Written by Patricia Turnier
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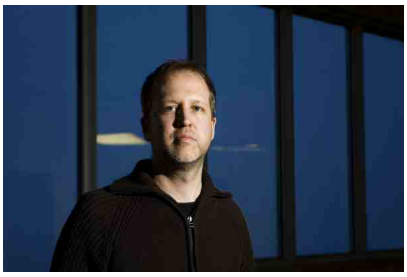


Yanick Létourneau was a Concordia University communication student. He's a producer, movie and documentary director as well as co-founder of Périphéria Productions Inc. That enterprise, that was founded in June 2000, specializes in movie and TV production. Since its beginnings, that society's been creating politically and socially driven documentaries as well as fictitious tales while keeping its focus on what captivates the masses. Périphéria 88 strives to have the latest word on movie directors, chaotic world events and new technologies.

Létourneau always admired liberated and thoughtful filmmaking that is brave enough to take on industrial diktats through works of art. This documentarian's interests range from sociopolitical and identity questions to pop culture and urban music. He produced short films and music videos for Quebec hip-hop artists through that perspective. That's how Létourneau wrote, produced and directed 2003's "*Chronique Urbaine*", his first long film stemming from his short film entitled "514-50 Hip-Hop". He then produced 2005's "
Souvenirs d'Acapulco
", a Diego Briceño-Orduz documentary relating to sex abuse cases towards the homeless Acapulco youth by North American tourists. Létourneau also produced "
Territoires
" by Mary Ellen Davis, a 2007 documentary on Canadian photographer Larry Towell who documented the impact of war and countries' borders on the nomads. Another one of Létourneau's productions include 2007's "
Ballades de minuit
" by Diego Briceño-Orduz, a documentary on Latin-American immigrants. Létourneau later on joined forces with Natasha Ivisic with whom he produced and directed "
Je porte le voile
", a 2009 documentary on Muslim women and their use of the hijab. That film was shown at the "Parallèle" theater located in Montreal and was aired on the RDI TV channel.

In 2011, Létourneau produced and directed his second high-rated documentary, "The United States of Africa" (a NFB coproduction) that relates to the social and political impact of the hip-hop generation, especially in Africa and North America. The film's official poster is quite symbolical and revealing since it shows a fist holding up a microphone in the air, which is an obvious reflection to the tone of the documentary. That film goes straight to the point and doesn't rely on

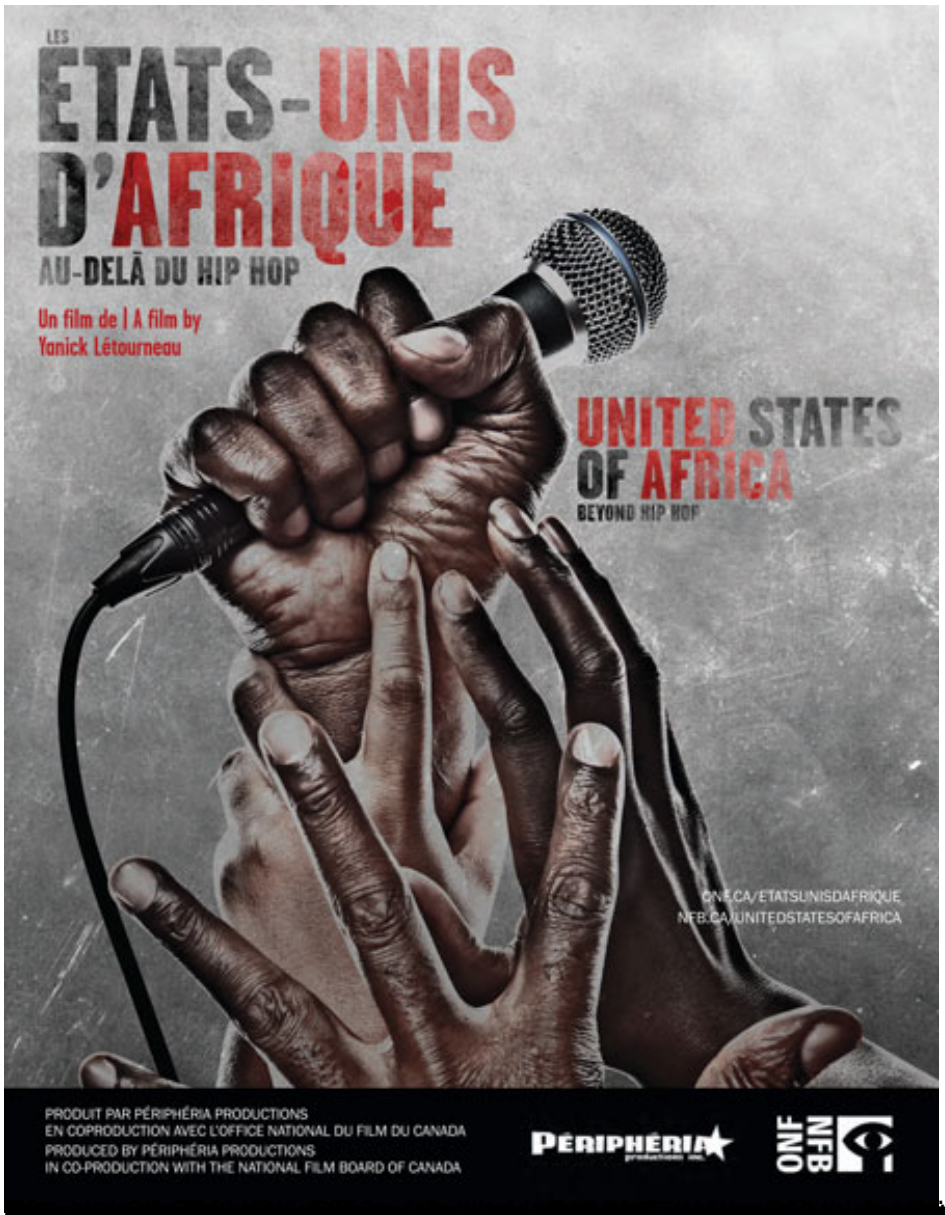
self-pity; the moviemaker wanted it that way from the very start. That movie gives the opportunity to witness the richness and cultural diversity of that continent; a nice evening held in Ouagadougou rewarding African music, for instance. Strong and historical Black characters such as Patrice Lumumba and Thomas Sankara are put in the front. That film documents hip-hop through depictions of current social issues present in the African continent. That documentary is rich in contents, shows a different side to rap as well as a new portrayal and reflection on Africa, notably through the eyes of Senegalese rapper, Didier Awadi. That rapper's new album, "
Présidents d'Afrique
", addresses today's youth through fierce lyrics. Awadi visited about 40 countries including Africa (he met fellow rapper ZuluBoy in South Africa). Stepping out of that continent, Awadi visited France and the United States of America (where he's collaborating with M1 of Dead Prez). Barack Obama's driving force led Awadi to take part in January 2009's presidential inauguration evening, an event full of hope for African-Americans. It should be noticed that "The United States of Africa: Beyond Hip-hop" emerged during the last difficult election in Senegal with the arrival of new president Macky Sall.

Létourneau met rappers Awadi and Smockey for the very first time during his trip to Burkina Faso in 2004. He was there to promote "*Chronique Urbaine*" (filmed with digital technology in popular Montreal neighbourhoods), a film about urban artist
Sans Pression
. Awadi and Smockey have now become the principal subjects of the last documentary by Létourneau. These artists that are recognized in their countries and elsewhere in the world distinguishing themselves by their firm statements and military demeanor. Didier Awadi, a pioneer of African hip-hop, very much popular in his country, has become a true advocate of such activism and Létourneau observes him with great attention throughout his journey. Awadi conveys sociopolitical ideals through his music.

"The United States of Africa" was broadcast by Documentary Channel, Super Channel and *Télé - Québec* (on last May 20th). Close to one million people will see that film in Canada and elsewhere in the world this year. Since last May 15th, that film is available on paid TV under the name "United States of Africa" and available in English on iTunes (Canada, the US, Australia and New Zealand). Therefore, the movie's available in both French and English. It would be nice if it got translated or dubbed into other languages such as Spanish and Wolof.
"The United States of Africa"
is one of FIPA's (
Festival International des Programmes Audiovisuels
) January 2012 selections.

Medias don't overlook Létourneau's films. Papers such as "*Métro*", "*Voir*" and "*Le Devoir*" critiqued his movies.
"The United States of Africa"
was played last March on the silver screen in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada. More precisely, that documentary was shown at
Cinéma L'Excentris - Salle Radio Canada
, and our
Mega Diversities'
team was present. It was impressive to see Létourneau make himself available to answer questions of the public after projection of the film.
Mega Diversities
had a talk with Yanick Létourneau last spring. He discussed his journey and evolution as a filmmaker and his latest, brilliant film,
"The United States of Africa"
, amongst other things.

[Interview translated from French by the talented Israell Isaac]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D'AFRIQUE
AU-DELÀ DU HIP HOP
Un film de | A film by
Yanick Létourneau
UNITED STATES
OF AFRICA
BEYOND HIP HOP
ONF.CA/ETATSUNISDAFRIQUE
NFB.CA/UNITEDSTATESOFAFRICA
PRODUIT PAR PÉRIPHÉRIA PRODUCTIONS
EN COPRODUCTION AVEC L'OFFICE NATIONAL DU FILM DU CANADA
PRODUCED BY PÉRIPHÉRIA PRODUCTIONS
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