

# AUNT CHLOE

2020 ISSUE YEAR

## Seith Mann: On Good Storytelling

Seith Mann has come a long way from his days at Morehouse College. In this interview, Mann gave *Aunt Chloe* some perspective on his background, his Netflix series, *Raising Dion*, his current project, *#FreeRayshawn*, and advice for others with aspirations to break into the entertainment industry.

*AUNT CHLOE*: When you were at Morehouse, did you know you wanted to be a director? How did you get your start?

MANN: I was in the process of discovering that I wanted to be a director when I was at Morehouse. Truth is, I probably knew it early on, but I was a little scared to say it. By the time I graduated I knew it and I said it. I would have never become one without doing both.

*AUNT CHLOE*: Are there specific black films and black television shows that left an impact on you and played a role in you getting into the entertainment industry?

MANN: Absolutely. Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It* and *Do The Right Thing* were probably the most important two. I like to say *She's Gotta Have It* is the film I saw that made me realize Black people could make films. *Do The Right Thing* is the film that made me want to.

*AUNT CHLOE*: In *Raising Dion*, Dion is a 7-year-old kid being raised by a widowed, single mother. What significance does that have to the plot and the show as a whole?

MANN: The fact that Dion's mom, played by the incomparable Alisha Wainwright, is a single mom is critical to the story. The notion in the comic book that the series is based upon, and in the series itself, is that it takes a superhero to raise a superhero. Certainly there is nobody on Earth more heroic than the single, Black mother. So she is actually the main character. You notice the title is *Raising Dion*. Who's doing the raising? His mom. She is the center of the show.

*AUNT CHLOE*: Why do you think it is important to display positive images of African-Americans on television and in films?

MANN: Images are very powerful. To pretend that images in the media do not have an impact on how we perceive ourselves would be dishonest. We should see positive images of ourselves in the media and watch stories inhabited by whole, fully realized Black characters—because whole, fully-realized characters are one of the primary ingredients of good storytelling. And that's what we are in real life.

*AUNT CHLOE*: Why do you think a show like *#FreeRayshawn* is important in today's political and social climate?

MANN: Because the culture of police escalation and violence when it comes to interactions with Black people is pervasive. And because the use of social media is integral to modern-day movements and protests generally, and the Black Lives Matter movement in particular. When I read the script, it felt timely and visceral, and it was one of those things I had to do.

*AUNT CHLOE:* What social and political messages did you hope to portray in *#FreeRayshawn*?

MANN: One of the things that I loved about the way the script was written was that it did not tell you whether Rayshawn was "guilty" or "not guilty" of what he was accused of for much of the film (series). The audience has to rely on their instincts, preconceptions, biases, and feelings about the character to decide that for themselves. Ultimately, we do tell you whether he was guilty of the thing he was accused of at the beginning, but not before you have formed your own opinion. For those who assume incorrectly, I think it as an opportunity for them to reflect on what preconceptions they carry that would allow them to make the wrong assumption. I also wanted to look closely at the culture of police escalation that leads to these kinds of tragic situations. And then the obvious... *Black Lives Matter*.

*AUNT CHLOE:* For those who want to pursue careers in entertainment—and more specifically, producing—how might they get their foot in the door?

MANN: Start making things. Write, direct, produce. Whichever your passion is. And apply to programs, grad school. Go to festivals and network. Read a lot and watch as many films and good television shows as you can.

*AUNT CHLOE:* Can you explain the job of a producer? Is there a difference between a producer in TV and a producer in film?

MANN: There are many different types of producers. In television, there are writing producers, non-writing producers, producer-directors, and line producers. Non-writing producers are varied in their roles, but the shorthand is that they have a hand in either setting up the show or making the show, but do not write or direct the show. Writing producers are producers who write on the show and also help produce it. Generally, the head writer is the primary executive producer of the show who, among other things, runs the Writer's Room. Without the Writer's Room, there is no show. Producer-directors are directors who help produce the show and have, among other things, the responsibility of maintaining the visual grammar of the show. Line producers are responsible for managing the physical and financial elements required to make the show within a certain time and budget.

In film, the line producer's role is more or less the same. The other producers are people who, in some way, contribute to getting the film made—whether it's by raising money, attracting talent, producing it through the company, setting the show up, writing a check, or some combination of any of those elements. Ultimately, producing a film or TV show is making a film or TV show.

*AUNT CHLOE:* What advice can you give a young creative trying to get into the business and trying to find funding for a project?

MANN: Be relentless and professional. Be creative. Don't ruin your credit (like I did) unless you have to. Embrace all the new technologies available to you to pursue your dreams.

*(Interview by NaSiya Taylor)*

Check out poetry by Seith Mann [here](#).



*Photo by Elizabeth Fisher*