

# 10 AFRICAN-AMERICAN FILM PRODUCERS FUELING THE BUSINESS OF HOLLYWOOD

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By Felicia Pride

Producers. They're the ones behind the scenes of our favorite movies who work tirelessly to make stuff happen. They are the business behind the media, putting together all the necessary pieces—from casting to [budget](#) to distribution—that turn an idea into cinema. Sure, you've heard of Ice Cube, whose one of the most active Black film producers in Hollywood these days, and all the other A-list actors who've naturally spawned off their own production companies, but there are other less well-known producers out there, helping to fuel the entertainment machine called Hollywood. Here are ten (individual and teams) black film producers who toil behind the scenes so that we can sit back, relax, and be entertained.

**Stephanie Allain Bray**



Although she's been a VP of production at Columbia and President of Jim Henson Pictures, Bray has also been a midwife, helping to shepherd Hollywood careers of filmmakers like John Singleton and Darnell Martin. In 2003, she launched her own company, Homegrown Films where she's produced a range of projects including *Hustle & Flow*, *Something New*, and *Black Snake Moan*.

**Effie T. Brown**



After gaining a degree in film production and theater at Loyola Marymount University, Brown climbed the Hollywood ladder, eventually becoming Director of Development for Tim Burton Productions. In 2001, she started her own production company Duly Noted, Inc to bring forth projects by both emerging and established filmmakers, and since then has produced *Real Women Have Curves*, *Everyday People*, and *Rocket Science*. *The Inheritance*, one of the forthcoming films that she produced, stars Golden Brooks.

**Debra Martin Chase**



As a graduate of Harvard Law School, Chase worked in the legal department at Columbia Pictures. Knowing the intricacies of the film [business](#) led her to head the production companies of Denzel Washington and Whitney Houston. Through her own company, Martin Chase Productions, she's worked on *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* and *Just Wright*.  
**Lisa Cortés**



Cortés got her start in the entertainment business working at Def Jam before it was Def Jam. After spending fifteen years working in executive positions with top acts in the music industry, she went back to school and shifted gears into film. Working alongside Lee Daniels at his company, Cortés production credits include *The Woodsman*, *Shadowboxer*, *Monster's Ball* and the Oscar-

nominated *Precious*. “Throughout my career I’ve been fortunate to have positions that are as exciting as they are engaging,” said Cortés. “I really enjoy the dynamic of working with artists and [business](#) people.”

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### **Ava DuVernay**



Although DuVernay has been working in the film industry for more than fourteen years as a marketer and publicist, she made her filmmaking debut in 2008 with the independent hip-hop documentary *This is the Life*. There’s no doubt that her experience heading her firm DVA Media + Marketing and overseeing strategy and execution for more than eighty film and television campaigns for projects directed by the likes of Clint Eastwood and Steven Spielberg has helped her balance the creative with the [business](#). Forthcoming films include *I Will Follow*, which she wrote, directed and produced, and BET’s first original music documentary *My Mic Sounds Nice* which she directed and served as executive producer.

### **Nelson George**



George has proven that being a jack of all trades can pay off. He grew his journalistic roots at New York Amsterdam News, followed by posts at Billboard and Village Voice, then punctuated by several books chronicling black culture. A career in film seemed like a natural [fit](#), especially since George was an investor in Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It* and helped Chris Rock pen *CB4*. Recent credits include directing the Golden-Globe award winning film *Life Support* starring Queen Latifah and executive producing Rock's *Good Hair*. "I am not happy if I'm not doing something," George said. "What makes me happy is the making, the moments of creativity when things come together, or when you're in that trance-like state. Or when you're on a movie set, you're working on a scene, and you say to yourself, 'This shit is working.'"

**Rob Hardy and Will Packer**



Hardy and Packer have come a long way from their days at Florida A & M University where they pushed their ultra low [budget](#) film *Chocolate City*. Now working with multimillion dollar budgets through their company Rainforest Films, Hardy and Packer have developed a chemistry that carefully mixes creativity with business. “Hollywood filmmaking is absolutely a business,” Packer said. “It’s the business of creating, distributing and marketing content.” A string of box office successes *Stomp the Yard*, *This Christmas*, and *Obsessed* has led to their latest project, *Takers*, a spin on the action heist that stars Idris Elba, T.I. and Zoe Saldana.

**Samuel Pollard**



Pollard is a triple threat: editor, producer and director. For more than thirty years, he's lent his expertise and critical eye to a number of projects that you've seen since he's Spike Lee's editor of choice and storytelling partner. Documentary seems to be his genre; he's served as an executive producer of *Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin* and most recently, he produced *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts* and its sequel *If God Is Willing and da Creek Don't Rise*.

**George Tillman Jr. and Robert Teitel**



Within a few years of each other, partners and college friends Tillman and Teitel of State Street Pictures produced huge box office hits: *Soul Food* (written and directed by Tillman) and *Men of Honor*. Their success didn't stop there. They went on to produce all three *Barbershop* films and *Notorious* (directed by Tillman).

#### **Erika Conner**



The University of Houston graduate got her start working under Keith Clinkscapes, then the President and CEO of Vibe magazine, and went on to work under John Singleton and assisting with the production of his films *Baby Boy* and *Shaft*. Her experience at that point landed her an executive position with Naa'ila Entertainmnet, the production company of [video](#) director Hype

Williams. Conner's big breakthrough came in 2006 when she produced the very unique and alternative film/musical Idlewild, which starred rap duo OutKast. Her next project, Mama Black Widow, should be equally as splashy as it is based on the book by the reformed pimp and notorious author Iceberg Slim.

*[Felicia Pride is the founder of BackList](#), a media.entertainment.education company and author of [The Message](#). Follow her on [Twitter](#).*