



Co-producer Evan Casper-Futterman and filmmaker Luisa Dantas.
PHOTO BY GARY MICHAEL SMITH.

LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

DOCUMENTARY SCREENS IN NEW ORLEANS

STORY BY GARY MICHAEL SMITH,
SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT EDITOR

There have been many books and films made about the plight of New Orleans' recovery from Hurricane Katrina. From reporter-turned-author Chris Rose's creative nonfiction *I Dead in Attic* to indie filmmaker Denise Richards Donnelly's phenomenal animal rescue documentary *Katrina Tails*, stories of rebirth and revival have been forefront in the hearts and minds of authors, filmmakers, readers, and viewers who appreciate what makes New Orleans so unique on so many levels.

On August 14, 2010, the historic (and philanthropic project of actress Sandra Bullock) Warren Easton High played host to another such show of solidarity—an extremely well attended community screening of the documentary *Land of Opportunity* by Brazilian filmmaker Luisa Dantas.

This free “evening of film, theatre, poetry, and food” was sponsored by the New Orleans Video Access Center (NOVAC) and JoLu Productions, and organizational partners the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center, Patois: The New Orleans International Human Rights Film Festival, Survivors Village, and the Louisiana Justice Institute. The event featured a special Q&A session with the filmmaker and protagonists featured in the film, as well as performances

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by the Day Labor Theater of Revolution, saxophonist Stephen Gladney, and New Orleans slam poet Sunni Patterson.

In the film, Dantas followed everyday people facing extraordinary circumstances to tell the stories of a diverse group of people who all are stakeholders in the rebirth of New Orleans—one of America's most emblematic cities. Whether local or not, *Land of Opportunity* asks viewers to ponder what the rebuilding of New Orleans can teach them about their own communities. Since this Great American City is being rebuilt from the ground up, the film begs such questions as, "What kinds of cities do we want to create in the 21st century?" and "Will they be truly democratic and diverse spaces or exclusive enclaves designed for tourists and the wealthy?"

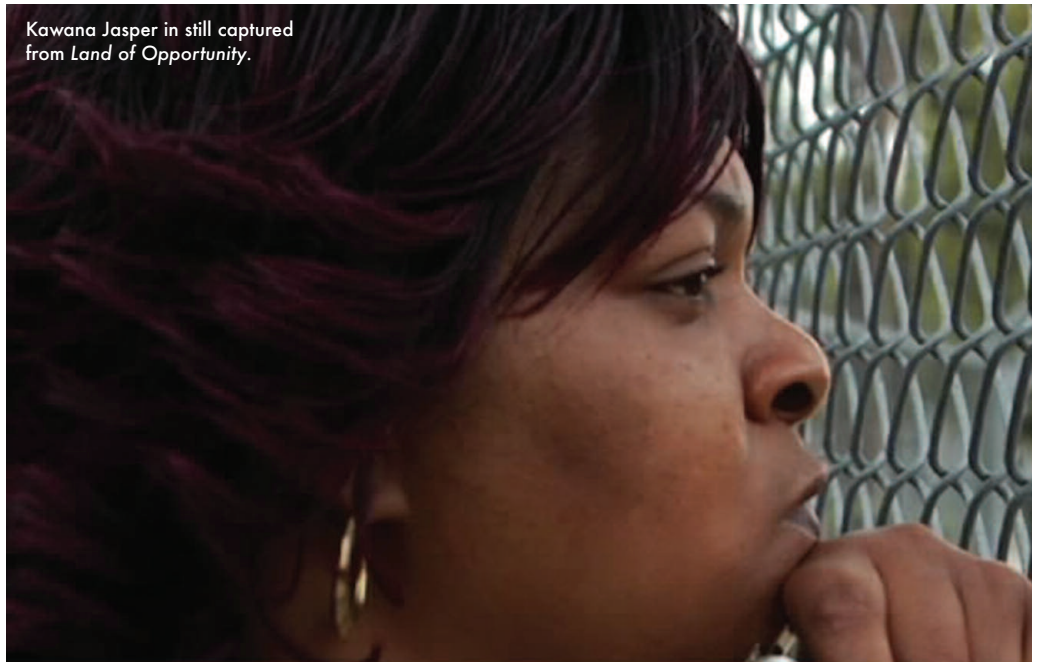
The film points to how ongoing reconstruction of New Orleans exposes key urban issues such as affordable housing, immigration, urban planning and redevelopment, and economic displacement. The filmmaker hopes to engage viewers with complex problems in an emotional and highly personal way, thereby inspiring action and engagement through as many as six personal stories. These narrative accounts come from an eclectic group: a young displaced New Orleanian and model student; a Cuban developer and urban planner; a Gentilly resident-turned-gardener from one of the lowest-lying areas in the city; a community organizer from the Lower 9th Ward where the levees broke; a pair of undocumented Brazilian immigrants; and a mother and daughter displaced from their public housing home.

Says Liz Dunnebacke, NOVAC executive director, "Luisa's tireless efforts over the last four and a half years to document this critical time in our city's history is truly inspiring, and NOVAC is proud to support such a comprehensive and unique endeavor."

Dantas co-produced the acclaimed documentary *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*, relocating to New Orleans in 2006. She's been on the ground filming ever since—a testament to her commitment to see these stories through.

"There is so much to learn from New Orleans and the incredibly

Kawana Jasper in still captured from *Land of Opportunity*.



resilient people here, and it's important that people understand that what happens in New Orleans does not stay in New Orleans," she says. "These issues are affecting cities across this country. As our tagline says, 'Happening to a city near you...'"

The highly credentialed Dantas has worked in film and television production as a writer, director, and producer on a range of different projects, from short films and documentaries to pre-school television

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programs in both her native Brazil and in the U.S. She pursues documentary filmmaking in order to "meld art with social justice," she says. In addition to *Wal-Mart*, she also directed and produced interviews for the Web series *Voices from the Gulf* for the political and social action organization Color of Change. *St. Joe*, her experimental short film about the demolition of public housing in New Orleans, won Best Short Film at Patois in 2009.

Land of Opportunity is a strongly character-driven documentary about New Orleans rebuilding efforts, encompassing a wide range of perspectives rarely seen together. The multi-platform feature-length film was prepared for both broadcast and as a comprehensive interactive Web site featuring content to be delivered across several platforms including streaming media and portable devices.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS FILM, SEE WWW.JOLUPRODUCTIONS.COM.

Demolition of the St. Bernard Housing Development in still captured from *Land of Opportunity*.

