN SEARCH OF SANCTUARY



INCEPTR MEDIA PRESENT **IN SEARCH OF SANCTUARY**

WARDROBE SUPERVISOR **ALAIN FOUDA** | ART DIRECTOR **CALISTA MOORE**

EDITORS **CHANEL CHARO DAVIS ERIC BOMBA-IRE** | COLOR **TOPE GENIUS** | SOUND RECORDIST **DAVE R. WATKINS**

FIRST AC **JUSTIN "MAGIC" NOEL** | SECOND AC **DARYUS HAWKINS NATE BAVELY**

CAMERA P.A. **ALEX FLORES-FERNANDEZ** | SET DRESSER **RYAN TORTORA** | ART P.A. **MICHAEL MORENO**

PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS **MYKIA CONYERS VALERIA CERVELLO**

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY **JOHN PRUNER** | ASSOCIATE PRODUCER **TANDI REDDICK**

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER **BERNARD MEYIR BOMBA-IRE** | PRODUCER **DONNA WONG ERIC BOMBA-IRE**

DIRECTOR **ERIC BOMBA-IRE**

