



Exclusion U Film Discussion Guide

IVIES USE THEIR MONEY
NOT TO EDUCATE U
BUT TO EXCLUDE U.

EXCLUSION

U

THE ILLUMINATION GROUP PRESENTS
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Introduction

Welcome! This discussion guide for Exclusion U was created to help facilitators engage with audiences. The goal of this guide is to elicit conversation, debate and thinking around the film's topics. This guide is designed for a thoughtful and thorough unpacking of Exclusion U, and its research regarding the Ivy League.



Section 1: About The Film

Exclusion U tells the story of the origin of the Ivy League universities, the extraordinarily large endowments they all carry, and the ways in which their policies affect students applying to and attending college, not just at these schools, but at colleges and universities throughout the United States.

The film exposes the hoarding of billions of dollars of endowment money, the investment of such money in efforts unrelated to university business, and the fact that Ivy League schools are largely unavailable to students from middle class families. **Exclusion U** reveals the ways in which our federal government continues to support these schools to disproportionate advantage, essentially creating and maintaining a wealth class - in a country that espouses equality for every citizen.

The speakers featured in **Exclusion U** are challenging the Ivy League schools to utilize their endowment money to create fairer practices for low and middle-income students, to open up the advanced learning and opportunities they offer to higher numbers of qualified students, and to reveal publicly the ways in which their vast endowments are invested, so that students, families and taxpayers, have a clear and honest understanding of where their money is really going.



Key Issues and Subject Areas:

Public Funding for Private Interests
Holistic Admissions and Tuition Policies
Wealth Inequality and Discrimination
Effects on Surrounding Communities
Strategies for Change

About the Director:

Ginger Gentile is an activist documentary filmmaker dedicated to addressing ignored issues and shedding light on solutions. With her documentary Erasing Family, which premiered at Lincoln Center in 2019, she exposed the trauma children suffer when a loving parent is erased by the divorce courts, a problem that affects over 22 million families in the U.S. alone. Ginger crowdfunded over \$430,000 for the film.

For her work in reuniting families, Gentile was named an Architect of Change by Maria Shriver and has spoken at SXSW 2019 and appeared on numerous podcasts and tv shows, including Red Table Talk.

Ginger attended Columbia University and has a love hate relationship with the institution. She loved the education she received but found institution to not always be a good neighbor to surrounding Harlem nor use its vast resources to educate all that it could.

Section 2: Background and Terms



Government grants support the group of eight Ivy League Universities at a higher rate than all other colleges and universities combined.¹ In terms of enrollment, students who come from families in the top 1% income bracket are 77 times more likely to attend an Ivy League School than their lower income counterparts.² Many students who attend Ivy League schools are “students of interest,” meaning they are legacy students, or that their families have donated a significant amount to support the school. First generation, low income students, particularly students of color, are rare outliers in the Ivy League environment - only 8,592 students at Ivy League Schools are Pell Grant eligible (meaning they are in the lowest income bracket).³ For students from middle class families, who can neither pay tuition outright nor are eligible for grant funding, the Ivy League is almost completely out of reach.



Combined, the endowments of the eight Ivy League schools total over \$193 billion,⁴ which is more than the gross domestic product of many small countries.⁵ Rather than supporting things like reducing student tuition, improving school facilities, increasing the number of accepted students or even hiring the highest caliber of instructors, these endowments are invested as trusts, keeping them separate from the university functions they are supposedly there to support. These universities are treated like charitable organizations, meaning they do not pay taxes on the donation income they receive to fund these endowments.⁶ Rather than being a boon to the cities they call home, most Ivy League Schools are a drain on resources, contributing only small percentage of their endowment funding to provide support to the city's residents.⁷ If these universities were to pay their PILOTS, instead of relying on exemptions, the situation would be vastly different.⁸



In the meantime, high caliber schools such as Rice University, Georgia Institute of Technology and Purdue University accept many more students and provide much more support to those enrolled than do Ivy League schools, despite having significantly smaller endowments.⁹

Legacy: A legacy student is someone who's family member, typically a parent, attended the same university. Legacy students are often given preferential treatment in U.S. schools. In the Ivy League, the typical percentage of legacy students is even higher - up to 40% of admitted students in some cases.¹⁰

Endowment: According to the American Council on Education, an endowment (specifically for a college or university) is "an aggregation of assets invested by a college or university to support its educational and research mission in perpetuity. It represents a compact between a donor and an institution and links past, current, and future generations. These gifts also allow an institution to make commitments far into the future, knowing that resources to meet those commitments will continue to be available. An institution's endowment is actually composed of hundreds or thousands of individual donations. Endowments allow donors to transfer their private dollars to public purposes with the assurance that their gifts will serve these purposes for as long as the institution continues to exist."¹¹

Universities with especially large endowments, such as Ivy League schools, disclose their investments with the SEC (Securities and Exchange Commission), an independent federal body that is supposed to monitor and regulate publicly traded companies.¹²



PILOT: The U.S. Department of the Interior describes Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT or PILOT) as “Federal payments to local governments to help offset losses in property taxes due to the existence of nontaxable Federal lands within their boundaries.”¹³

PILOT payments aid cities in carrying out vital community services such as police and fire protection and public construction for public schools and roads, PILT payments are one way that organizations such as the National Park Service, can be a good neighbor to the cities that surround them.

Educational and medical facilities are exempt from the PILOT program, despite utilizing the resources that their cities provide, creating a burden on the systems in place. In recent years, more states are beginning to challenge these exemptions through litigation and proposed governmental policy changes. For example, in 2016, Princeton University paid the state of New Jersey \$18M to settle a lawsuit challenging its property tax exemptions.¹⁴



Discussion Questions

1. How did the college admissions process impact you and your family?
2. What moments in the film were most memorable to you? What moments in the film surprised you?
3. What do you think about the types of investments Ivy League universities are making with their endowments?
4. How can elite institutions be more welcoming to students from non-traditional backgrounds? Can a school be elite but not elitist?
5. Do you think universities should be required their admissions processes?
6. Do you think admissions should be based only on qualifications such as SAT scores and essay writing, or should exceptions be made for students of interest, such as legacy students?
7. What do you think about Harvard's dorm crew program where students are paid to clean dorms?
8. Do you think universities with large endowments, such as Ivy League schools, should remain exempt from paying taxes?
9. How could ivy league universities use their endowments to educate more people



Exclusion U: Facts and Figures

The Ivy League is a collegiate athletic conference comprising eight schools: Brown University, Columbia University, Cornell University, Dartmouth College, Harvard University, University of Pennsylvania, Princeton University and Yale University.¹

7 of these 8 schools were founded before the American Revolution (exception is Cornell, founded in 1865).²

Ivy League endowments are worth a combined total of over \$193 Billion.³

More Ivy League students come from the top 1% income bracket than the bottom 60%.⁴

Consultants for Ivy League admissions make up to \$1000s of dollars per hour, greatly increasing the chances for wealthy students to be accepted.⁵

The University of Pennsylvania owns \$2.5 Billion in tax free property, while the city of Philadelphia has over \$700 million dollars in debt.⁶

Private universities are tax exempt, treated as charitable organizations.⁷

Key Issue 1: Public Funding for Private Interests - Facts and Figures

Combined total of Ivy League endowments is soon to reach \$1 Trillion, making their financial worth higher than the GDP of many countries.¹

With endowments, original donation is never touched, but is invested in things like bonds, real estate, hedge funds, etc. School only spends 5% or less of the GROWTH of the donation.²

Endowment funds are often restricted for specific interests, with incoming donations earmarked for those specific interests - i.e. Harvard University has invested in California Vineyards as a means to secure water rights and also in private prisons.³

Ivy League reported huge losses during the Covid-19 pandemic, due to students not being on campus - but these amounts represented the equivalent of only a one-day fluctuation on their endowments.⁴

Organizations like Yale's Endowment Justice Coalition are urging the university to divest from fossil fuels. Harvard has a similar student organization that is challenging its investment practices.⁵

Yale has created a large number of shell corporations, which are then transferred to fund managers, so that they can operate out of the public eye.⁶

Salaries of Ivy League senior administrators have gone through the roof, at an average of \$400,000.00 per year, with Presidents making over \$1 Million per year. The number of employee positions have also increased - at Yale, for example, there are 3 staff members for every student.⁷

Teaching obligations have largely been transferred to poorly paid, adjunct professors, rather than highly trained, tenured professors. At Yale, 30% of classes are taught by adjunct professors.⁸



Between 2010-2015, Ivy League schools received \$25.73 Billion in government grants, much more than the \$22 Billion received from student tuition.⁹

Ivy League outranks 16 U.S. states on the receipt of federal funds.¹⁰

Per student, government funding provides an average of \$100,000 per Ivy League student, as opposed to an average \$24,000 per public college student, and just \$10,000 per community college student, vastly skewing government funds to support the country's wealthiest students.¹¹

Discussion Questions

- 1) Should private universities with large endowments pay federal taxes?
- 2) Do you believe the endowment investments of schools like Harvard are the invested in the spirit of their charters of their institutions ?
- 3) Should schools like Yale have the ability to create Shell corporations, to which they transfer endowment funds?
- 4) Do you think there should be an endowment 'cap,' essentially forcing a school to spend endowment money to benefit its students, faculty, staff and facilities, once the endowment reaches a certain level?
- 5) Student activism in the Ivy League has grown tremendously over the past decade - do you believe these student groups can practically create change?
- 6) Why do you think Ivy League schools have created so many administrative positions with very high salaries?
- 7) Tuition increases and endowments grow. So does the use of adjunct professors who aren't paid as much as tenured professors. How do you think this impacts education?
- 8) What do you think about government grant dollars being spent significantly more on Ivy League students as opposed to public college or community college students?
- 9) Do you think Ivy League schools should be eligible for government grants at all, given the high cost of tuition?
- 10) The Ivy League receives more government funding than 16 US states. How do you feel about this?



Key Issue 2: Wealth Inequality and Discrimination - Facts and Figures

A student from a 1% top income earning family is 77 times more likely to be accepted to an Ivy League school than someone from the bottom 60%.¹

Ivy League Schools focus on who they EXCLUDE, to keep the school's ranking high.²

Many influential CEOs and politicians come from Ivy League schools, essentially making these schools a pipeline toward leadership.³

First generation, low-income students are outliers, even though the universities like to highlight "rags to riches" stories.⁴

The Ivy League educates only 8,592 students who are Pell Grant Eligible (from the lowest income group).⁵

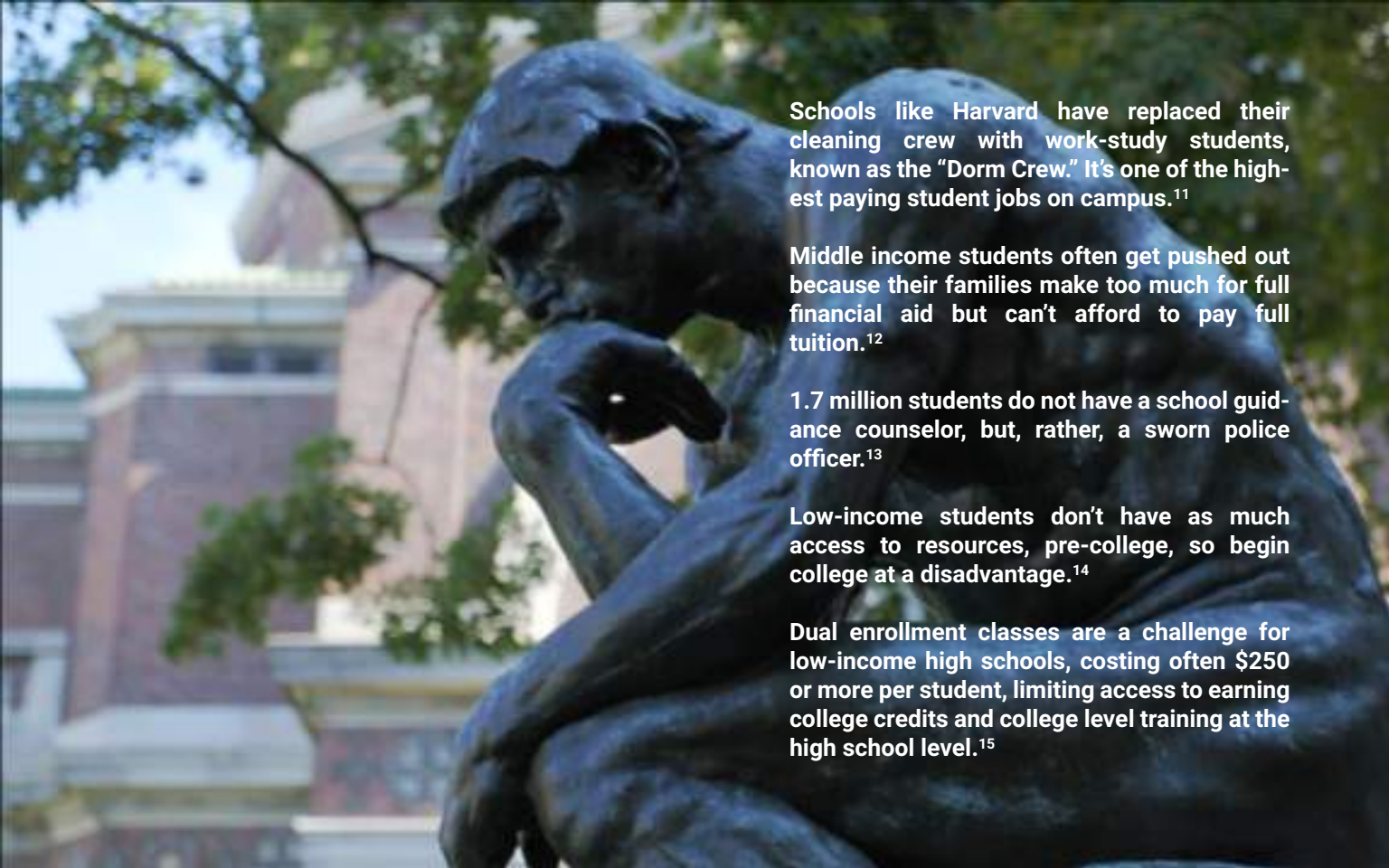
Students of color often feel excluded because of the culture of classism in the Ivy League.⁶

College Consultants often make \$10,000-\$50,000 per student, increasing the chances of helping students from wealthy families to get accepted into Ivy League Schools. College consulting is one of the fastest growing industries in the country.⁷

Students working with a college consulting firm, such as IvyWise, get a "mentorage" to help them with every aspect of the application process.⁸

Full financial aid is often available for very poor students at Ivy League schools. Very few schools can boast meeting the full family need for tuition.⁹

Many students who do receive full financial aid are responsible for a SIC (Student Income Contribution) of \$3,000-\$6,000 per year, typically meaning they have to work in addition to attending school, in order to meet this requirement.¹⁰



Schools like Harvard have replaced their cleaning crew with work-study students, known as the “Dorm Crew.” It’s one of the highest paying student jobs on campus.¹¹

Middle income students often get pushed out because their families make too much for full financial aid but can’t afford to pay full tuition.¹²

1.7 million students do not have a school guidance counselor, but, rather, a sworn police officer.¹³

Low-income students don’t have as much access to resources, pre-college, so begin college at a disadvantage.¹⁴

Dual enrollment classes are a challenge for low-income high schools, costing often \$250 or more per student, limiting access to earning college credits and college level training at the high school level.¹⁵



Discussion Questions

- 1) Do you think Ivy League schools are elitist?
- 2) Why do you think some employers will **ONLY** consider applicants who graduated from Ivy League schools?
- 3) Many CEOs and policy makers graduated from Ivy League institutions. How do you think this influences society's treatment of these schools?
- 4) Why do you think Ivy League schools often promote "rags to riches" stories in which first generation, low-income students succeed?
- 5) What do you think about the Student Income Contribution required by several Ivy League schools?
- 6) Do you think it's fair that higher income students have access to firms like IvyWise, essentially coaching them through the admissions process?
- 7) If you were a student at Harvard, would you want to work on the dorm crew? Why or why not?
- 8) Do you think that partial tuition assistance should be offered to students from middle class families?
- 9) Should dual enrollment classes at low-income high schools be tuition free?
- 10) Do you believe private colleges should invest in public high schools, to increase the acceptance chances of low-income high school students?

Key Issue 3: Subjective Admissions and Tuitions Policies - Facts and Figures



3.5-8.7% of applicants are accepted to Ivy League Schools.¹

Ivy League Universities were largely geared toward the WASP (White Anglo Saxon Protestant) portion of this country.²

Ivy League admissions began to require application elements such as guidance counselor recommendations, essays, and student photos, as a way to avoid accepting Jewish students.³

Many Asian students have gotten lower ratings from admissions panels. With such a subjective admissions system, this can be seen as discrimination.⁴

Ivy League schools do not have minimums for test scores or grades, making the admissions benchmarks a mystery.⁵

Holistic admissions process is subjective and gives Ivy League schools leeway to admit less academically qualified students for other reasons such as financial donations, political favors, and connections.⁶

Shadow admissions process focuses on recruiting students of interest such as athletes (83% chance of admission vs 16% for non-athletes), legacy students (students whose parents went to the institution i.e. at Harvard, 30% of legacy students get admitted).⁷

Key Issue 3: Subjective Admissions and Tuitions Policies - Facts and Figures (cont'd)

Legacy students with parents who remained involved at the university, particularly through participating in development, donating, serving on committees, etc. are much more likely to be accepted.⁸

Z List students get admitted for the following year, as a way for the school to take "students of interest" without causing a big fuss.⁹

43% of students at Harvard are "students of interest" - children of faculty, children of donors, recruited athletes and legacy students. 3/4 of these students would otherwise not have qualified.¹⁰





Discussion Questions

- 1) Do you think Legacy students should receive preferential treatment for college admissions?
- 2) What do you think about the idea of a holistic admissions policy that factors in things like extra-curricular activities, essays, and recommendation letters?
- 3) Qualitative admissions criteria were instituted in the Ivy League as a strategy for admitting lower numbers of Jewish students. Do you feel these policies are still discriminatory?
- 4) Why do you think the Ivy League schools don't publicly post minimums for test scores or high school grades on their admissions website pages?
- 5) Do you think students should get preferential treatment for having a university-desired special skill, such as athleticism?
- 6) What do you think about the Z List of students, admitted after requiring a gap year?
- 7) Do you think parental donations should have any influence on a student's admission to a university?
- 8) Do you believe Ivy League universities should find a way to make their admissions processes less subjective?
- 9) Most students who apply to Ivy League schools are qualified to attend. How do you feel for those who are rejected?

Key Issue 4: Effects on Surrounding Communities - Facts and Figures



Ivy League schools are private universities, treated like nonprofit organizations, and are a drain on resources in cities like Philadelphia.¹

60% of the property in New Haven, CT is nontaxable, most of which is taken up by Yale University. The remaining 40% of property owners have to cover 100% of the taxes.²

If Yale paid property taxes, it would give the city of New Haven \$150,000 million per year. The university voluntarily contributes \$14 million.³

More and more, Ivy League universities are being pushed to pay PILOTs (payments in lieu of taxes), in order to positively contribute to the cities they call home.⁴

If U Penn paid their PILOTs to Philadelphia, it would amount to \$100 Million per year. Without this, they create a disparity between the school's prosperity and the city's poverty.⁵

U Penn laid off 140 kitchen and janitorial workers at the beginning of the pandemic.⁶



Discussion Questions

- 1) Before watching this film, were you aware that private universities paid no taxes to the cities and states they call home, nor to the federal government?
- 2) If you were a resident of West Philadelphia, how do you think you would feel about the University of Pennsylvania?
- 3) Do you think Universities should pay PILOTs?
- 4) If private universities paid endowment taxes, property taxes or PILOTs, how do you think that would affect income inequality in our country?
- 5) Do you believe racial disparity in our country is exacerbated by public schools? Why or why not?
- 6) Did you realize that city services like police and firefighters, which a university benefits from, are paid completely by the city's taxpayers and not the university? What do you think about this?
- 7) Do you think special consideration should be given to students who live in a city containing an Ivy League school? If so, do you think they should be automatically considered for financial aid?

Key Issue 5: **Strategies for Change - Facts and Figures**



Ivy League Schools educate 0.3% of college student borrowers. ¹

Rice University's acceptance rate is 10.9%, with an endowment of \$8.9 Billion.²

Rice University is transparent about financial aid opportunities up front, offering full tuition to low-income families and at least half tuition to middle income families.³

At Rice University, there is no majority demographic group.⁴

Georgia Tech has a \$2.97 Billion endowment, and a 18% acceptance rate.⁵

Georgia Tech has 3 times as many undergraduate students as Dartmouth College.⁶

Georgia Tech has almost doubled in size in the last decade.⁷

Purdue University has a \$2.6 Billion endowment and is building high schools to increase access.⁸

Purdue University has a 67% acceptance rate.⁹

Since opening Purdue high schools, the enrollment rate at Purdue Universities for Indianapolis residents has increased by 300%.¹⁰

Over the last decade, Purdue University has expanded its student population by nearly 40%.¹¹



Discussion Questions

- 1) Why do you think these non-Ivy schools featured in the film focus on diversity in the way Ivy League schools do not?
- 2) Should Ivy League schools look to other reputable public and private universities for guidance, regarding issues like admittance rates, tuition assistance and community support?
- 3) Should tuition assistance be granted on a sliding scale?
- 4) What do you think about Purdue University's endeavors to build high schools in Indianapolis, essentially creating a direct pipeline to the university?
- 5) Why do you think these schools have chosen to expand their student populations, when their endowments are significantly less than those of Ivy League schools?

Additional Biographies

Cora Media is an independently-financed production company based in South Florida. Their focus is to create compelling nonfiction and documentary content that examines important social, political, and economic issues. Their other feature film includes InHospitable along with Exclusion U.

Veronica Nickel

Producer

Veronica Nickel is currently a founding partner at Kashif Incubator, a nonprofit focused on artist development for BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ and disabled creators. Recently she led the documentary production company Cora Media, with the upcoming INHOSPITABLE. Her feature, the Netflix Original FIRST MATCH, premiered at SXSW in 2018 and won the Gamechanger and Audience Awards. Other recent credits include UNCORKED and A24's Academy Award-winning feature MOONLIGHT. Nickel was chosen to take part in the Sundance Institute Creative Producing Summit, LAFF Fast Track Lab and Tribeca All Access Lab and has her MFA from Columbia University.

Xuan Vu

Editor

Xuan Vu is an award-winning documentary film editor whose core motivation is to amplify the voices of those who otherwise would not be heard. Her independent documentary work spans the globe and has won her several distinguished awards, including the 2020 Southeast Emmy award for "Outstanding Documentary" for WHILE I BREATHE, I HOPE, a feature film on which she served as producer and principal editor. She has also worked extensively on network television series, including CNN's THIS IS LIFE WITH LISA LING, Showtime's DARK NET and PBS's AMERICA BY THE NUMBERS WITH MARIA HINOJOSA.

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Cheree Dillon

Editor

Cheree Dillon is a documentary film editor based in New York City, far from her childhood spent in Kansas. She edited the Emmy-nominated feature film OFF AND RUNNING, co-edited the award-winning feature docs DEATH BY DESIGN, SURVIVING AMINA and MASSACRE RIVER. Her broadcast work includes editing THE HOMESTRETCH on PBS's series Independent Lens, WNET's special THE TALK: RACE IN AMERICA, and segments for THE TODAY SHOW. Cheree also edited the award-winning short films SISTER/STRANGER, AN IMAGINARY THING, COSMO, and SOUTHMOST USA. When not editing, Cheree volunteers in several community gardens including the West Harlem Garden Collective.

Mariam Dwedar

Director of Photography

Mariam Dwedar is an Emmy Award-winning Egyptian-Filipina cinematographer and filmmaker from Brooklyn, New York. She has contributed to Peabody Award- and Webby Award-winning projects, filmed on field productions around the world covering a wide range of topics, and her clients include an array of media from independent documentaries to news programs and television comedies. Recently, Mariam was recognized by DOCNYC, America's largest documentary festival, as one of '40 Under 40' rising stars in documentary filmmaking.

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