



OklaFilm Presents

BAD PRESS

Directed by Rebecca Landsberry-Baker (Muscogee Creek) and Joe Peeler

Producers: Conrad Beilharz, Garrett Baker and Tyler Grait

Executive Producers: Will Potter, David Doran, Justin Nearing, Mary Garis, Will Hugon, and Brenda Robinson

2023 | U.S | English & Mvskoke | 98 minutes

2023 Sundance Film Festival – World Premiere, U.S. Documentary Competition
U.S. Documentary Special Jury Award: Freedom of Expression

FINAL PRESS NOTES

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Short Logline

When the Muscogee Nation suddenly begins censoring their free press, a rogue reporter fights to expose her government's corruption in a historic battle that will have ramifications for all of Indian Country.

Medium Logline

When the Muscogee Nation government abruptly repeals its landmark Free Press Act to muzzle the tribe's hard-hitting news outlet, defiant and foul-mouthed journalist Angel Ellis charges headfirst into a historic (and surprisingly funny) battle to restore her tribe's press freedoms. An enthralling, edge-of-your-seat nail biter that unfurls with the energy and suspense of a political thriller, *Bad Press* is a timely and unprecedented documentary about a lone journalist fighting a corrupt system for her fellow citizens.

Long Logline

Imagine you lived in a world where your only reliable news source became government propaganda overnight. That's exactly what happened to the citizens of the Muscogee Nation, the fourth largest Native American tribe, in 2018. Out of 574 federally-recognized tribes, the Muscogee Nation was one of only five to establish a free and independent press - until the tribe's legislative branch abruptly repealed the landmark Free Press Act in advance of an election. The tribe's hard-hitting news outlet, Mvskoke Media, would now be subject to direct editorial oversight by the tribal government.

One defiant journalist refuses to accept this flagrant act of oppression. As brave as she is blunt, veracious muckraker Angel Ellis charges headfirst into battle against the corrupt faction of the Muscogee National Council. Angel and her allies rally for press freedoms by inciting a voter-supported constitutional amendment, just in time for the start of a new election cycle.

An enthralling, edge-of-your-seat nail biter that unfurls with the energy and suspense of a political thriller, *BAD PRESS* is a timely and unprecedented story about the battle for freedom of the press and against state-censored media.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The battle for the free, unimpeded flow of information to the public is in danger in both the Muscogee Nation and the United States, and in both cases those who control that flow hold some measure of sway over their elections' outcomes. Our film holds up a timely and important mirror to those in power in both the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and America.

There is no one more qualified to tell this story than director Becca Landsberry-Baker, who has lived this story for more than a decade. It is her heritage, identity, and her chance to effect change

within her tribe. Through this film, she will shine a light on government corruption and highlight how an independent press can strengthen tribal sovereignty by informing and educating tribal citizens.

As a filmmaker, telling this story is the evolution of her collective career working in and representing Indigenous media, sharing critical information with an audience including fellow citizens, and speaking truth to power. This documentary represents an opportunity to empower Indigenous voices, harnessing the power of media through journalism and film.

Co-director Joe Peeler brings over a decade of documentary editing experience to the project. Joe's primary goal has been to tell stories that expand the traditional idea of the "American experience" and shed light on diverse and underrepresented communities. His career as a documentarian has made him a passionate defender of free press and media, so the story of the Muscogee Nation is enormously important to, and aligned with, his values as a filmmaker.

Artistically, our goal is to tell a story from a modern, Native perspective that challenges audiences' preconceptions about what freedom of press actually looks like in America. Our aim is to paint a complex portrait of the struggles of Indigenous journalists in the most entertaining and humorous way possible.

FEATURING

Angel Ellis (Muscogee Creek)
Jerrad Moore (Muscogee Creek)
Jason Salsman (Muscogee Creek)
Gary Fife (Muscogee Creek)
Mark Randolph (Muscogee Creek)
David Hill (Muscogee Creek)
James Floyd (Muscogee Creek)
Dode Barnett (Muscogee Creek)
Graham Lee Brewer (Cherokee)
Arielle Farve (Chickasaw)
Lenzy Krehbiel-Burton (Cherokee)
Liz Gray (Muscogee Creek)
Travis Scott (Muscogee Creek)
Rita Courtwright (Muscogee Creek / Mojave)
Steve Bruner (Muscogee Creek)
Kalyn Free (Choctaw)
Brenda Golden (Muscogee Creek)
Shannon Shaw Duty (Osage)

BIOGRAPHIES

Rebecca Landsberry-Baker | DIRECTOR

Rebecca Landsberry-Baker is an enrolled citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and the executive director of the Native American Journalists Association. She is a recipient of the 2018 NCAIED “Native American 40 Under 40” award and was selected to the Harvard Shorenstein News Leaders Fall 2022 cohort. Landsberry-Baker made her directorial debut with the documentary feature film, *BAD PRESS*, which was supported by the Sundance Institute, Ford Foundation JustFilms, NBC, and the Gotham. *BAD PRESS* premiered at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival and received the U.S. Documentary Special Jury Award for Freedom of Expression. The film was also recognized with the One in a Million Award from the 2023 Sun Valley Film Festival.

Joe Peeler | DIRECTOR

Joe Peeler is a Sundance award-winning director and editor whose work has appeared on NETFLIX, HBO, FX, ESPN, Hulu and CBS. Joe began his career apprenticing under legendary director Peter Bogdanovich, and from there edited Lucy Walker’s Academy Awards Shortlist documentary short *The Lion’s Mouth Opens*; multiple episodes of the Netflix original series *Flint Town*; and Margaret Brown’s SXSW premiere documentary short *The Black Belt*. Most recently, Joe co-directed *BAD PRESS*, which premiered at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival and won the U.S. Documentary Special Jury Award for Freedom of Expression.

Conrad Beilharz | PRODUCER

Conrad Beilharz is a Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program, NBC Universal Original Voices, and Ford Foundation JustFilms grantee with his 2023 Sundance Film Festival Award Winning film, *BAD PRESS*. He produced the 2019 SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL PREMIERE virtual reality experience *EMBODY*; as well as the ENGADGET ALTERNATE REALITIES PREMIER mixed reality experience *DANCE WITH FL(AR)MINGOS*. Previously, he produced the CALIFORNIA FILM AWARD-winning documentary *MULE DAYS* as well as the VIMEO STAFF PICKED short film *GOOSE*. He has also produced content for MICROSOFT, LULULEMON, CLIF BAR, and VICE MEDIA, in addition to many independent visual artists. Conrad is currently producing the feature documentary *RINA SARINA WILD BALLERINA* about a polyamorous death midwife.

Garrett F. Baker | PRODUCER

Garrett Baker is a Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program and Ford Foundation JustFilms grantee. He is a screenwriter with a Bachelor of Arts in Film and Media Studies from the University of Oklahoma, where he graduated Summa Cum Laude. He wrote the pilot for *WESTMORELAND*, a series for XBOX ENTERTAINMENT STUDIOS. Garrett has been featured as an Honorable Mention (top 40) in the Tracking Board’s Launch Pad Feature

Competition, Quarterfinalist (top 3%) in the Script Pipeline Feature Competition; Quarterfinalist (top 10%) in the Scriptapalooza Screenplay Competition, and Semifinalist (top 3%) in the Final Draft Big Break Contest - Features. He is currently the Technical Support Manager for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Tyler Graim | CINEMATOGRAPHER & PRODUCER

Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program and Ford Foundation JustFilms grantee, Tyler Graim is a Denver-based cinematographer. He shot the forthcoming documentary features AMERICAN ESPIONAGE for director Christopher Smith, and RINA SARINA WILD BALLERINA for director Joe Peeler. He also directed and shot the short documentary SUFFERFEST which premiered at MOFF 2022. In addition to his documentary work, Tyler has filmed commercials for VOGUE, COMCAST, INTEL and TOYOTA, as well as docu-style series for COORS, BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT, and MICROSOFT. Most recently, Tyler shot BAD PRESS, which premiered at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival and won the U.S. Documentary Special Jury Award for Freedom of Expression.

Jean Rheem | Editor

Jean Rheem is a Los Angeles-based documentary film editor, originally from South Korea. Her work has been supported by the Ford Foundation, Sundance Institute, IDA and the LEF Foundation. Her first feature documentary, SAVE MY SEOUL, premiered and won the GRAND JURY AWARD at the LA Asian Pacific Film Festival. The film is currently streaming on AMAZON PRIME. She most recently completed editing her second documentary feature, ACCEPTED, in collaboration with Concordia Studio, Boardwalk Pictures and Jubilee Media. Premiering at the 2021 TRIBECA FILM FESTIVAL, the film explores race, class and education in America through the story of high school students in the rural South. In 2020, she was awarded the KAREN SCHMEER DOCUMENTARY EDITING FELLOWSHIP and in 2021, the inaugural BROWN GIRLS DOC MAFIA SUSTAINABLE ARTIST GRANT.

Denisse Ojeda | Composer

Denisse Ojeda is a Mexican-American artist and composer for visual media based in Los Angeles. After graduating from Berklee College of Music with a dual degree in Film Scoring and Bass Performance, Denisse further developed her craft as a composer for trailers and advertisements. Over the course of her career, she's had the opportunity to work on several promotions for high-profile studio projects including Amazon, Netflix, and HBO. Denisse's composition work is heavily influenced by electronic, experimental and orchestral sounds. She characterizes her body of work as darker and more ambient in nature, and often finds herself incorporating field recordings. "Bad Press," which premiered at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival, is Denisse's first feature film.

Credits

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