



BASED ON THE STORY OF ESSIE MAE WILLIAMS

WAITING

BY DANA VERDE



WAITING

story synopsis

WAITING is a short film based on the true story of Essie Mae Williams and her father James "Strom" Thurmond.

James was a white southern senator who was a staunch opposer of the civil rights movement. Essie is the daughter that he fathered with Carrie Butler, a young African American woman.

In this fictionalized story, Essie and James have a secret meeting at a diner in Coatesville, PA. As the two of them have a heart-to-heart about what really happened between Carrie Butler and him; uncomfortable sips of coffee and exchanges turn into a push-pull conversation that leaves Essie "waiting" for answers that Strom isn't willing to give.

Essie Mae



Gloria Rueben

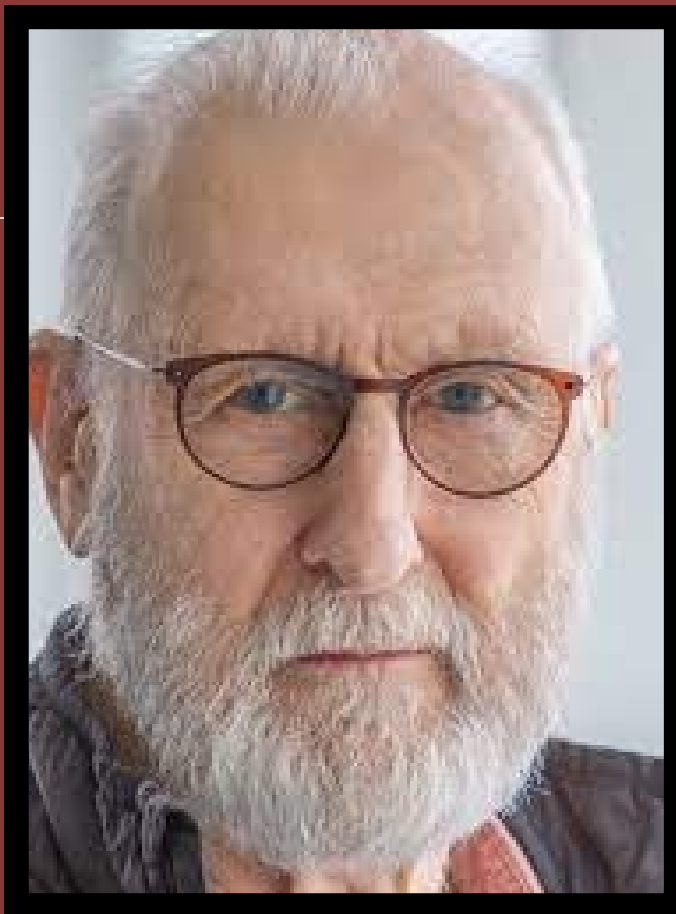


Carmen Ejogo

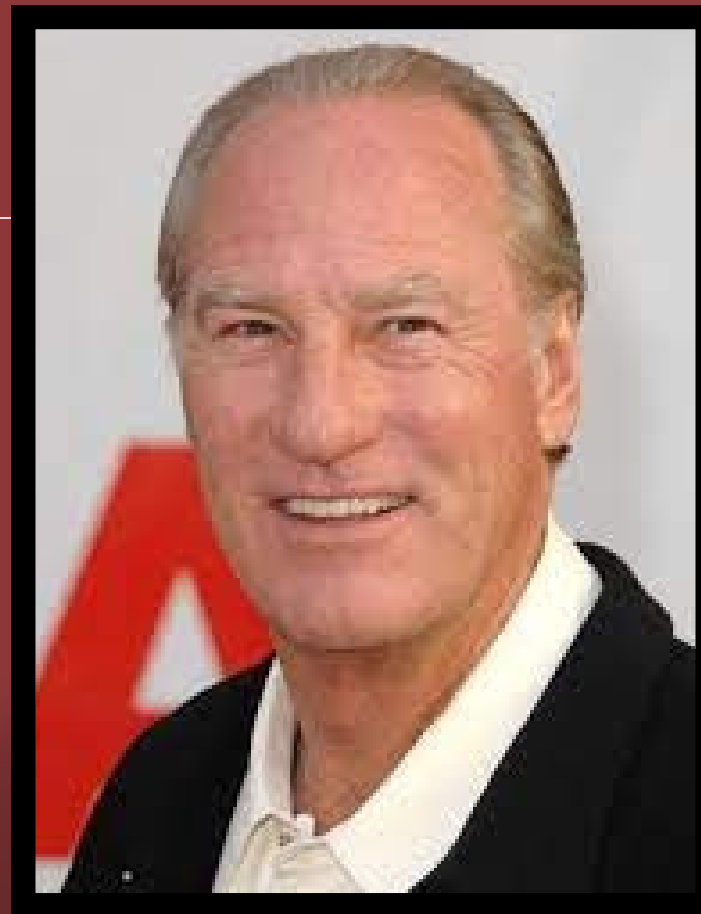


Tracie Thoms

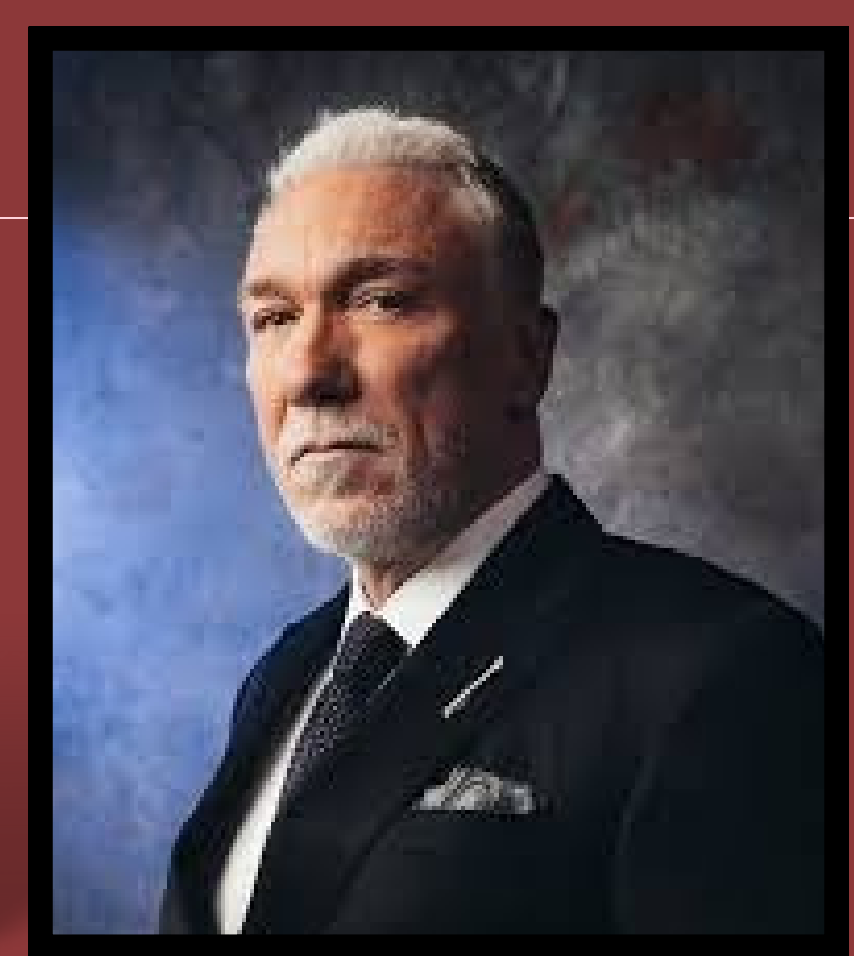
James "Strom" Thurmond



James Cromwell



Craig T Nelson

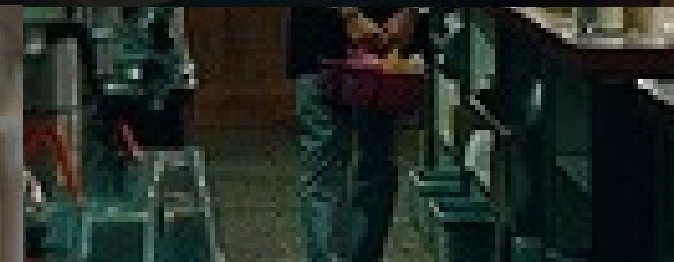


Patrick Page

TONE & MOOD

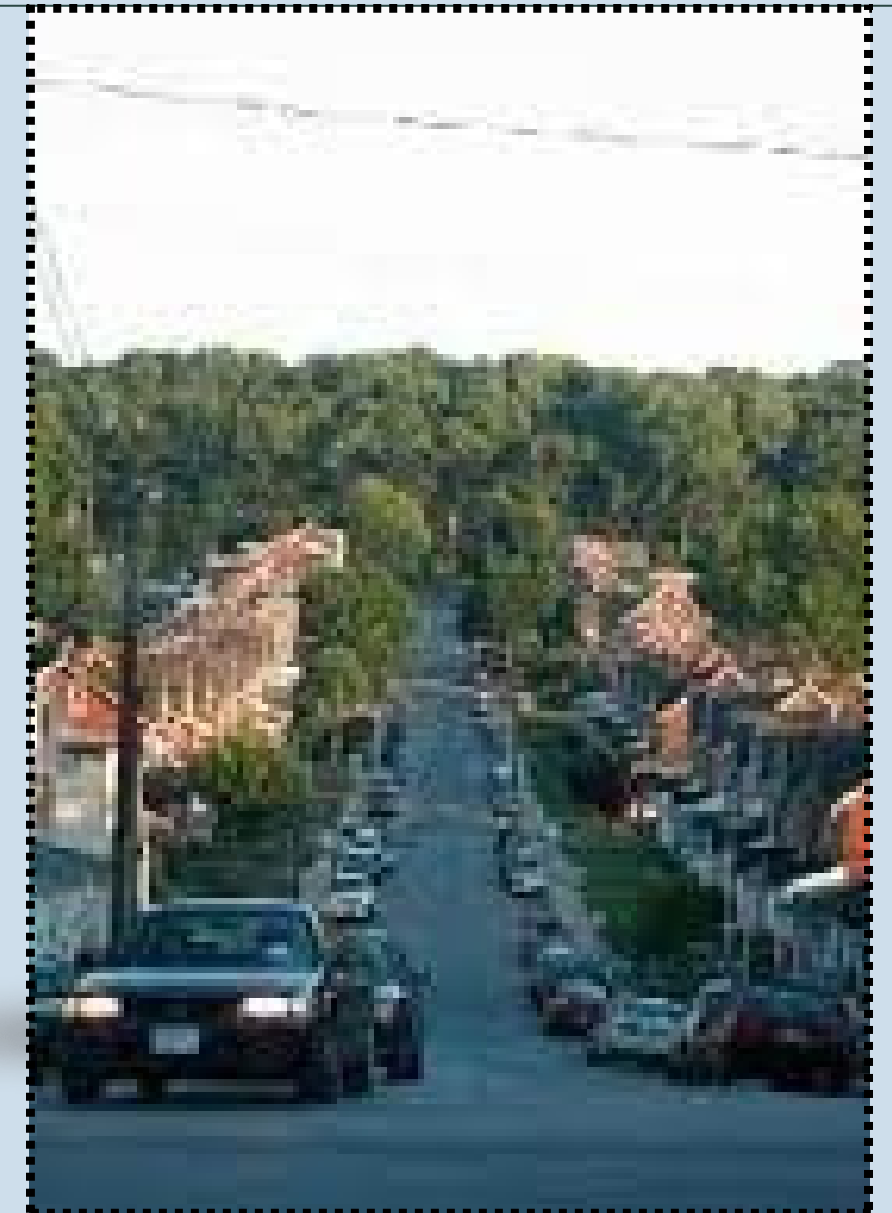
WAITING: THE SHORT FILM

The Look





Coatesville, Pennsylvania



Okema T. Moore is an Emmy Nominated, PGA producer, writer and rising director, creating content for ULTA Beauty, OWN, Netflix, BET, Disney/Marvel and "Moore."

Okema wrote and produced the 2024 EBONY Power 100 Award show, was lead producer on the short film, Chocolate with Sprinkles, and developed and produced Down in the Valley for STARZ. In 2025 she landed her third American Black Film Festival win for her short film Laundry, which she directed.

Okema is a member of Alliance of Women Directors, and she serves on the boards of both NYWIFT, and The Black TV & Film Collective.



THE DIRECTOR

WAITING: THE SHORT FILM

Dana Verde started her career co-hosting a TV show on MTV called Your Movie Show as a film reviewer while pursuing a degree at The New School University in Media Studies/ Screenwriting.

She continued her education in film at The London Film School (London, UK), where she earned an MA in Filmmaking. After graduating, Dana returned to the U.S and wrote and produced several short films that have screened in over 30 film festivals worldwide.

Her feature film a spec screenplay called The Perfect Match, was produced by Queen Latifah's production company, Flavor Unit and was distributed by Lionsgate. It debuted at No. 6 at the U.S. box office opened in 925 theaters nationwide. Her love for short films and short-form content led Dana to create 3CK Media (Third Culture Kid Media), a production company specializing in digital content. Dana has also ventured into TV commercial directing and has co-directed the Flashdance Bucket commercial with DGA-nominated director David Shane for Paramount +. Recently, she has written two TV movie thrillers for Marvista and a Christmas Movie for Hallmark.



WAITING IS MORE THAN A FILM—IT'S A DEEPLY PERSONAL ACT OF HONORING A SILENCED TRUTH.

THE STORY IS INSPIRED BY THE REAL-LIFE REVELATION THAT UNITED STATES SENATOR STROM THURMOND FATHERED A CHILD WITH A YOUNG BLACK HOUSEKEEPER NAMED CARRIE BUTLER. THAT CHILD WAS ESSIE MAE WILLIAMS, WHO SPENT DECADES LIVING IN THE SHADOW OF HER FATHER'S DENIAL AND THE NATION'S SILENCE. THIS SHORT FILM EXPLORES A FICTIONALIZED, YET EMOTIONALLY TRUTHFUL, ENCOUNTER BETWEEN ESSIE MAE AND STROM THURMOND IN THE MID-1970S—A MOMENT OF LONG-DELAYED RECKONING.

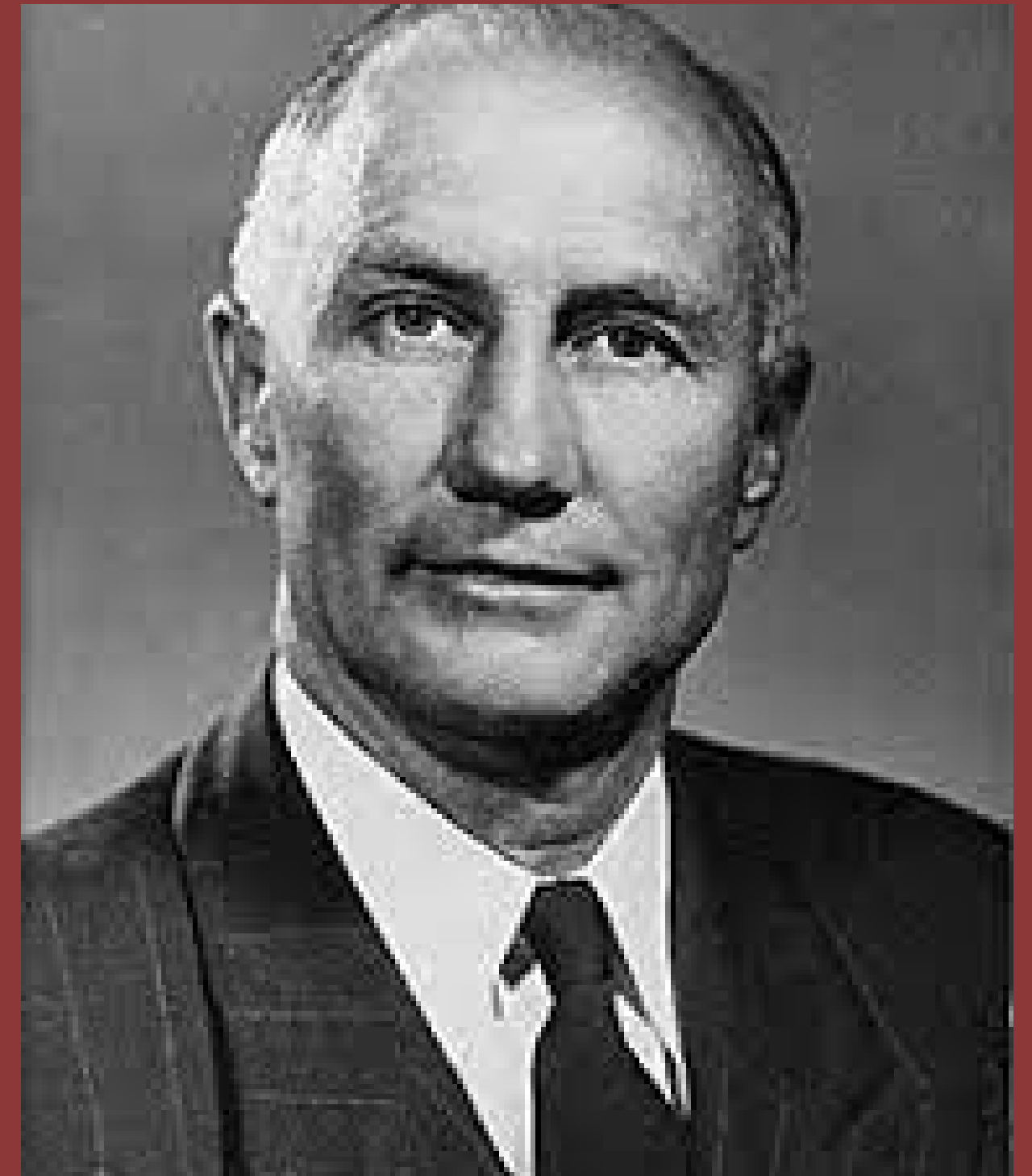
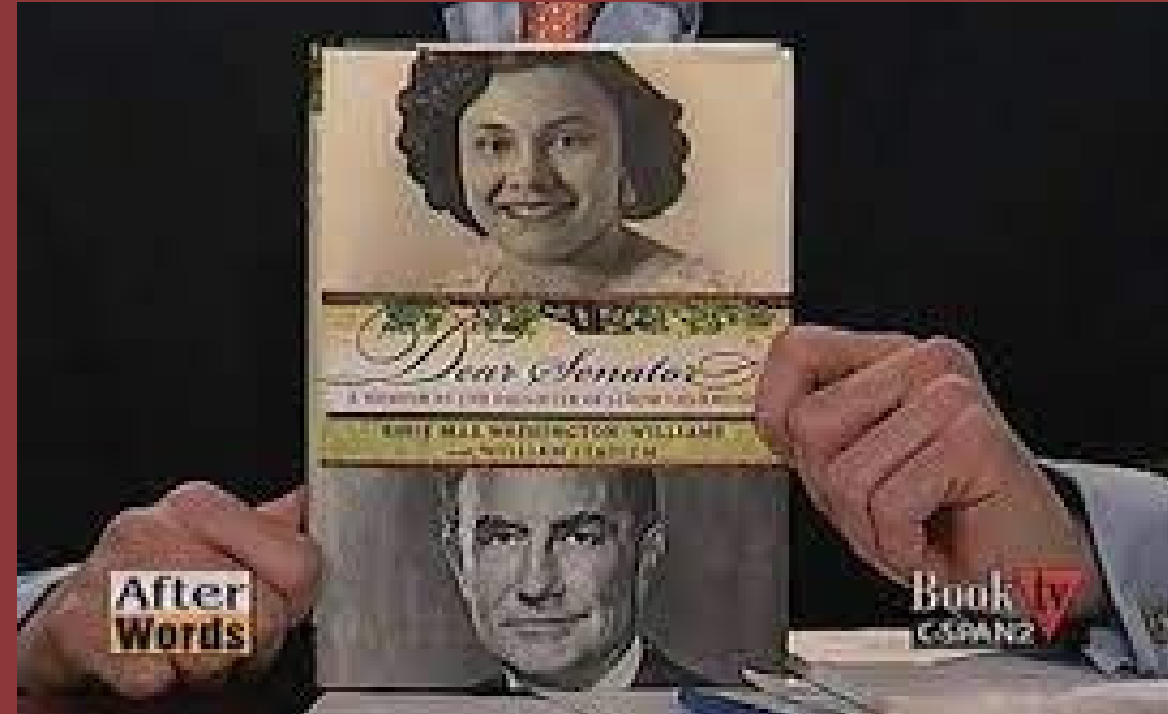
I WAS DRAWN TO TELL THIS STORY NOT JUST BECAUSE OF ITS HISTORICAL WEIGHT, BUT BECAUSE OF MY PERSONAL CONNECTION. I KNOW WANDA BAILEY, THE DAUGHTER OF ESSIE MAE WILLIAMS. HER GRACE, STRENGTH, AND GENEROSITY IN PRESERVING HER FAMILY'S LEGACY MOVED ME DEEPLY. THROUGH WANDA, I FELT THE ECHOES OF GENERATIONS OF WOMEN WHO CARRIED THIS STORY QUIETLY, WITH DIGNITY AND RESTRAINT, UNTIL IT COULD NO LONGER BE IGNORED.

THIS FILM IS FOR THEM—FOR THE DAUGHTERS WHO ARE TOLD TO WAIT, FOR THE MOTHERS WHO BEAR SECRETS, AND FOR THE FATHERS WHO NEVER OWNED THEIR TRUTHS.

WITH WAITING, I WANTED TO CREATE A SPACE FOR THE UNSAID: FOR WHAT LINGERS IN GLANCES, SILENCES, AND COFFEE CUPS LEFT HALF-FULL. IT'S A STORY ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN TRUTH FINALLY ENTERS THE ROOM. WE DON'T DRAMATIZE THIS HISTORY WITH SPECTACLE—WE LET THE EMOTIONAL WEIGHT DO THE TALKING. THIS IS A QUIET CONFRONTATION, BUT ONE THAT SPEAKS VOLUMES ABOUT RACE, POWER, WOMANHOOD, AND THE COST OF SECRECY.

I HOPE THIS FILM SPARKS CONVERSATION, REFLECTION, AND RECOGNITION—NOT JUST OF ESSIE MAE'S STORY, BUT OF SO MANY OTHER HIDDEN STORIES STILL WAITING TO BE TOLD.

Category	Description	Estimated Cost		
Above the Line	Writer, director, producer, cast, casting director, legal	30000		
Production (Below the Line)	Crew, equipment, locations, set dressing, wardrobe, hair & makeup	42000		
Post-Production	Editing, color, sound design, score, archival footage	23000		
Administrative / Insurance	Insurance, payroll, production office, meals, transport	10000		
Marketing, Festivals & Deliverables	Festival submissions, PR, posters, DCP, travel	8000		
Contingency (~5%)	Emergency overage, schedule delays, unforeseen costs	7000		



STROM & ESSIE

THANK YOU

