

# Young Brooklyn filmmaker asks 'Why Do You Have Black Dolls?' in her debut documentary

Samantha Knowles' movie will be screened at Ingersoll Community Center

BY [JACOB E. OSTERHOUT '02](#) / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

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**Samantha Knowles '12, 22, is surrounded by the subject of her new 25-minute movie.**

Sometimes, a doll is not just a doll. It's a reminder of a child's beauty and potential.

No one understands that better than 22-year-old director Samantha Knowles, whose experience growing up as an African-American in a predominantly white community was the inspiration for her new documentary, "Why Do You Have Black Dolls?"

The 25-minute debut film about the significance of black dolls has been accepted at five film festivals and will be screened tonight at the Ingersoll Community Center in Brooklyn.

“When I was 8, a white friend came over and innocently asked, ‘Why do you have black dolls?’” remembers Knowles, who was raised in Warwick, N.Y., and now lives in Prospect Heights. “At the time, I obviously couldn’t really answer the question.”

Fourteen years later, she can.



SAMANTHA KNOWLES/SAMANTHA KNOWLES

**A scene of little girls and their favorite playthings from 'Why Do You Have Black Dolls?'**

Knowles, who initially made the film as her honors thesis at Dartmouth College, spent \$6,000 and interviewed more than 20 dollmakers and historians, mostly in New York and Philadelphia.

“These black dolls provide a positive representation of black women and men to the children that play with them,” she says. “In these dolls, children see a reminder of their own beauty.”

In the film, 6-year-old Emily Forrester and her friends illustrate Knowles' message as they play with their dolls in a Queens apartment.

“She had curly hair just like me, so I picked this doll,” says Forrester. “I have black dolls because they are pretty and everyone likes black dolls.”

Knowles was surprised to discover a small but passionate community that creates and collects black dolls.



SAMANTHA KNOWLES/SAMANTHA KNOWLES

### **A cavalcade of diverse black dolls shown in Samantha Knowles' documentary**

“I learned a lot about the making of black dolls,” she says. “Instead of going to Walmart and buying dolls, many women are making their own dolls to look like their mothers and sisters. These dolls sell anywhere from \$20 to thousands of dollars, but their true value is in the creation process.”

The main concern for Knowles, who has a collection of 60 dolls, was whether anyone would care about the significance and history of a child's toy.

The response to her film, which includes a profile in Jet Magazine, has set her mind at ease.

“The black community has these larger issues like educational gaps and poverty and violence and I kept thinking, ‘Why do black dolls matter?’” she says. “But the

conversation always reverts back to image and what is a more powerful and formative image for a young black child than her dolls?”

Criticism online has accused Knowles of promoting reverse racism, to which the young director responds, “I’m not critiquing white dolls, just exploring the role of black dolls. They are a reminder of our beauty that weren’t always available. My mom would have to specially order me black dolls at Christmas.”

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**YOU SHOULD KNOW**

A trailer for “Why Do You Have Black Dolls” can be seen on Youtube.com. The documentary will be screened Wed., Feb. 6, at 6:30 p.m. at the Ingersoll Community Center, 177 Myrtle Ave., Brooklyn.

Read more: <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/tv-movies/brooklyn-filmmaker-asks-black-dolls-article-1.1256056#ixzz2KY9UgXhd>