

# Discovering Your Inner Power in M. Asli Dukan's *RESISTANCE: the battle of philadelphia*

by Grace D. Gipson



In 1899 sociologist and storyteller W.E.B. Du Bois published what would be known as the first sociological race study of the African American community in the United States, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. This study, as a whole, brought attention to the problems of Black communities in the U.S. with Philadelphia as the central focal point. Upon completion of the study, Du Bois gathered that “the Negro” was ultimately being perceived as a problem within American society. This labeling was created due to an amalgam of racial, social, class, health, educational biases and issues. Thus, it was crucial that a change in perception was necessary and that Blacks were afforded an equal opportunity to excel and thrive in and outside of their communities.

Fast forward to the *near* future, filmmaker and visual artist M. Asli Dukan picks up the mantle of Du Bois and continues to shed light and creatively fight the long-standing injustices and oppressions of Philadelphia in her 2018 web-series *RESISTANCE: the battle of philadelphia*. With the constant abuse and violence toward Black bodies, the resistance must revamp and re-strategize. Through this six-part series, Dukan demonstrates that when a community comes together under the guise of resistance they are not to be ignored or underestimated.

*What is one willing to risk?* This is a question that one must ask themselves, especially if they are wanting to be a part of “the action”. *RESISTANCE: the battle of philadelphia* chronicles that question through the lives of five residents (Akewi, Kurtis, Mother Adu, Zam, Crystal) whose lives are interconnected and ultimately lead to a battle for liberation and equality. Through this

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six-part web series viewers encounter what it means to be on constant alert and trapped in the web of surveillance. Thus, each character must tap into their strengths, while channeling their anger and frustration into dismantling a corrupted system. Much in the same way that Tananarive Due used her personal experiences of racism and opposition in her horror and fantasy storytelling as a mode of healing; Dukan carries out that same mission as we witness each resident collectively fighting for the community, self-worth and humanity.

Another standout feature of the series is the way it channels a female energy that personifies a type of familial, protective and nurturing spirit. This is reminiscent of Octavia Butler's work highlighting the female figure as a core part of the story. Whether it is a mother, sister, daughter, friend or spiritual guide the female presence is very much incorporated into the series. Additionally, Dukan is able to purposefully balance this female energy, while showcasing that each resident has a part to play and that no one goes unnoticed.

*RESISTANCE: the battle of philadelphia* as web series additionally serves as a history lesson as it pays homage to a longstanding history of Black futures, Black intelligence, culture, and early social movements. The episodes in their own unique way show influences of the Black Arts Movement, tap into the action plans of James Baldwin, while further exploring Du Bois's early Philadelphia study. This internal acknowledgement of *The Philadelphia Negro* study shows that the fight continues and the current residents are reviving the fight to be seen as equals...as human. *RESISTANCE: the battle of philadelphia* is not simply just a web series, but an ongoing visual story of maintaining community, protecting the safe havens, and acting on the dreams of the future.

Not only do we witness the struggle and strides of these Philly residents through the series storyline, Dukan makes sure that we visually appreciate the beauty of this east coast city. From the opening credits of downtown Philadelphia, to protests in Center City, to all the city murals, and to the neighborhoods of West Philadelphia viewers are immersed into a space that refuses to be conquered. Philadelphia not only houses the setting for the web series, but embodies a city built on hope and possibility, a core tenet of the sci-fi, speculative, fantasy universe.

All in all, *RESISTANCE: the battle of philadelphia* is not only an Afrofuturist and speculative story film-wise, but an illustrative enticing treat to other speculative and activist gems like the mural of sci-fi/horror/fantasy writer and Philly native the late L.A. Banks; past and present references from C.L.R. James, Angela Davis, and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor; and the pioneering poetic spirit of Sonia Sanchez. Considering Philadelphia's rich history of Blackness and endurance that is uniquely explored in Dukan's *RESISTANCE: the battle of philadelphia*, one must prepare to dive into this series ready for battle.

*RESISTANCE: the battle of philadelphia* is set to commence this September 2018.