

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lisa Cortes

PERSON

Cortés, Lisa

Alternative Names: Lisa Cortes;

Life Dates: December 24, 1960-

Place of Birth: Milford, Connecticut, USA

Residence: New York, New York

Occupations: Filmmaker

Biographical Note

Executive producer Lisa Cortes was born on December 24, 1960 in Milford, Connecticut. Although she was born in Connecticut, Cortes spent much of her youth on the streets of Harlem. She attended Milford Academy and then enrolled in Yale University where she majored in American Studies. After graduating she went into the music business where she worked with Russell Simmons and Rick Rubin, the founders of Def Jam. Cortes then joined the staff at Mercury Records. While at Mercury Records, she worked with stars such as Vanessa Williams and Brian McKnight. In 1994, Cortes was offered her own label called Loose Cannon. Loose Cannon lasted for two years until it was shut down on October 31, 1996, shortly after Cortes sued Mercury records for sexual and racial discrimination.

After leaving the music industry, Cortes turned her interests to film. She enrolled at the School of Visual Arts in New York and later the New York Film Academy. A producer and close friend, Lee Daniels, was producing *Monster's Ball* and Cortes and Daniels together subsequently collaborated on movies such as *Woodsman* (2004), *Shadowboxer* (2005), *Tennessee* (2008), and *Precious* (2009).

Cortes founded her own company, Cortes Films in 2010. Cortes Films has produced two films *Happy Birthday to a Beautiful Woman: a Portrait of My Mother*, a film about Mickalene Thomas' mother and her struggle with aging and kidney disease, and *Kwaku Ananse* a film about West African fables of Kwaku Ananse and a young woman named, Nyan Koronhwea, attending her estranged father's funeral while trying to come to terms with her father's double life.

Heralded as a "disturbing masterwork of human survival" by The Hollywood Reporter, *Precious* won the Grand Jury Prize and the Audience Award at the 2009 Sundance Film

Festival. Precious was also nominated for six Academy Awards, winning two; and was praised by publications such as Variety and The New York Times, and garnered multiple Golden Globe nominations.

Cortes was interviewed by The HistoryMakers July 14, 2013.

Related Entries

New York Film Academy [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Yale University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.A.

Richmond, The American International University in London [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Def Jam/Rush Recordings [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1986 to 1990]

Mercury Records [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1990 to 1994]

Loose Cannon [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1994 to 1997]

Magic Lantern Productions [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1997 to 2000]

Lee Daniels Entertainment [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 2000 to 2009]

Cortes Films [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1980 to 1984]

President

K2 Pictures [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1959 to 1962]

Producer

Yaddo [MEMBEROF]
[from 1997 to ?]

Board Member/Film Chair

Independent Feature Project [MEMBEROF]
[from 2009 to 2011]

Advisory Board

Trajal Harrell Dance Style [MEMBEROF]

[from 2010 to ?]

Board Member

Independent Television Service (ITVS) [MEMBEROF]

[from 2010 to ?]

Board Member

Reel Works Teen Filmmaking [MEMBEROF]

[from 2010 to ?]

Advisory Board