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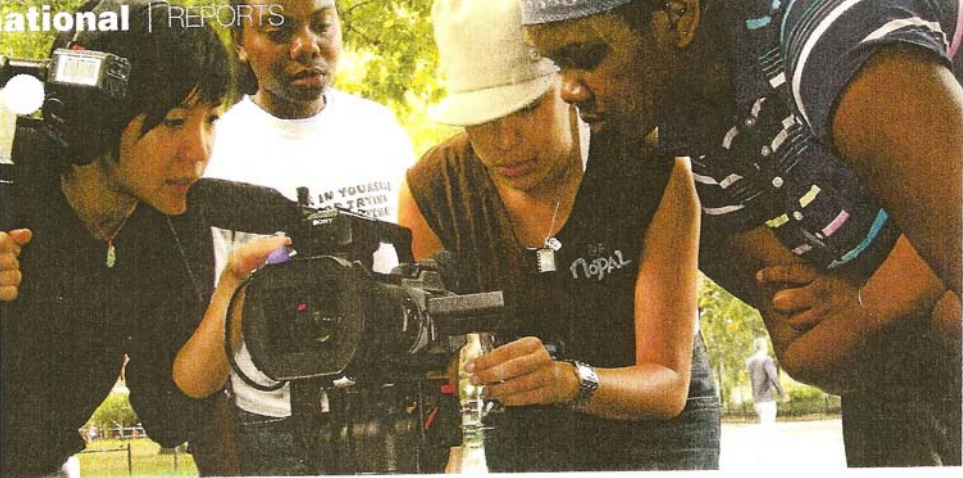


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## From Harlem to Hollywood

A New York "boot camp" turns young women of color into feminist filmmakers

INSTEAD OF PLAYING OUTSIDE, "I was that kid who was up in her room, writing her screenplay," says Karly Beaumont, 27, who grew up in New York City's Washington Heights neighborhood. "But I didn't see any women out there making movies—definitely not women of color who look like me."

Harlem-based media justice organization Chica Luna Productions is trying to change that. Beaumont participated in the 2005 inaugural class of Chica Luna's F-Word program—the "F" stands for "feminist"—a yearlong "boot camp" that trains young women of color, ages 16 to 25, to be socially conscious filmmakers. As her capstone, Beaumont produced *I'm Not Here*, a gripping short about a young girl cowering in her bedroom as her father's heavy footsteps approach.

Although the program is about creating a safe space for self-expression, it's also about developing participants into professional filmmakers. At a time when pop-culture commentators are hailing YouTube as a great democratizer, Chica Luna aims higher: for "well-crafted films with visual soul," says co-founder Elisha Miranda. In addition to achieving "media literacy"—

the ability to recognize even the subtlest racist, sexist and homophobic undertones in films in order to avoid perpetuating them—the young women study producing, screenwriting, directing, camera, lighting and editing. They grapple with questions such as "How do you light this well for people of color so they all don't look like shadows?"

Several of the program's weekly sessions are dedicated to career nuts and bolts such as applying for artist grants and developing a salable film treatment. Co-founder Sofia Quintero says, "You could have the most powerful, important, conscious message, and if your craft is not tight"—and you don't have the resources or know-how to get your film exhibited—"no one's going to listen to it."

Chica Luna founders Miranda, Quintero and Sonia Gonzalez each interrupted their own fledgling film careers to mentor young women of color. With a shoestring budget and a six-month lease on a tiny office space, they opened Chica Luna in September 2001. "We did this primarily for selfish reasons," says Quintero with a grin. "We didn't want to be the only ones out there. This is a big recruitment drive for us."

▲ Budding filmmakers (left to right) Mansee Kong, Gloria Zapata, Yaromil Fong-Olivares and Stephanie Alleyne

The program is starting to get Hollywood's attention. One F-Word graduate is now a director's assistant on the upcoming Michael Pinckney film *You're Nobody 'til Somebody Kills You*. Symphony Space hosted a Chica Luna film festival this year, and the May graduation ceremony was held at the Times Square headquarters of HBO. "I was pretty impressed," said Doris Martinez of Alianza@HBO, the company's Latino networking group. "It really took me by surprise, the level of maturity that these girls have."

One of the shorts screened was *Sol, Mar, y Estrella* by Yaromil Fong-Olivares—the story of a young Dominican girl who falls in love with her mother's lesbian friend. "What's out there in film is not very woman-positive," says Fong-Olivares. "A lot of what we see in the media is tits and ass, and you've gotta be tall and skinny, have light skin and straight hair. It's a counterprogram for us to be able to take that power of the media and throw it right back."

—BETH SCHWARTZAPFEL