Mary Mazzio, director. *A Most Beautiful Thing*. 50 Eggs Films, 2020.

A Most Beautiful Thing chronicles the experience of the first high school all-Black rowing team founded in Chicago's West Side neighborhood in 1999. Filmmaker and former U.S. Olympic team rower Mary Mazzio documents recent interviews with the men of Manley High School's former rowing team. In the 1990s, Chicago was among the most violent cities in the U.S., with high crime rates. As the crack epidemic raged throughout the U.S., drug abuse and gang violence were commonplace in Black communities. West Side neighborhoods, including Lawndale, Austin, Humboldt Park, and Garfield Park, where Manley High School is located, reached peak homicide rates in the early 1990s.

Mazzio compiles oral histories and crime statistics to frame the first all-Black high school rowing team's biographical narrative. Mazzio's work speaks to social injustices in the Black community and issues prevailing in the U.S urban centers. Chance encounters in a program established to offer alternatives to gang participation and drug abuse in Chicago's West Side communities led to life-long bonds and an inspiring story with a silver lining for today's Black youth.

Towards the turn of the decade, sprawling gentrification and rising property values in Chicago's South Side promoted the creation of social welfare and community outreach programs for Black youth in the West Side. Manley High School's rowing program hoped to break stereotypes that portrayed rowing as a White-dominated sport, only accessible to rich people. The program aimed to establish pathways to higher education through athletic scholarships for the team. The teammates of Manley High School's 1990 first all-Black rowing team recount their experiences participating in a White-dominated sport during one of the most violent times in Chicago's history. Many of the team members, now as adults, provide their testimonies and experience as young Black men involved in different gangs, facing hardships and grief due to drug abuse at home. Rowing had a transformative power over their lives.

Following the program's abrupt end due to lack of funding, some team members fell into the cycle of violence, drug

abuse, and incarceration that plagued Chicago's Black communities. Other team members took advantage of the opportunity to participate in an entrepreneurial program that enabled them to start small businesses. The latter half of the documentary explores tensions between the Black community and police presence in the West Side. Twenty years later, in 2019, the team reunites to participate in the Chicago Sprints rowing race. The team's captain, Arshay Cooper, hopes to inspire a new generation of young Black men by inviting the Chicago Police Department to join in the race. It is an effort to illustrate that rowing as a sport can unite people of any color and disparate backgrounds.

Though the message of the documentary is uplifting and inspiring for Black youth, this documentary merely grazes the surface of racial injustice, profiling, and police brutality that Black men face every day. Given the team captain's controversial decision to compete on the same team as White Chicago police officers in their reunion race, the documentary falls short in its examination of the role the police play in incarceration rates of Black youth. As cases of police brutality against Black men, like George Floyd and Trayvon Martin, continue to be relevant in contemporary conversation, perhaps Mazzio's overall perspective that we are 'all on the same boat' is a misjudgment. *A Most Beautiful Thing* is a movie that any audience can enjoy watching because of the optimistic perspective it offers for young Black men. This documentary could especially be useful to audiences hoping to engage with stories that highlight the plight of the Black community while offering an uplifting silver lining for Black youth.

Jennifer Yam