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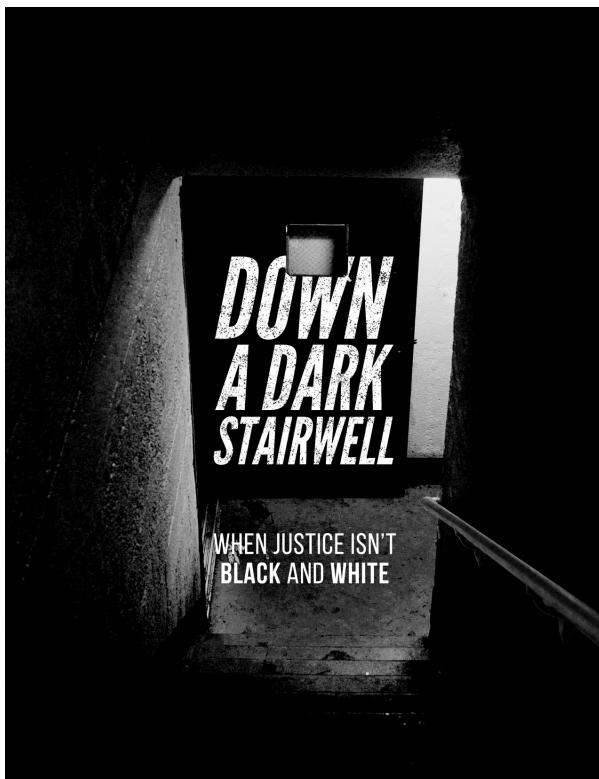
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## DOWN A DARK STAIRWELL TO PREMIERE ON PBS AND THE PBS VIDEO APP ON APRIL 12, 2021

*Documentary Casts an Insightful Light on the Complexities of Police Reform in an Uneven Criminal Justice System*



(San Francisco, CA), March 10, 2021 — On a fall night in 2014, Peter Liang, a Chinese American police officer, shot and killed an innocent, unarmed Black man named Akai Gurley. The event unfolded in a dark stairwell of the Pink Houses housing project in Brooklyn, New York. While conducting a routine patrol of the building, Liang fired his gun—the bullet ricocheted off of a wall and fatally struck Gurley.

*Down a Dark Stairwell* chronicles the tragic shooting of Akai Gurley and the trial and subsequent conviction of NYPD officer, Peter Liang, casting a powerful light on the experiences of two marginalized communities thrust into an uneven criminal justice system together. Directed by filmmaker Ursula Liang, no relation to officer Peter Liang, the film will make its broadcast premiere on PBS's *Independent Lens* on April 12, 2021 at 10:00 p.m. ET ([check local listings](#)) and will also be available to stream on the PBS Video app.

With the country reeling from the killings of Eric Garner and Michael Brown, and activists nationwide calling for police reform, Gurley's death further inflamed the residents of New York City. Cries of police brutality rang out to join a chorus protesting the recent police killings of unarmed Black men. Peter Liang joined a high-decibel national conversation about race and the justice system, one that continued to crescendo when just days later an officer in Cleveland, Ohio, shot and killed a 12-year-old African American boy playing with a toy gun.

In this anguished debate, a rallying point was the pronounced pattern of police officers, mostly white, avoiding criminal prosecution. Liang, however, was hit with a charge of second-degree manslaughter, making him the first NYPD officer in over a decade to hear a guilty verdict in such a case. This triggered a fresh wave of debate, including protests across New York City in support of Liang, with activists speaking out against the unjust treatment of Asian Americans and racial



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imbalances in the American legal system, calling into question whether his conviction was offered up in part to quell larger national unrest.

Filmed as these events unfolded, and featuring interviews with Akai Gurley's family and loved ones, local community members, and activists and organizers within the Asian American and African American communities, *Down a Dark Stairwell* offers an intimate look at the painful aftermath of Gurley's death. The film examines the notion of systemic oppression created by an uneven system, and acts as an entrypoint to a powerful and nuanced discussion about race, policing, and justice in the United States.

"The scale of the protests related to this case were unlike anything I had seen before in the Asian-American community, and I was driven to capture history as it happened," said filmmaker Ursula Liang. "My goal was to look for intimate and honest conversations that would help people understand what happened in a different way than what was being presented in short-sound bite media coverage, and to listen to what's actually being said. My hope is that the film helps to create a space for new conversations about race, justice, and coalition building, and challenges audiences to question who really benefits when legacies of solidarity are disrupted."

*Down a Dark Stairwell* is a co-production with ITVS and CAAM, and part of a five-year pipeline of criminal justice content presented by *Independent Lens* under its Stories for Justice public media partnership. Through a groundswell of more than 20 documentary films and docuseries about the racial inequities of the criminal justice system, the public media partnership aims to increase understanding and inspire local communities to support reform.

Visit the [Down A Dark Stairwell](#) page on *Independent Lens* for more information about the film.

## About the Filmmaker

### **Ursula Liang, Director**

Ursula Liang is a storyteller who has crafted narratives in a wide range of media. She has worked for *The New York Times: Op-Docs*, *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, *ESPN The Magazine*, *Asia Pacific Forum* on WBAI, StirTV, the *Jax Show*, *Hyphen* magazine and currently freelances as a film and television producer and story consultant. Her credits include *Tough Love* (POV), *Wo Ai Ni Mommy* (POV), *One October*, *UFC Countdown*, *UFC Primetime*. *The New York Times* described her debut feature *9-Man* as "an absorbing documentary." The film won numerous awards, including the CAAMFest 2015 Grand Jury prize, and aired on public television's America ReFramed series. Liang is a member of Film Fatales, A-DOC, and sits on the executive board of Brown Girls Doc Mafia.

## CREDITS

Directed by  
Produced by

Ursula Liang  
Ursula Liang  
Rajal Pitroda



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#### **About *Independent Lens***

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series, with Lois Vossen as executive producer, features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS, Acton Family Giving, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more visit [pbs.org/independentlens](http://pbs.org/independentlens). Join the conversation: [facebook.com/independentlens](http://facebook.com/independentlens) and on Twitter [@IndependentLens](http://@IndependentLens).

#### **About Stories for Justice**

The STORIES FOR JUSTICE presented by INDEPENDENT LENS is a public media partnership that grew out of a groundswell of urgent interest in criminal justice issues among storytellers, audiences, local stations, and communities across the country. Steady polling from Gallup, Associated Press, and others shows more than 90% of Americans support some kind of reforms, as more and more people question why the United States is the most incarcerated nation in the world—and why people of color are disproportionately and unjustly affected by the criminal justice system. STORIES FOR JUSTICE brings together the untold stories, missing voices, and community connections needed to help citizens understand our complex criminal justice system, talk with neighbors about local realities, and explore community-led solutions to reduce injustice, violence, racism and harm. Stories for Justice is made possible with the generous support of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Ford Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Wyncote Foundation and Park Foundation.

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