



AÏSSATA  
PRODUCTIONS

# LIFT

WRITTEN AND  
DIRECTED BY ABRAHAM AMKPA



# SPECIFICATIONS

*Two Nigerian immigrants thrust themselves into the world of competitive weightlifting in order to gain American citizenship.*

**Runtime:** 14 minutes

**Genre:** Drama

**Budget:** 15,000 USD

**Company:** Aïssata Productions®



Official Selection  
New Filmmakers  
Los Angeles



OFFICIAL SELECTION  
Martha's Vineyard  
African American  
Film Festival  
2022



# SUMMARY

Rashid and Joseph are childhood best friends who have decided it's time for them to step up their game and journey to America in search of Olympic success. They're piss broke upon arriving to California and are sponsored in Long Beach by a pastor who has a connection to their hometown in Lagos, Nigeria. They've been taking on odd jobs during their time in America while intensely attending all the AAU weightlifting meets and trainings they can find. They feel isolated and excluded from the sport as black immigrants and all the coaches they've encountered don't really get their style.

One day the pair attend a Senior lifting meet at the Long Beach convention center and they meet Danny Henry a.k.a Coach (40s, African American, funny, personable, but intense) and the pair are mesmerized by coach's prowess and masterful weightlifting abilities. They exchange information with Coach at the meet, but that same night, out of eagerness and necessity, they surprise coach at his doorstep with nowhere else to go... They've illegally overstayed their US visas, but are dying to train and stay the course. Coach instantly takes a liking to the pair's grit and he decides to take them under his wing as they improve their training programs and reach their ultimate goal of US Citizenship.





# ABRAHAM AMKPA



Abraham is an actor and filmmaker from New York City. Through his global life experiences, Abraham has learned to appreciate humanity in broad strokes and chooses to tell those stories through producing meaningful content such as this narrative.

His other producing and casting work can be seen in festival short films such as "Valentina" and "Da Capo", which stars *Grey's Anatomy* alumni Moe Irvin, and a number of *United States Postal Service* marketing ads. Abraham's directorial and writing debut short film, "The Loop", about a young black man that goes to extremes to reconnect with his estranged father, is also currently in its festival run and was recently added to the Palms Springs International ShortFest film market.

Abraham is a graduate of *NYU Tisch School of the Arts*, has studied Producing at *UCLA's* school of Film & Television, and holds a Masters degree in Filmmaking & New Media from the *New York Film Academy*, Burbank.





# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The journey to citizenship for the immigrant forces them to make uncomfortable decisions on their path to achieve the "dream." *LIFT* is a story that encapsulates the ultimate struggle between choosing oneself over others and sacrificing core components of one's morality along the way.

I'm the son of West African immigrants and have lived across three continents throughout my life - Europe, Africa, and North America. Watching my parents struggle to ensure my brother and I understood the value of the words "Nationality: American" on your passport, I deeply understand the unique pressures immigrants face as they attempt to assimilate and fight for a better life for their families' future.

*LIFT* explores what it means to struggle as a new immigrant in the occidental world and the sacrifices that must be made in order to survive, however degrading the actions may seem. It is a story that captures the inherent lack of safety and security immigrants feel throughout the process, and how one event can change everything for some while forcing others to start the arduous journey again. Growing up, I had multiple family members take menial, blue collar jobs at minimum wage in the US, despite being qualified for higher paying ones in their old countries, just to send money back home. I saw how this sacrifice took a toll on their social lives, physical, and emotional well-being. I also saw how my aunts and uncles *never* deemed their struggles as "sacrifice". They held onto hope that the grinding graveyard shifts would eventually lead to a better life for everyone.

This story was inspired by a group of young Nigerian men I met working out at a local Black owned cross-fit gym in West Adams. I quickly became curious about their lives, how they got to Southern California, and what inspired them to keep going. From their journeys the story of *LIFT* was inspired.





# CAST



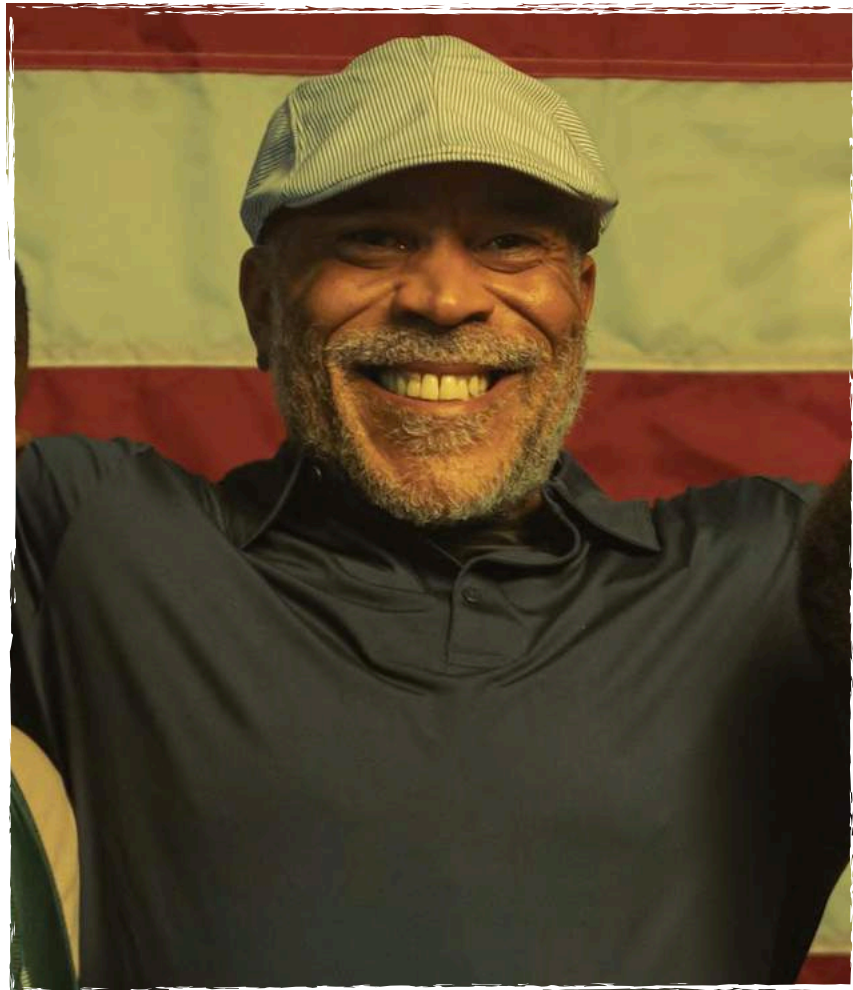
**Jamal Mallory McCree** is an American actor from Detroit, Michigan. He is best known for his portrayal of Charlie Price in the ABC thriller "Quantico" and as Sekou Bah in the *Showtime* television series "Homeland".



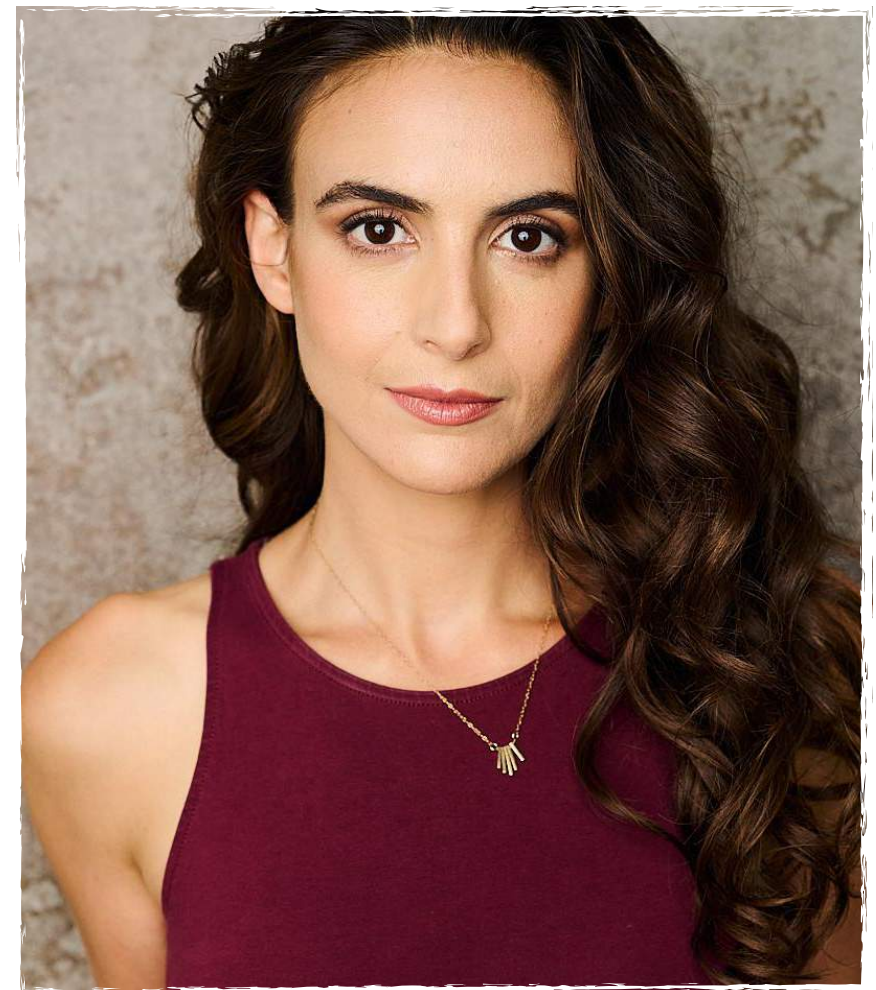
**Rasaq Tanimowo** is a Nigerian weightlifter. On 10 September 2015, he won two silver medals in weightlifting while representing Nigeria at the 2015 All-Africa Games in Brazzaville. Prior to the 2015 All-Africa Games, he also represented Nigeria at the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, Scotland.



# CAST



**Danny Henry** is a multiple award winning AAU Senior Men's Lifting champion, Defensive coach of the Inglewood Blackhawks, and owner of The Academy of Strength & Sport in West Adams, Los Angeles.



**Mara Klein** Mara Klein is an LA based actress, producer, and lover of theater. Most notably she played "Young Valerie" in "Casual" on *HULU*, with additional TV credits on "Startup", "Young & Hungry", "Fresh off the Boat" and others. Mara hails from the suburbs of Washington, DC. She holds a BFA from NYU's *Tisch School of the Arts*, with training from the *Stella Adler Studio* in New York, and *RADA* in London. Most recently starring in "An Octoroon" at *The Fountain Theater*.



# PREPARING FOR THE FILM

When we were in pre-production, two things became clear to us:

- **Rasaq**, the professional weightlifter our film is centered around, needed to learn how to *act*...
- ... and **J. Mallory**, the actor playing his best friend, needed to learn how to *lift*.

During the months leading up to the shoot, I'd tap into my training from NYU and spend a few hours every night teaching Rasaq how to play the character loosely based on himself, Rashid. One of the reasons we changed the name was to help Rasaq distance himself from the character; I needed him to give the performance the scenes required, and it was important that he not judge the character.

As I taught Rasaq, his old coach, Danny Henry, would train J. Mallory to lift the way Jojo and Rasaq do in the film.

Danny Henry was also the film's stunt supervisor and he helped bring a major sense of authenticity to *LIFT*.







# CREDITS

**Written & Directed by**  
Abraham Amkpa

**Producers**  
Abraham Amkpa  
Patrick Taylor  
J. Mallory McCree

**Rasaq Tanimowo as Rashid**  
**J. Mallory McCree as Jojo**  
**Danny Henry as Coach**  
**Mara Klein as Rachel**

**Cinematography by**  
Drew Thomas

**1st Assistant Director**  
Jonathan Betzler

**Edited by**  
John Hibey

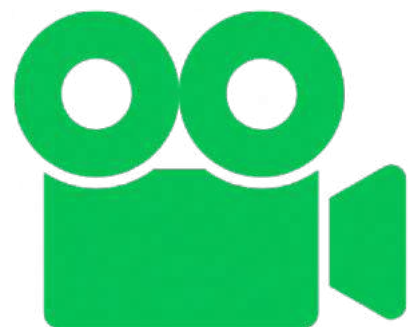
**Music by**  
Andrew Silagy

**Production Design by**  
Rose Michels





# CONTACT



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