



SEND ME NUMBER 9

The Legacy of Engine Co. 9

Latchkey Kids Productions, LLC
Richmond, Va.
<https://Latchkeykidsproduction.com>

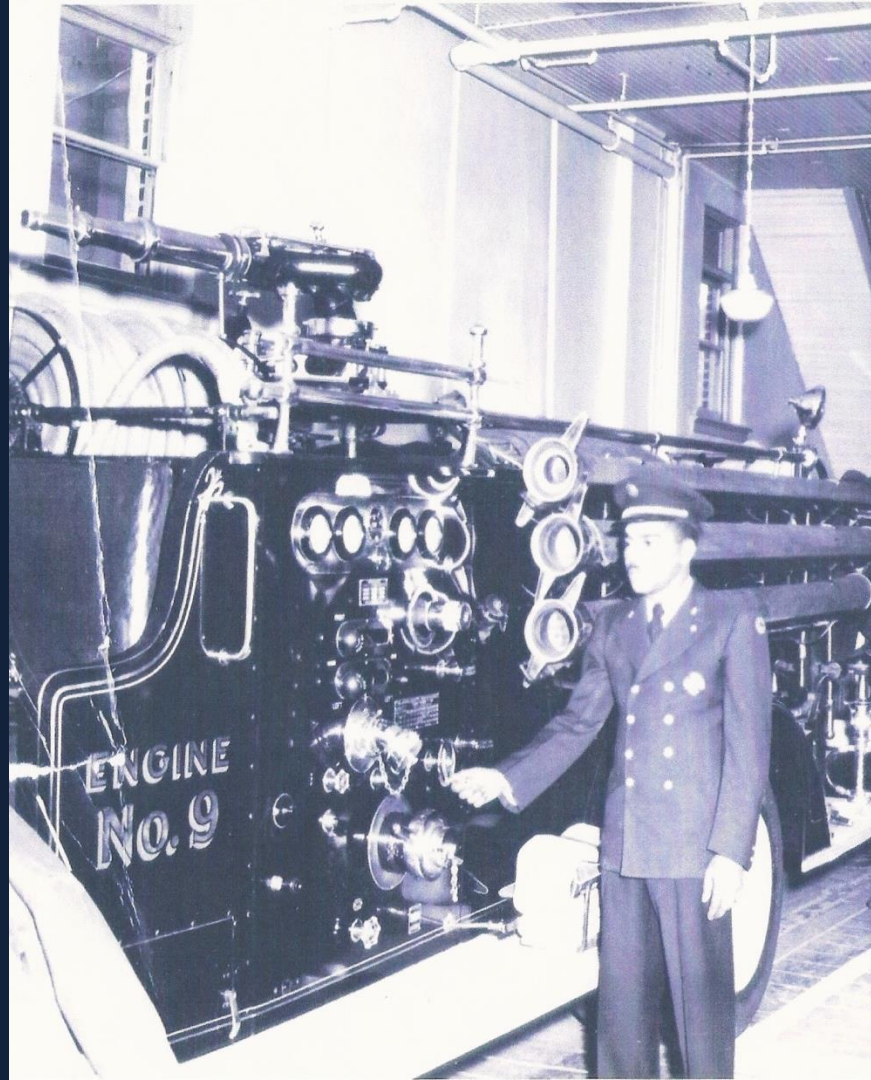
Synopsis

Send Me Number 9 is the long-overdue documentary highlighting the achievements of the first Negro firefighters hired in Virginia, their contributions to fire service and a community.

Motivated by the ongoing misconception that black firefighters benefit easily from affirmative action and anti-discrimination initiatives, Firefighter Richard Lewis embarked on a mission to uncover the largely unknown history of African American firefighters.

What he discovered in Richmond's Jackson Ward, the Harlem of the South surpassed all expectations. Filled with stories of heroes, tragedy, and triumph, the narrative of Engine Company Number 9 unfolds like a compelling Hollywood drama.

Two decades later, now Battalion Chief Richard Lewis recounts his inspiring and humbling journey to explore the legacy he inherited as a Black firefighter and the impact it had on his career.





Beyond History

Engine Company Number 9

July 1, 1950, the City of Richmond hired the State's first negro firefighters. Ten men out of 500 applicants were selected. They would man Engine Co. #9 in Jackson Ward. They faced the challenges of fire service and racial inequity with dignity and pride. Their strength and determination embodied the resilience of the community and laid the foundation for future success.



Jackson Ward

Engine Co. #9 encountered numerous difficulties that reflected those experienced by Jackson Ward. The building of I-95 and desegregation had a profound impact, leading to the destruction of homes, the introduction of public housing, and the closure of Station 9, which collectively diminished the community's sense of pride.

Why Now?

Acknowledging the historical achievements of Black Americans has become a highly contentious and divisive issue. Today, it is more important than ever to preserve and present African-American history in a manner that honors those who paved the way for future generations to improve their quality of life.

When conveyed accurately and thoughtfully, history has the power to inspire, shape identities, and offer valuable perspectives that enrich our understanding of the present. People seek meaningful narratives to connect with, and the lesser-known history of Engine 9 serves as one such compelling story.

Va. FD celebrates 75th anniversary of first Black career firefighters

Richmond marked the anniversary of hiring Virginia's first professional Black firefighters, honoring the legacy of Engine Co. 9 and the men who broke barriers in 1950

July 06, 2025 06:39 AM



By Sam Mostow

Richmond Times-Dispatch

RICHMOND, Va. — Richmond hired the commonwealth's first professional Black firefighters 75 years ago. On Tuesday's anniversary, the community commemorated them.

"They studied the craft, they excelled at the craft and they shared the knowledge that they gained with anyone that was willing to accept it in the department," said Richard Lewis a battalion chief of the Richmond Fire Department. "Even at that time, as time progressed, they weren't allowed to be officers. They weren't allowed in most spaces before 1963, but that didn't stop them from serving."

Society Needs a Story Like This



“We may have
come here on different ships
but we’re *all* in the
same boat now.”

Frances St. John, wife of Arthur St. John

Why Richard Lewis?

Richard Lewis has dedicated twenty-seven years to the City of Richmond Fire Department, advancing to the rank of battalion chief. He has a reputation for fighting for the little guy, every little guy.

In 2005, Richard began recording interviews with members of Engine 9. He formed a strong bond with Mr. and Mrs. St. John and was bestowed the honor of telling their story. Richard was entrusted with personal insights and reflections from the last six original members. Although he was unable to film Brown and Cersey, he engaged in meaningful discussions about their experiences in fire service.

Richard’s aim extended beyond documenting Engine 9’s history; he sought to preserve their legacy. Success as firefighters was just one part of their mission. The members of Engine 9 understood that true success required unity and collaboration.

This, ultimately, is the essence of their legacy.

Engine Company Number 9 (Main Plot)

The tale of Engine Company Number 9 reads like a cinematic saga, marked by struggle and triumph amid the challenges of the segregated South. These firefighters were a source of pride for their community and knew that failure was not an option. “Everyone was watching...”. (70%)

ACT 1

Protagonist:

The first black firefighters hired in the State of Virginia.

ACT 2

Antagonist:

“Ignorance” Members faced racial discrimination within the department, leadership and surrounding communities.

ACT 3

Resolution:

They overcame racial discrimination and built a solid foundation for future firefighters to work together successfully.

Jackson Ward “Harlem of the South” (Sub-Plot)

Iconic black community near downtown Richmond known as “the Harlem of the South” or “Black Wall Street” due to its cultural, artistic and entrepreneurial prowess. It was a source of pride for blacks throughout the country, not just Richmond. (15%)

ACT 1

Protagonist:

Thriving black community filled with arts, culture and entrepreneurship. A self-sufficient black community.

ACT 2

Antagonist:

The great divide; segregation, race relations and City planners clearing the way for Interstate 95.

ACT 3

Resolution:

Revitalization efforts including gentrification and plans to mend the divide caused by interstate 95.

Richard Lewis (Narration through Interviews and Discussions)

In 1998, Richard was among ten people hired for RFD Class 98-1. One white female and two black males were selected with seven white males out of a pool of over four thousand people. As he rose through the ranks, he was confronted by the prevailing thought that blacks had it easy because of affirmative action. (15% with conversations serving as narration)

ACT 1	ACT 2	ACT 3
Protagonist: Richard Lewis, confronted with views on affirmative action in fire service seeks knowledge and validation.	Antagonist: "My gift. My curse." Antiquated racial ideologies surfaced during promotional processes from all sides.	Resolution: Richard looks back on his twenty-seven year career and finds validation and career satisfaction.

Main Characters



Arthur St. John

The most vocal member and chief historian of Engine Co. #9.



Jackson Ward

The iconic community personified through the experiences of the firefighters in the 1950s and today.



Richard Lewis

Serving since 1998, ascended through the ranks to Battalion Chief. Respected leader in the organization.

Locations

Richmond, VA.

Jackson Ward various locations and restaurants.

I-95 north and south through the City

Downtown Richmond, Va.



Filmmaking Approach

Richard takes an organic, grassroots approach to story telling and does not allow bright lights and large production crews to interfere with delicate moments.

Send Me Number 9 will feature narration through past interviews, from 2005 with **the last four original members**, current discussions and stories from past and present firefighters.

Historical photos and footage slowly being phased to full color will be strategically used in storytelling form to connect the main topic to the two sub-topics and **bring the past to life.**

"To see black and white photos of historical events kind of dehumanizes the experience," said Lewis, the Richmond battalion chief. "... Once you actually meet these people and you realize that every historical event was shaped by someone just like us, it's humbling and it's inspiring all at the same time."



"I don't wonder how I got over. The Lord brought me over. And today, He's still taking care of me."

Frederick Robinson 2005.

The Team: Latchkey Kids Productions collaboration with the collective



Richard D Lewis

Writer, Ex-Producer, Director

Richard Lewis is a natural born storyteller trained mentored by David Robins

(17-time NY Times Best Selling Author)

Film credits include:

It's Only (a) Natural
(Va Film Festival 2012)



Your Name Here

Producer

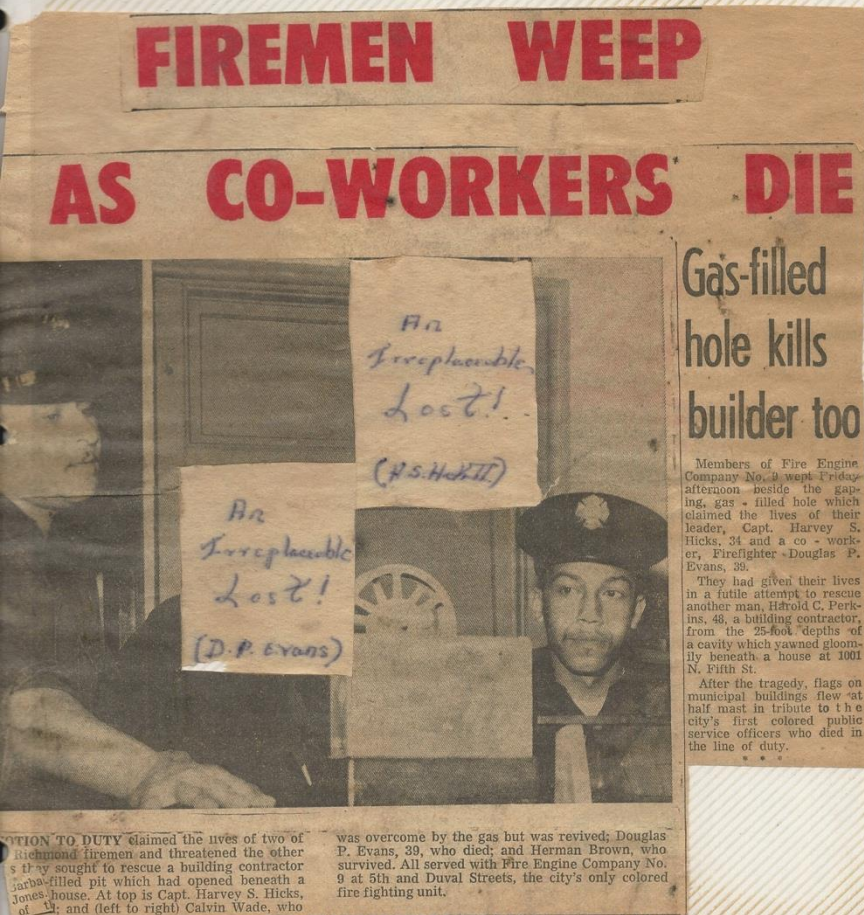
Collaborating partner to
be named.



Your Name Here

Director

Collaborating partner
to be named.



Budget

Cost reflect; legal fees, research, collaborations with third party studios, licensing fees, operations, advertising and distribution.

Pre-production	\$80,000
Production	\$220,000
Post-production	\$500,000
TOTAL:	\$800,000

Distribution

Following its premier at the historic Hippodrome Theatre in Richmond's Jackson Ward, the documentary will be submitted to the following film festivals and shopped to streaming services.

2027 Film Festivals:

American Black Film Festival
North Carolina Black Film Festival
Pan African Film & Arts Festival
Martha's Vinyard African American FF
Black Harvest International FF
Virginia Film Festival

Streaming Services:

Netflix, Prime, Hulu, Apple TV

But not limited to.



THANK YOU

Richard D. Lewis, Founder
Latchkey Kids Productions, LLC
lewisrd@Latchkeykidsproduction.com