

Nina Parikh – And The Lure Of Mississippi For The Film Industry

Angela Rogalski | September 4, 2019



The Mississippi Film Office is committed to bringing more film and television production to the state. From location scouting and research, to pre-production help with casting, extras, crew, equipment and trouble-shooting during production and wrap, the

Film Office and its director, Nina Parikh, are ready to help. Parikh's objective is to assist in bolstering the state's economy by showing the film industry what Mississippi has to offer when it comes to incentive programs, diverse locations and a history of moviemaking that is more than impressive.

In the 2019 legislative session, the Mississippi Motion Picture Incentive Program was amended to again include a rebate on salaries of non-residents working in Mississippi," Parikh says. "The current program returns a rebate on the following: twenty-five percent on expenditures with Mississippi vendors/businesses, twenty-five percent on non-resident salaries (as long as the production is partnered with a pre-approved Mississippi production entity), thirty percent on resident salaries, and five percent additional on the salary for any individual that is a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces."

The state's rich history in moviemaking includes *A Time to Kill*, *O, Brother Where Art Thou*, *The Help* and a multitude of other great films. And with Mississippians such as Morgan Freeman, Tate Taylor (director of *The Help*), Oprah Winfrey, and many more state-born actors and professionals promoting the state, the future of Mississippi-made productions looks bright.

Parikh herself is a self-proclaimed Mississippian. While she lived in Indiana, Illinois and New York until she was around eleven-years-old, she grew up basically in Brandon, Miss. and feels that Mississippi is home.

Growing up, she had always loved photography and storytelling, and when one of her best friends in high school suggested she get into filmmaking, the course for her career was set. She graduated with a Radio, Television, and Film (emphasis on Film) degree from University of Southern Mississippi and she continued her film studies at New York University.

"I began as a freelance crew member, working all over Mississippi and our surrounding states," she says. "I started in the entry production assistant position, found a focus in the camera department, and eventually started producing. I've produced both documentary and narrative projects including Sundance award winner *Ballast* which we filmed mostly in Yazoo County. I'm a co-founder of the Crossroads Film Society & Film Festival and Mississippi Film Alliance. I teach a film production class at Millsaps College and directed the Canton Young Filmmakers Workshop, a summer program for students ages eight to seventeen. And I've been with the Mississippi Film Office for twenty-one years, serving as the director for the last two years."

Parikh says that moviemaking in Mississippi had slowed some in the last two years, leading up to the change in legislation this past April.

"But immediately after that change, we have seen an increase in inquiries and location scouting since that time," she adds. "So, it certainly has made a difference already. Production has changed over the last two decades and it continues to change. Equipment is more accessible, resources in general are also more accessible. There are people here in Mississippi who have access to camera equipment, editing software, and the means to learn about screenwriting, so you have independent filmmakers all over the world telling stories, so it isn't just Hollywood. It's both the studios and independent filmmakers. And those independent filmmakers are making content not just for a big theater screen, but for streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, even YouTube and Facebook, that have platforms now for storytelling."



With content providers all over the world and platforms that are as diverse as the filmmakers, Parikh says that having an incentive to bring them to Mississippi, and also to encourage local storytellers, is important and effective.

Parikh adds a new Tate Taylor movie was finished recently in Natchez called *Breaking News* in Yuba County. "And Tate's goal is to make as many of his film and television productions that he's involved with, here in Mississippi. He's from Jackson, Miss. and we're very lucky to have his dedication to the state, his love of the state."

The Dinner Party, directed by Miles Doleac, who's based in

Hattiesburg, is another movie that was just wrapped up in the state. And a first for Mississippi is a feature that Parikh is hopeful will get underway soon since some casting has already been done in the state, called *Blue Bayou*. It will film on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

"It's a unique story that's written and directed by Justin Chon, who is an actor that was a part of the *Twilight* series," Parikh adds. "It will hopefully begin this fall. They're specifically looking for actors who are of Vietnamese or Korean descent and they hope to find those people in Mississippi. And it's a first for the state because *Blue Bayou's* lead character is written as an American with Korean heritage. So, we're very excited." ■