

To Those with Good Intent

Film Noir / Crime, Thriller

Eager for independence and financial stability, 26-year-old Mitchell Harris struggles with his faith, while living with his Mother on Chicago's Southside. After a disappointing job interview with a college friend, Harris finds himself in the middle of a violent, and unforeseen dilemma.

Introduction

Upon my graduation from Columbia College Chicago, I completed *To those with Good Intent* to act as a Senior Thesis project. It was not a requirement as an Interdisciplinary major to have a film as a final project, but I pursued this as a means of capping off my college career with a project that could show my competency as a filmmaker. Since the production was not a requirement within my curriculum, the film was conceived as an independent project - giving me creative control and co-ownership upon completion. This was the first serious project that I developed and executed, and acts as the genesis of my creative process and development as a filmmaker.

To those with Good Intent was inspired by my love *Black and White* cinema and Film Noir. At the time, I was living in Chatham (Chicago's Southside) and I was becoming concerned with life after college. I was still living at home with my Mother, and the growing racial tensions of the country [2016] left me wondering the direction of my career ambitions, opportunities and just my life overall. I was beginning to feel like a loser, and I developed the project within the construct of Noir and Kitchen Sink realism. At the time, I was not mature or skilled enough as a creative or filmmaker to capture the dynamics of Kitchen Sink realism and the depth of that level of performance. So, I relied on my understanding of Noir and the certain character of the city. So much of what the film is inspired by is films like *Killer of Sheep*, and *This Sporting Life* - but would end up being closer to *Killer's Kiss*; where melodrama allowed me up to create something more theatric and "movie like," as I began learning my directorial strengths and weaknesses.

The script was hand-written over the course of two months, mostly on public transit. At the time, I was without a car and I found writing on buses and trains - heightened my learning of dialogue and character. I heard several stories about crime and individuals who got caught up in unforeseen and random situations, and I coupled that with my own personal circumstances to craft the landscape of *To those with Good Intent*. The black and white aesthetic was my pilgrimage to filmmakers I looked up to; whose early works were often shot in the style. I knew I wanted the film to take place in an area that was adjacent to the environment of the Chicago Southside, and I worked with fellow students and my Producer - to find a community that complimented the movie's roots and origins. This would land us shooting in the neighborhood of Ukrainian Village



PRE -
PRINCIPLE -
POST -

Production

The film went through two producers before landing the financier who would lead the project. Since the production was a student film, I was depending on the student body of my campus and the availability of classmates who were interested in working on a project outside of college oversight.

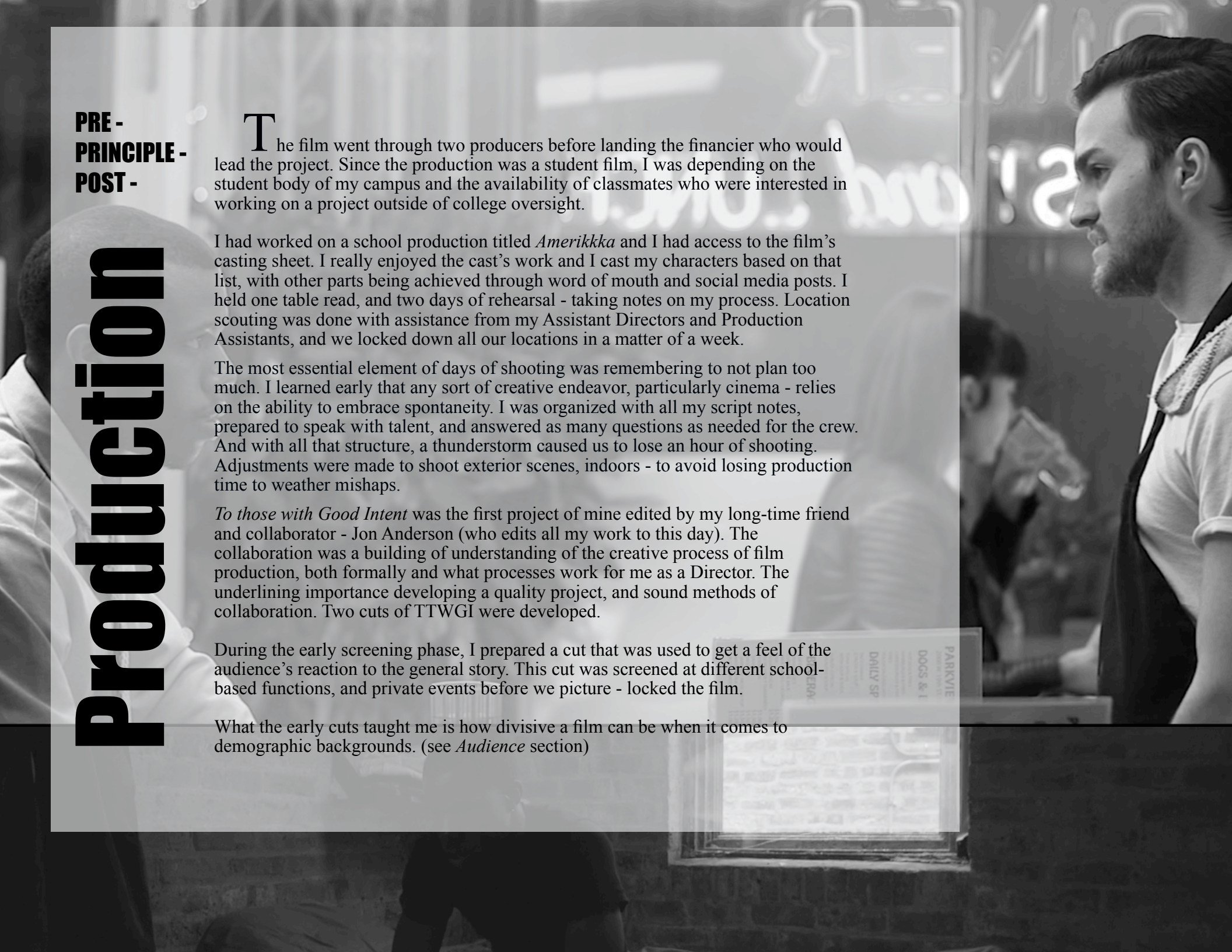
I had worked on a school production titled *Amerikkka* and I had access to the film's casting sheet. I really enjoyed the cast's work and I cast my characters based on that list, with other parts being achieved through word of mouth and social media posts. I held one table read, and two days of rehearsal - taking notes on my process. Location scouting was done with assistance from my Assistant Directors and Production Assistants, and we locked down all our locations in a matter of a week.

The most essential element of days of shooting was remembering to not plan too much. I learned early that any sort of creative endeavor, particularly cinema - relies on the ability to embrace spontaneity. I was organized with all my script notes, prepared to speak with talent, and answered as many questions as needed for the crew. And with all that structure, a thunderstorm caused us to lose an hour of shooting. Adjustments were made to shoot exterior scenes, indoors - to avoid losing production time to weather mishaps.

To those with Good Intent was the first project of mine edited by my long-time friend and collaborator - Jon Anderson (who edits all my work to this day). The collaboration was a building of understanding of the creative process of film production, both formally and what processes work for me as a Director. The underlining importance developing a quality project, and sound methods of collaboration. Two cuts of TTWGI were developed.

During the early screening phase, I prepared a cut that was used to get a feel of the audience's reaction to the general story. This cut was screened at different school-based functions, and private events before we picture - locked the film.

What the early cuts taught me is how divisive a film can be when it comes to demographic backgrounds. (see *Audience* section)



Distribution & Marketing

TTWGI got into five film festivals (*right panel*) and peaked with a win at the Chicago International Reel Shorts festival, claiming the Audience Choice Award. The festival route at that time in 2016 was still a platform that was still exceptionally good for upcoming talent, and the project was able to get onto both domestic and international screens. The 2018 screening with Connect South Shore, was a local event that showcased filmmakers and creative talent of Chicago, outside of the traditional festival market. This increased the local viability of the film and its reputation.

I attended several screenings for the film as well as Q&A sessions - discussing everything from inspiration, my time in college, and where I'd like my film career. The handling of the project with festival representations felt very much like a student film experience, which at the time was great and suitable. But there was a difference of in handling and reception during screenings on the Chicago Southside. (see *Audience* section).

The project was uploaded to Vimeo for viewing, which can be accessed through online search or directly accessed through my online portfolio. Posters and marketing materials were developed for the production, with social media used to announce screenings and festival status updates. Behind the screen (BTS) photography, frames from the film as well as marketing images featuring festival laurels or screening details were routinely shared for audience engagement. Facebook was the primary platform during the time of the film's festival and screening run.

Festivals list

2017 - Chicago International Reel Shorts Festival
- 2017 CIRSFF Audience Choice Award

2017 - Montreal International Black Film Festival

2017 - DC Black Film Festival

2017 - Chicago Southside Film Festival

2017 - Black International Film Festival

2018 - Connect South Shore Showcase



Audience Reception (Market Analysis, Career Impact)

College level

To those with Good Intent's first two screenings were at the collegiate level; one taking place during class for editing feedback, and the other at my college's year end festival. Despite being a very "diverse" campus, a lot of Columbia College Chicago's response was mixed towards the themes of the film's stories. A few students felt the frustrations of main protagonist Mitchell's relationship with his mother were "unreasonable" and "unrealistic." Others felt some of the characters were irredeemable, due to their attitudes and questionable ethics. This was indicative of the age of the collegiate viewing experience, class background, as well as ethnic demographics. Many of the campus's affluent students, could not comprehend the themes of independence and social frustrations; many of them seeing it more so as an exaggeration of inconvenience. This may have been a product of its time, but there was a disconnect with the student body - despite many of the adult faculty giving it positive responses.

Festival level

The responses to *TTWGI* on the festival market were well received, particularly during discussions of genre and the spontaneity of its violence. The Southside Film Festival and Connect South Shore showcase, two platforms skewed towards Black audiences - received the most intimate and introspective responses of any audiences shown to. Many of viewers during Q&A discussions brought up the complications of faith and opportunity in the Black community, as well as the undertones of racial turmoil seen within the film. Programming this project within a Black screening, gave it the opportunity to be seen amidst documentary work and other projects - some independent and many older projects. This allowed the *To those with Good Intent* to have a generational quality in its themes - when watching older projects cover the same aspects of a different era.

Analysis and Career Impact

As my first professional film, the biggest takeaway I got from its creation is my love of dialogue and character interaction. My favorite films at the time and to this day, feature a strong emphasis on imperfect and immoral characters, placed against good (or simply better) people. Film Noir at the time was arguably my most beloved genre and movement of films, due to my then relationship with the construct of "the city." This was the beginning of me finding my voice in crafting stories where I could explore the city in unique ways, through the perspective of a Chicagoan. *To those with Good Intent* taught me a lot about my love of the "Black and White" film, and I have since developed more of an understanding of how to handle the aesthetic for greater use.

An aesthetic that was revisited for a branded documentary endeavor most recently, and will be used for my feature-length debut.