



## Documentary Director

### 1853.Today

#### The Story of Historic East Towson

**Position:** Documentary Director

**Project:** *1853.Today*

**Production Organization:** Northeast Towson Improvement Association (NeTIA)

**Primary Production Location:** Historic East Towson / Baltimore County, Maryland

**Format:** Feature-length documentary and/or multi-part documentary series

**Engagement:** Contract / Project-Based

**Compensation:** Commensurate with experience and final production scope

### About 1853.Today

*1853.Today* is a historical documentary project telling the story of Historic East Towson, Maryland—a Black community established in 1853 by formerly enslaved and free African Americans associated with the Hampton estate and surrounding communities.

The documentary will connect the community's origins to its continuing story today through descendant testimony, archival records, historical research, maps, photographs, government documents, churches, cemeteries, homes, institutions, and the physical landscape itself.

At the center of the film are the descendants: families who built a community in freedom and whose experiences provide a human lens through which to examine land, family, faith, education, segregation, government policy, displacement, preservation, and the continuing effort to protect Historic East Towson's heritage.



We are seeking a director who understands that this assignment requires considerably more than knowing how to make beautiful images.

**We are looking for a storyteller.**

The successful director must be capable of taking a complex historical record and transforming it into a compelling, emotionally resonant, factually grounded cinematic story.



## The Director's Role

The Documentary Director will provide the principal creative and storytelling leadership for *1853.Today*, working collaboratively with NeTIA, descendant representatives, producers, historians, researchers, and the production team.

The Director will help determine how the story unfolds on screen—what the audience learns, when they learn it, whose voices carry the narrative, how archival evidence is introduced, and how historical events are connected to the landscape and people of Historic East Towson today.

The Director will be expected to approach descendant stories with sensitivity while maintaining rigorous standards for historical accuracy and documentary integrity.

## Primary Responsibilities

The Director will:

- Develop the overall cinematic and narrative vision for *1853.Today*.
- Translate extensive historical research into an accessible and compelling documentary narrative.
- Work with descendants, historians, researchers, producers, and community representatives to identify the film's essential stories.
- Conduct and direct substantive interviews with elders, descendants, historians, scholars, community leaders, government representatives, institutional representatives, and other witnesses.
- Guide the use of archival photographs, maps, property records, deeds, restrictive covenants, newspaper accounts, government documents, historical footage, oral histories, and other primary-source materials.
- Develop visual approaches for explaining historical events for which little or no original film footage exists.
- Direct location filming throughout Historic East Towson, Hampton, Baltimore County, and other historically relevant locations.
- Collaborate with cinematographers to establish a distinctive visual language for the documentary.
- Supervise and collaborate with editors, researchers, archival producers, cinematographers, sound professionals, composers, graphic designers, and other production personnel.
- Help develop the interview list, archival research plan, production schedule, shot list, and documentary structure.
- Participate in fact-checking and ensure that significant historical assertions are appropriately supported and presented.
- Help distinguish documented facts from allegations, interpretations, descendant recollections, and contested historical claims.



- Shape potentially complex subjects—including slavery, emancipation, restrictive covenants, land ownership, segregation, displacement, infrastructure, wealth, community survival, and preservation—into understandable storytelling without oversimplifying the historical record.
- Work with producers through rough cuts, fine cuts, picture lock, sound design, music, graphics, and final delivery.
- Help prepare the documentary for potential public television, educational, streaming, museum, community-screening, and film-festival distribution.

## Essential Qualifications

**Documentary experience.** Candidates should have completed documentary films or substantial nonfiction productions and demonstrate an understanding of long-form documentary storytelling.

**Historical storytelling.** Demonstrated ability to interpret history through people, places, documents, archival materials, and contemporary environments. The successful candidate should know how to make historical evidence cinematic rather than simply informational.

**African American historical and cultural experience.** Experience telling stories involving Black communities, families, institutions, culture, history, or lived experiences is strongly desired.

**Interview direction.** Demonstrated ability to develop trust with subjects and draw meaningful testimony from elders, descendants, historical witnesses, scholars, and community members.

**Research capability.** Experience working with historians, archival collections, primary-source documents, investigative reporting, historical records, or similarly research-intensive productions.

**Narrative development.** Ability to sustain an emotional and coherent story across a feature-length documentary or multi-part series while managing multiple historical periods, characters, institutions, and themes.

**Production leadership.** Experience leading collaborative documentary productions and supervising cinematographers, editors, researchers, archival producers, and other creative and technical personnel.

**Geographic availability.** Ability to conduct sustained production work in Maryland, particularly Baltimore County and Historic East Towson.

**Professional portfolio.** Candidates should provide at least two completed nonfiction work samples, preferably including at least one substantial documentary.



## Preferred Experience

Particular consideration will be given to filmmakers whose previous work demonstrates experience with one or more of the following:

- African American historical documentaries
- Civil rights and social justice history
- Slavery, emancipation, and Reconstruction
- The history and cultural role of the Black church
- Intergenerational family and descendant storytelling
- African American land ownership and property history
- Community displacement, eminent domain, segregation, redlining, or urban development
- Oral history
- Investigative documentary filmmaking
- Archival-intensive historical productions
- Public history and museum storytelling
- PBS or other public-media productions
- Independent documentary distribution
- Film-festival exhibition
- Educational documentary production

Experience as a graduate, faculty member, alumnus/alumna, mentor, or creative collaborator within an HBCU film, journalism, communications, or media program is especially welcomed.

**HBCU affiliation is preferred but is not required.** *1853.Today* is an open opportunity for qualified filmmakers regardless of where they studied.

## The Filmmaker We Are Seeking

The strongest candidate will understand that *1853.Today* is ultimately a story about people—not simply institutions, policies, dates, or documents.

We want a director who can stand in Historic East Towson with an elder and recognize that the house behind them, the church down the street, the road cutting through the community, an old family photograph, and a deed sitting in an archive may all be parts of the same story.

The filmmaker must be comfortable moving between the intimate and the historical:

- **A grandmother's memory and a government record.**
- **A family photograph and a historical map.**
- **A church congregation and the history of institution-building.**
- **A piece of land and generations of ownership.**
- **1853 and today.**



The Director should possess the creative judgment to determine when the audience needs an expert, when it needs a document, when it needs archival imagery—and when the most powerful thing the camera can do is remain still and allow a descendant to tell their story.

## Creative Approach

We are particularly interested in directors capable of combining several documentary traditions: historical documentary, investigative storytelling, oral history, biography, place-based storytelling, archival filmmaking, and cinematic observational work.

The production should not feel like a filmed history lecture.

Nor should historical complexity be sacrificed merely to create drama.

The objective is to produce a documentary that is **cinematically powerful, historically rigorous, emotionally engaging, and accessible to a broad audience.**

## Community and Descendant Responsibility

Because this documentary involves descendants, family histories, churches, burial grounds, slavery, segregation, property loss, and potentially contested institutional histories, the Director must demonstrate mature judgment concerning documentary ethics.

The Director will be expected to respect descendant voices while maintaining the factual and editorial standards necessary for a serious historical documentary.

Candidates should be comfortable working within a collaborative process in which community knowledge, scholarly research, documentary evidence, and filmmaking expertise inform one another.

## Application Requirements

Candidates should submit:

1. **Resume/CV and professional biography**
2. **Director's reel or portfolio**
3. **Links to at least two completed nonfiction productions**
4. **A brief statement of interest in directing *1853.Today***
5. **Description of relevant historical or African American storytelling experience**
6. **Examples of archival, oral-history, or investigative documentary work, where applicable**
7. **Current geographic location and availability for sustained production in Maryland**
8. **Three professional references**



9. **Website, IMDb profile, or professional portfolio link, if applicable**
10. **General compensation expectations**

Shortlisted candidates may be invited to discuss their creative approach with representatives of NeTIA, descendants, producers, and members of the historical research team.

Applicants will **not** be expected to produce unpaid original footage or a completed documentary treatment as part of the initial application.

## Director Selection Criteria

Candidates will be evaluated principally on the strength of their demonstrated work and their ability to tell this particular story.

| Selection Criterion                                    | Weight      |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Historical documentary storytelling                    | 25%         |
| Quality of completed documentary work                  | 20%         |
| African American historical/cultural storytelling      | 15%         |
| Interview and descendant storytelling                  | 15%         |
| Ability to transform research and archives into cinema | 10%         |
| Production leadership                                  | 10%         |
| Maryland availability and collaborative approach       | 5%          |
| <b>Total</b>                                           | <b>100%</b> |

## Geographic Search

The recruitment campaign will particularly target experienced filmmakers and HBCU filmmaking networks throughout the **New York–Philadelphia–Baltimore–Washington–Virginia corridor**, while remaining open to exceptional candidates outside the region who can commit to sustained production work in Maryland.





## **The Assignment**

The selected Director's initial development period will include immersion in the historical record; meetings with descendants and project leadership; location visits throughout Historic East Towson and the surrounding historical landscape; preliminary interviews; identification of archival opportunities; and development of the documentary's creative treatment, story architecture, production requirements, and visual approach.

The goal is not simply to document what happened.

It is to create a film in which audiences come to know the people who built Historic East Towson, understand what they created, see what happened across subsequent generations, and understand why the community's history matters today.

## **1853.Today**

**1853 marks the beginning of the community. Today tells us the story is not over.**