



PURE GOLD PRESENTS:

# *THE BOOK OF GEORGE*

George McKenzie Jr. traded the hard streets and violence of New York City for a life photographing some of the most elusive animals in North America for National Geographic.

His next mission? Empower kids of color to access their own dreams and to protect the natural world.



# *“Growing up, all I ever wanted to be was a gangster.”*

From Brooklyn's concrete jungle to the heart of the Everglades, meet George McKenzie Jr., a Black photographer transforming his lens into a beacon of change. Swapping the weight of a gun for the promise of a camera, George found his calling amid nature's raw grandeur, capturing everything from city pigeons and rats to elusive panthers. His unique perspective earned him the title of National Geographic Explorer, but his mission runs deeper than recognition.

George, a rare gem in the predominantly white canvas of wildlife photography, is empowering kids of color to shift their gaze to conservation. He's proof that the color of your skin shouldn't define the wild dreams you pursue, nor the impact you aspire to make.





## WHO IS GEORGE?

Hailing from Guyana, George McKenzie Jr. transitioned from a shy city kid to a magnetic event photographer in the hustle of New York City. A serendipitous encounter propelled him towards his true calling - wildlife photography. Today, he stands at the epicenter of his documentary, *The Book of George*, capturing nature's essence and inspiring young people of color from underserved communities.

This film is George's mission in motion, demonstrating that dreams are not restricted by socioeconomic barriers and that conservation is everyone's responsibility. "This Earth is our collective inheritance; its protection should not be a luxury only the affluent can afford. We must democratize the narratives of conservation," asserts George. Support *The Book of George*, and empower a more diverse, inclusive future for our planet.







## ***THE STORY***

Mentors told George, "photograph what you have access to," which in his Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood, were pigeons and rats. Turning adversity into opportunity, George's compelling captures of these "rats with wings" launched his career, earning him a spotlight in National Geographic. Now, he invites you to be a part of his ongoing conservation mission, from the city streets to the heart of Florida's wild.

This project forms the unseen, meticulous labor of George's passion for wildlife photography. As the sun peeks above the horizon, he services his camera traps, reflecting on his journey from the concrete jungle of New York City to this inspiring expanse of nature.

Before sunrise, amidst Florida's sultry swamp, George McKenzie embarks on his daily pilgrimage. Navigating through the ebony water, a small alligator mirroring his steps, George is en route to his forest-hidden camera setup. His task? Capturing elusive panthers and black bears, vital components of his extensive biodiversity surveys across the Florida Wildlife Corridor.





## ***THE STORY***

George's story is one of transformation. Traversing his old neighborhood of Bed-Stuy, the swagger of the swamps echoes in George's confident stride.

Once, his ambition was singular - to be a gangster, the only life he saw growing up amid the rhythmic pulse of '90s hip-hop and fashion, but fraught with crime and violence. Through voice over, animation, and dramatic re-creations, we transport our audience to what it was like to be in these streets. An eye scar - a chilling memento of a near-death encounter - marked a turning point. George began photographing city events, earning a reputation that offered him a lifeline.

Working in a Manhattan photo store, a fateful encounter with National Geographic photographer Charlie Hamilton James brought George to an unexpected crossroad. He stepped into the role of assistant, veering his life towards an unforeseen trajectory. And as they say, the rest is history.



# ***THE STORY***

From the glossy pages of National Geographic to global assignments and capturing the gaze of international brands and editors, George McKenzie Jr.'s photographic journey is noteworthy. However, he knows there's more to his mission.

A 2020 incident left an indelible mark on him when a Black birdwatcher was unjustly targeted in Central Park. "That could've been me," George reflects. As a Black man and conservation photographer, he's often questioned about his presence in outdoor spaces. This chilling reality fuels George's work beyond the pursuit of the perfect wildlife shot. Under the sweltering Everglades sun, George commands a circle of inner-city students from Miami and Orlando, their picnic table a mosaic of camera equipment. The assignment: bird photography. George's easy smile and jovial manner hold the teenagers in rapt attention as they embark on their first day of photo camp.

George initiated these camps to share his love of nature with the next generation. But his aspiration goes deeper: he hopes these young minds capture more than birds through their viewfinders. He aims for them to see the boundless possibilities before them, and in him, a tangible testament that their dreams are achievable. His life is a testament that boundaries can be transcended, expectations defied, and new narratives written.





# ***THE STORY***



On a frosty December day, George McKenzie Jr. stands, breath visible, poised to cross a street in Manhattan's Upper Eastside. His usual rubber boots and field attire have been replaced with a sleek, black three-piece suit. With a practiced eye on his watch and innate agility, he maneuvers through bustling taxis and bikes, a seasoned New Yorker at heart. Adjusting his photo backpack and smoothing his tie in a reflective window, he inhales deeply before stepping into the imposing brick fortress of New York's most prestigious assembly: the Explorers Club.

This club stands as a monument to illustrious explorers, from Buzz Aldrin and Teddy Roosevelt to Sir Edmund Hillary and James Cameron. Its doors first opened to a Black man in 1937, and to women only in 1981.

Amid its opulent, artifact-laden interior - elephant tusks and taxidermied African wildlife - George identifies the famous explorers and photographers lining the walls. As he approaches the lectern in the crowded auditorium, his eyes meet a special audience occupying the front two rows - teenagers from Bed-Stuy High School's photo class, here upon George's invitation. He starts his lecture with a lighthearted joke about his Brooklyn roots and the journey to this esteemed platform.

Post-lecture, he reunites with the students in Central Park. Tie loosened, suit coat abandoned, it's time for a birding expedition and an outdoor photography lesson. In this moment, George is more than a speaker or teacher; he's a bridge between worlds, creating opportunities for young minds to envision a different path.



# WHY THIS STORY



Unlike similar stories, this project delves into the intersectionality of race, identity, and conservation, offering a lens rarely seen in mainstream media. We will surprise audiences with an unprecedented exploration of how George overcame incredible adversity and systemic oppression to meaningfully contribute to conservation and inspire a new generation to consider their place in the natural world.

The *Book of George* amplifies marginalized voices, spotlighting underserved communities leading environmental stewardship while challenging norms within wildlife photography, offering a narrative of empowerment and resilience.



# ***STYLISTIC APPROACH***



The Book of George is a catalyst for social change and environmental awareness. By amplifying diverse voices, we aim to inspire a new generation of conservationists and promote inclusivity in the fight for a sustainable future.

Our storytelling approach to The Book of George is one of collaboration. This is George's story, and we are the conduit through which it can be told. We intend to take every effort to ensure we approach his story - even the hard parts - in the most tender, raw, and empathetic way. Stylistically, we will establish the duality of George's world: the streets of Brooklyn and the swamps of the Everglades, and the ease at which he moves through these often hostile environments. To immerse our viewers completely in George's experience, we will stay close to him and shoot in wide angle. Natural history sequences from NY and FL will come alive with stunning cinematography and a rich soundscape, capturing wildlife and humanity in the same beautiful way. But these visual techniques will come second to the intimate, welcoming approach of the audience into George's world, both past and present.

George's backstory of growing up in New York is incredibly important for the person he is today. It's a rich tapestry of rap music, crime, fashion, violence, and hustle. These layers of history and personal experience will be brought to life through animation, narrated with George's casual, yet brutally honest, voice-over. Transporting back to 1990s Brooklyn; the darkness, beauty, violence, and exuberance of George's youth will be reborn on screen.



# ***IMPACT & DISTRIBUTION***

The Book of George aims to have a transformative impact on both the planet and its audience by fostering a deeper connection to nature, promoting diversity and inclusion in conservation efforts, and inspiring environmental stewardship among underserved communities.

A robust film festival tour will amplify the project's reach, sharing George McKenzie Jr.'s inspiring journey with a wider audience and garnering attention on a global scale. Following the festival and community screening tours, the project will pursue online and broadcast distribution, hoping to bring George's story to a worldwide audience.

Complementing the documentary screenings, the project's impact campaign will fund two photocamps led by George and his colleagues. These camps will provide 8-12 young BIPOC photographers with the opportunity to embark on assignments in the wilds of Florida. By investing in the next generation of storytellers, the project aims to cultivate a diverse and inclusive community of environmental advocates.









# TEAM



## DANNY SCHMIDT - DIRECTOR

Danny Schmidt is an award-winning director, producer, and cinematographer of non-fiction television, documentaries, and web-content. He has produced, directed, and photographed documentary films for clients including PBS, National Geographic, Netflix, Disney+, EarthX, NASA, and many others.



## CLAY BARRON - PRODUCER

Clay holds a masters degree in TV, Radio, and Film from Syracuse University. He has 15+ years of film production experience in studio, agency, and independent production. This is his second collaboration with Director Danny Schmidt, previously working on the short documentary *4DWN*.



## GEORGE MCKENZIE JR - PRODUCER

George McKenzie Jr. is a National Geographic Society award-winning visual storyteller from Brooklyn, NY, who specializes in wildlife, natural history, and conservation. With over 10 years of experience, George is well-versed in producing stories with an impact that focus on human interests around the world. When he's not working on his next wildlife story, George is an educator in his local community, mentoring rising young people of color around the world.



## HAYLEY NENADAL - PRODUCER

Hayley has over 20 years experience working in film production and film festival programming. She knows how to see a project from inception to completion with a strong sense of timeline and budget. Her years of experience include working extensively at Sundance, Telluride, Mill Valley, Mountainfilm, EarthX film festivals and many other well connected companies and institutions. Hayley has strong relationships within the documentary film world, whether it is through grants, donors, or programmers and can build + implement strong strategy around The Book of George impact distribution and funding.



# ***PRODUCTION TIMELINE***

MARCH 2024

FUNDRAISING, STORY DEVELOPMENT, AND SCHEDULING

JUNE 2024

LOCATION SCOUTING AND PRE-PRODUCTION

SEPTEMBER 2024

SHOOTING - NEW YORK CITY AND FLORIDA

OCTOBER 2024

POST-PRODUCTION BEGINS

DECEMBER 2024

ROUGH CUT DELIVERY AND ANIMATION

FEBRUARY 2025

FINAL CUT DELIVERY AND FESTIVAL APPLICATIONS

MAY - DEC. 2025

WORLD PREMIERE AND FESTIVAL RUN

JANUARY 2026

ONLINE DISTRIBUTION





# FINANCIALS

## *PRE-PRODUCTION*

Labor .....	21,000
Travel and Transport .....	3,750
Accommodations .....	3,200
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>27,750</b>

## *PRODUCTION*

Labor .....	55,400
Equipment and Rentals .....	11,300
Travel and Transport .....	5,200
Accommodations .....	13,500
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>85,400</b>

## *POST-PRODUCTION*

Post-Production Management .....	6,500
Editing .....	15,000
Animation .....	12,500
Color .....	1,250
Mixing .....	1,250
Licensing .....	5,000
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>41,500</b>

## *CAMPAIGN*

Festival Submissions .....	1,500
Travel and Transport .....	17,500
Accommodations .....	21,750
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>40,750</b>

## *MARKETING*

Website .....	1,500
Social Media .....	2,500
Print Materials .....	5,200
Accommodations .....	1,200
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>10,400</b>

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**SUBTOTAL: 205,800**

**VARIANCE: 20,580**

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**TOTAL: 226,380**



# *TO GET INVOLVED*

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