



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES RHABURN

# ACTOR, FILMMAKER, STORYTELLER:

## There's "No Ceiling" for the Talents of Nicole Collins

*By Dean M. Shapiro, Senior Editor*

"Making an impact on the world." That's the objective of Nicole Collins, a talented actor, filmmaker, writer, storyteller and innovator who came to New Orleans from her childhood home in Alexandria, bringing her skills and enthusiasm to the cultural world of her adopted city.

"I'm at the point in my life where I am not going to give up and will continue to reach success. I'm going to keep going and help others along the way. I know that there is no ceiling for me and what I can do," Nicole confidently proclaimed in a recent interview.

Nicole arrived in New Orleans to attend Dillard University three days before her 18th birthday in late August 2005 but she couldn't stay very long. Hurricane Katrina hit the city at the end of that month and Nicole evacuated to Lafayette. Eventually she returned to New Orleans and she stayed at the Hilton Hotel where Dillard was holding classes while the Gentilly campus was being repaired from hurricane damage.

Early in her career, Nicole spent eight years hosting a weekend radio program on the popular hip-hop station, Q93. "The lessons I learned through mentorship and the exposure that I received from working in radio gave me some valuable career experience," she said. "It helped me develop the ability to communicate and speak to people directly.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHUCKY ALLEN

"That experience also opened doors to television and live-event hosting," Nicole added. "I was the in arena host for the New Orleans Pelicans for 6 years which included two All Stars. My hosting work included other opportunities involving the Essence Festival, We TV, EUR Web, Bossip, and the Final Four."

Most recently coming from the lead and only female role in the world premiere of Harold Ellis Clark's new play, "Ganking Mr. Guidry," at LePetit Theatre in August 2026.

It was a major role in Crescent City Stage's New Orleans premiere of the Pulitzer Prize-winning stage drama, "Primary Trust," in May 2026, that brought Nicole's acting skills to Clark's attention. "Harold saw me in it and he gave me the opportunity to be in 'Ganking Mr. Guidry.' That's how that came about," Nicole explained.

Among the past projects that Nicole has proudly created was a web series titled "Maternally Yours" that was filmed entirely in her home town of Alexandria in 2020. In addition to holding down a minor role in the series, Nicole was also the series director.

Her latest film, "Pullover," is beginning its film festival journey. Nicole co-wrote the short film with her 15-year-old daughter, actress Aadyn Encalarde, who also plays the lead role. "Pullover" was created in collaboration with a talented Louisiana cast and crew in December 2025.



*PRIMARY TRUST* Cast & Crew

PHOTO COURTESY OF NICOLE COLLINS



*Pullover* Crew



*Nicole and Aadyn on Pullover set*

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"Pullover" makes its premiere in October at the New Orleans Film Festival, an Oscar-qualifying festival.

Aadyn also had a role in "Sinners," Ryan Coogler's Oscar Award-winning horror-drama that was filmed in the New Orleans area in 2024.

"I'm so inspired by her," Nicole gushed.

Shuttling back and forth between Louisiana and Los Angeles, Nicole took on some humanitarian philanthropy work. "I've always believed in community service and humanitarian endeavors," she proudly stated. "It has been instilled in me since childhood."

Continuing, Nicole spoke about an organization she created called The Blooming Phoenix when she was in Los Angeles in 2019. "Under this organization I put on a Black Women's Maternal Brunch that focused on post-partum wellness."

"I also, under the Blooming Phoenix organization, facilitated Black women's mental health check-ins for COVID and those were available on Zoom," Nicole added. "In 2016 I created the Love Yours workshop. It is a public workshop that helps young girls build self-confidence

through the art of public speaking.”

Another one of the projects that Nicole is equally proud of is a documentary series titled “The Young Woman’s Guide” in which women, 70 years-old and up, gave feedback and advice to younger women making their way through their lives and careers. It screened at the New Orleans Film Festival in 2018 and it received favorable reviews.

“The main thing about it is the impact that it has,” Nicole said. “I’ve had many people come up to me and tell me how much the words affected them in a positive way. ‘I’ve had three grandmothers and I lost all three of them,’ Nicole recalled. “The last one passed away last year. I was extremely close to her. Bennie Claiborne was her name.

“That’s why I say there is no ceiling for me because I’ve had my grandmothers, my dad, my mom, my aunts and uncles, my cousins, godparents, my friends and my community who believe in me. The only person out there who I have to navigate around is my own self.”

Nicole’s first feature film booking was in the film adaptation of the book, “Twelve Years a Slave,” Solomon Northup’s 1850s firsthand account of his enslavement. She portrayed a young slave girl who humanely gave water to a lynched slave hanging from

a tree but still surviving. The film went on to win the Academy Award for Best Picture.

Her screen resume also includes projects such as “Criminal Minds,” “The Crossover,” “The Burial,” and “Carry-On.”

Other productions that Nicole has been in over the course of her career include five episodes of the 2012 “Treme” series.

In recent years, Nicole has been reaping prestigious awards, including a Top 10 winner of Tyler Perry’s Inaugural Dream Collective for Upcoming Directors in 2025.

Other recent honors include a 2024 SIPP Cultural Artist-in-Residence, a 2024 Foundation for Louisiana honoree and a 2023 National Performance Network Take Notice Fund recipient. She also serves on the board of the New Orleans Video Access Center where she was previously the board president for three years.

Calling herself “a student of the art and of life,” Nicole is constantly learning and growing, watching the latest shows, films and live theatre. “I understand the importance of community and working together when it comes to creating,” she explained. “As a leader, I understand that the success of a film doesn’t end in the editing room, relationships also matter.”

Locally, Nicole recently wrapped up a documentary examining how the historic Bayou Road corridor in New Orleans is being protected and revived by a Black-led movement of business entrepreneurs, culture bearers and community organizers. The project, in which she was a writer, director and producer, was made possible through grants from the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation and the New Orleans Tourism and Cultural Foundation and it is expected to premiere in the fall of 2026.

“It is a story of Black economic liberation and cultural pride through ownership and the vision of Dwight and Beverly McKenna,” Nicole said.

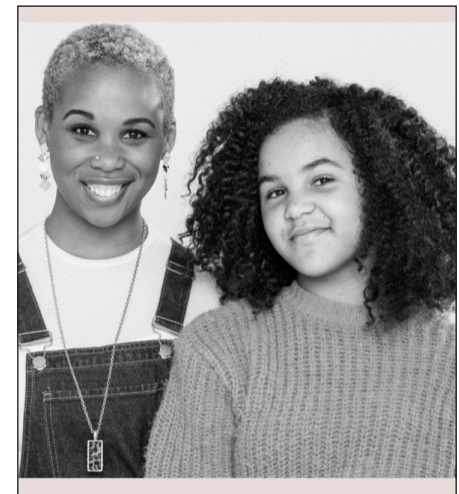
When told by her interviewer that she is blessed in what she has accomplished in her field of expertise, her response is a



Nicole and Aadya NOVAC

PHOTO COURTESY OF NICOLE COLLINS

humble “Thank you,” followed by a sharing of the credits for her success. “Yes, I am blessed and my daughter is as well. She actually gets more than me. And I am happy about that; she’s such a great kid. We’ve worked hard for what we’ve accomplished and we are grateful.”



Nicole and Aadya

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