

Arts &amp; Culture

JALENA'S JOURNEY  
TOWARDS BRILLIANT  
REPRESENTATION

Jalena Keane-Lee is a social justice filmmaker and the spring 2018 Sally Burns Shenkman Woman Filmmaker Fellow.

Storytelling by [Deena](#)

[ElGenaidi](#)

Filmmaker [Jalena Keane-Lee](#), 22, aims to place women of color at the forefront of the film industry, launching an all women-of-color production company and working on documentary films to spotlight important issues involving women around the world.

Her company, [Breaktide Productions](#) is set to launch in the coming weeks, and she is collaborating with fellow filmmakers Reaa Puri and Alex Bledsoe. After finding that they were all working on similar projects "as one-woman machines," Keane-Lee said, they decided to collaborate.

“We all gathered together and realized that we had the same mission. We needed to band together to make us all so much more powerful.” Their goal is to hire only women of color for all roles and positions in an effort to increase representation in film—both behind and in front of the camera. “There’s nothing like being around and working with other badass women of color, especially in this political climate,” Keane-Lee said. For Keane-Lee, this means working with a team of women that she can trust and rely on, she says, especially with politically fraught work.

Keane-Lee graduated from Wellesley University, where she studied Political Science and Cinema and Media Studies. During her time in college, she worked as an NBC Fellow and received the Secretary Albright Fellowship, a fellowship created for Wellesley students, in which the students were given a stipend to work on sustainable development projects.

She also studied abroad in Prague, where she attended Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, also known as FAMU. Lee describes FAMU as a “real film school,” where she was able to direct a film on 16mm camera for the first time. After graduation, she moved back to her hometown of Berkeley, California and now works in film full time.



Jalena Keane-Lee'S Directing Reel

Although Keane-Lee is interested in both documentary and narrative film, she is currently focusing primarily on documentaries. She recently directed and produced a film about female construction workers in Myanmar with her previous production company, Blue Peel Productions. Lee spent June and July

of 2016 in Myanmar working on the film, called *The Construct: Female Laborers and the Fight for Equality*, pooling together a team of international female filmmakers, she said. However, the project was not without its challenges.

"The different cultural nuances as a foreigner and traveler can be hard to pick up on," Keane-Lee said. "As a young woman, I found that there are more restrictions and limitations than there are on men, especially being an Asian American woman in an Asian setting." As a result, Lee says she had to be more aware of her behavior, representing herself not just as an American, but as an Asian American, which had its own specific nuances. Lee also takes into consideration her background and identity as an Asian American woman in the specific work she does.

"Filmmaking is always people doing it with their friends," Keane-Lee said. "It's always been upwardly mobile, wealthy, white men



that could afford expensive equipment bringing their friends in. As an Asian American woman, I try to always portray Asian American women and women of color as the powerful women everyone knows them to be."

Within the industry, Keane-Lee cites Ava DuVernay and Issa Rae as powerful women of color she views as models for her career. She also looks to her own parents as role models, as they were both theater actors in the past. Lee's end goal with film is to make sure women of color are represented. Her next film is a documentary about the Hawaiian telescope permits that many Native Hawaiians were opposed to. Lee aims to tell the untold story

behind the permit project, and in the meantime, she will continue to work with women of color to come up with new ideas and collaborations.

“One reason I really like filmmaking,” Keane-Lee said, “is that I’m interested and passionate about a wide variety of issues and topics, but I really want to make sure that women of color are represented and have a voice and are portrayed the way we actually are—brilliant, strong, and taking on people’s problems and fixing them.”

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You can learn more about [Jalena Keane-Lee here.](#)

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The word "Stellar" is written in a large, blue, cursive script font. The letters are thick and have a slight shadow, giving it a three-dimensional appearance. The 'S' is particularly large and loops around the 't'.

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