

Film addresses sexual assault



– SUBMITTED PHOTO Aishah Shahidah Simmons will show her documentary “NO! Confronting Sexual Assault in Our Community” at the Painted Bride next week. Farah Jasmine Griffen, above, is featured in the documentary.

By Janae Hoffler

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A local filmmaker hopes when her documentary premieres next week, it will get people talking.

Aishah Shahidah Simmons began filming “NO! Confronting Sexual Assault in Our Community” in 1994 when she wanted to find out why so many women, Black women in particular, were silent about sexual violence.

What she uncovered in her 11 years was how the collective silence of both Black men and women adversely affects the entire community, but not without providing tools of healing and reconciliation.

Simmons, 37, whose film premieres Thursday at the Painted Bride Art Center, said the film explores the trauma of rape and other sexual violence, but also is a message of healing.

“I did the documentary because first of all I am a survivor of sexual assault, and I realized I knew more Black women who have been raped than who have not. Women period, but really wanting to look at Black women, wanting to look at sexual violence in the community from which I come,” said Simmons, a West Philadelphia native.

NO! features testimonies of seven women and interviews with historians, anthropologists and violence prevention advocates who examine sexual violence in the African American community.

It also examines sexual violence during slavery, the Civil Rights and Black Nationalist movements and date rape on college campuses, and how attitudes within the Black community hinder justice.

The screening, presented by the Leeway Foundation and Scribe Video Center, is also part of domestic violence awareness and prevention month.

“Aishah has created an important tool for social change. This film pushes people to think of sexual assault in complex ways, as more than one isolated act of violence,” said Leeway Foundation Program Director Kavita Rajanna.

Simmons’ documentary is will also be shown at the “From Womb to Womanhood” conference for women and girls of color Oct. 28 at Temple University.

NO! premieres at the Painted Bride, 230 Vine St. at 7 p.m. The event is free but reservations are required by Monday. Call (215) 545-4078. For more information on the film, visit www.notherapedocumentary.org.