

LAURA FLANDERS & FRIENDS

INSIDE THE MAGA MOVEMENT: WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

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LAURA FLANDERS: That was a clip from "[Homegrown](#)," a stunning new documentary, by [Michael Premo](#) and [Rachel Falcone](#), about the violence that helped bring Donald Trump back to power. Made on the down-low with extraordinary access, "Homegrown" follows three men involved in the extremist group, the Proud Boys, as they participate in protests, rallies, and ultimately paramilitary action before and after the November 2020 election. An intimate record of the feelings and facts that push some to political violence, the film also casts light on the changing dynamics and demographics within today's far-Right movement. "Homegrown" is compelling, concerning, and perfectly timed. On January 6, 2021, Premo was there at the Capitol following one of his subjects, Christopher Quaglin, then a radicalized father-to-be, as he stormed the building and assaulted officers, leading to Quaglin's arrest and sentencing to a 12-year prison term. Today, Quaglin is one of the over 1,500 people charged and 900 convicted in relation to their acts that day. He's also one of the same 1,500 pardoned by Donald Trump when he took office a second time. What are we to make of all this? Well, "Homegrown" makes us think about all of it, our laws, our culture, our neighbors, and ourselves. Michael Premo's work spans film, radio, theater, installation, and photography. With his frequent collaborator, Rachel Falcone, he co-directed the participatory documentary "Sandy Storyline," among others. "Homegrown" premiered at the Venice Film Festival in the summer of 2024. It's out now from [Storyline Media](#). Welcome to "Laura Flanders & Friends," Michael. I am very glad to see you. When did you decide that this was the story you wanted to tell, and how did you get the access that you did?

MICHAEL PREMO: Rachel and I started filming this in 2018, and it was really at that moment where we were trying to better understand why people felt it was necessary to use violence to achieve what it is that they felt they needed to achieve. So we really set out to try to better understand why people, sort of somewhat across the political spectrum, were fighting for America. Like, what does that mean to fight for America? Who are you fighting? What are you fighting for? And I think that honest curiosity was really a credit to how we ended up getting the access that we did. I think fundamentally I found many people who, you know, share a perspective that I share, which is that, you know, we live in a system where the economic and political system is rigged in favor of corporations and the billionaires at the expense of working-class and middle-class people. And that sort of central critique or frustration sort of seemed to run through all the people that we met.

LAURA FLANDERS: Now, you say you set out to look across the political spectrum, but you end up with three Proud Boys. Can you talk about them as individuals, how you settled on them? And what happened to that idea that you would be talking to people of a variety of political ideologies?

MICHAEL PREMO: While we were in production, we were talking to people sort of who are on the Left, who are on the Right. And the more we thought about this film, it became there was too many ideas for one film. And the energy, and the excitement, and the proximity to power that the conservative movement was exhibiting made that angle particularly provocative. Why we ended up with the participants that we did was because we really saw this sort of level of energy and excitement bubbling in the conservative movement. And I'm very familiar with social movements, I've been around many different types of social movements, and there was just this energy coalescing in a particular way, and we wanted to figure out how we could be as close to the center of that energy as possible to really better understand why people were doing what they were doing.

LAURA FLANDERS: Is there a moment where you could see that possibly something like January 6 was in the cards?

MICHAEL PREMO: We could've never imagined where it would take us, but we knew we were headed to something explosive. The summer before the election, it became very clear that there was a level of alignment and organization across different tendencies of the conservative movement that were finding kind of a rhythm of working together, so to speak, in a way that portended that something big was gonna happen.

LAURA FLANDERS: Mm, was there anything you learned new about that day, January 6 itself?

MICHAEL PREMO: I think overall what we learned is that the movement is much more diverse and dynamic than we sort of went in thinking. We did not expect to find people across the sort of racial and demographic spectrum like we did. But I think people don't fully appreciate how this event was planned in public. You know, like the drum was beating to storm the Capitol since around Christmas. And we really tried to show in the film there was kind of two turning points in the fall with the "Million MAGA March" in November and the sort of "Stop the Steal" rally in December, that were really kind of two turning points that really showed how people were getting increasingly frustrated with what they believed was a stolen election. And as they saw their sort of legal avenues for recourse dwindling, were becoming more aggravated and more aggravated. And so, in December, it seemed inevitable that there was going to be a large amount of violence.

LAURA FLANDERS: It's important to remind people, we're talking about Election 2020. And we are now four years on and entering a second Trump term. Are the concerns you raise, that you've just mentioned, allayed now? Do you feel like these folks that you followed are like, "Okay, our guy's in power, we can go home"?

MICHAEL PREMO: No, I think what we're going to see is an escalation of the potential for violence. People feel increasingly emboldened in a way that I think is somewhat similar of 2016, but there's a different sense of urgency around now.

LAURA FLANDERS: One of the most surprising sections of the film is the part that shows a rally, supposedly Patriots Against Racism, that is being organized by some of the participants in your film in Utah, in Salt Lake City. Do you want to set this up?

MICHAEL PREMO: Well, as many people remember, there was this sort of phenomenon that happened partly as a result of the pandemic, where there was all these car caravans and rallies that were taking place in, sort of in place of big public rallies in a crowded space. And we see one of the protagonists in our film, Thad Cisneros, who is a Latino man from South Texas who was living in Salt Lake City at the time, and he is a Proud Boy. And he is somebody who had been racially profiled by the police on several occasions. And it was his opinion that the problem with police was not a systemic problem, but it was a case of bad apples. But regardless, he is somebody who was interested in, or is still interested in, police reform. He thought that the system had to be addressed in some way to address these bad apples. And so he forged this highly, completely unlikely alliance with this woman named Jacarri Kelley, who is a Black Lives Matter activist. And he was like, "Look, maybe we can sort of reach across the aisle," so to speak, and talk to people who, you know, on the surface, maybe were diametrically opposed. So him and Jacarri kind of struck up this unlikely relationship, which we see in the film.

LAURA FLANDERS: It's not all kumbaya, as even this clip reveals. You've talked about that alliance as unlikely. What's happened to it?

MICHAEL PREMO: So it was somewhat short-lived. Thad's attempt to try to work with Black Lives Matter activists was met with a backlash from other activists in the Proud Boys who were very critical of him trying to work with Black Lives Matter. Some people liked the idea, some people were like, "No, you can't work with them. They think we're all white supremacists, they'll never understand anything else." And as a result, their partnership was very short-lived.

LAURA FLANDERS: Is the far Right white supremacist?

MICHAEL PREMO: So I think that is one of the things that we try to complicate in the film. Because we show so many people of color who would not identify as white supremacists, who,

they themselves, say that they're not racist. Even, you know, one of the Proud Boys in our film, Randy Ireland, who is a white man who lives in Brooklyn, New York, you know, in my experience with him, is someone who is not a racist. You know, and I think it sort of complicates this narrative. And I saw Randy and I saw Thad fighting with other activists in the movement around racism or around white supremacy. And often the flack that they caught was, "Hey, you're giving in to the sort of woke Left that's trying to censor and trying to, you know, cancel people. We're conservatives, we don't cancel people. We accept all views. It's freedom of speech. People can say what they're gonna say." And, you know, Randy would retort with, "No, we need to get rid of the white supremacists. We need to get rid of the racists. That's not what democracy, that's not what America is about." And this tension was present and it was palpable, and it was a level of debate, or it was a volume of the debate, that I didn't expect to find.

LAURA FLANDERS: What you do cover though, and portray so brilliantly, is maybe not white supremacist the people, but white supremacy the structure. And I'm thinking particularly of the scene where another one of the caravans, one that Chris is participating in, is heading down the highway in Long Island at relatively high speed, and they're joking about how they're never going to get pulled over by police. What are you wanting your audience to think about that moment?

MICHAEL PREMO: So what we want to see, why we made this film in the way that we made it, and what I mean by that is this is an observational film, there's no sit-down interviews.

LAURA FLANDERS: No, we feel like we are right there with you.

MICHAEL PREMO: And we wanted you to be up close and personal to see the gulf, and the juxtapositions, and the tensions, and contradictions between what they say and what they do, and how their actions reverberate in the world in very different ways based on race and class. And so we wanted to be clear to see how people move through the world, and how they act very differently. I think we see this in that Trump train that you're referencing, and we also see this on January 6. If there was a very different type of movement that looked in a very different way, the response from law enforcement would've been absolutely different, and, as you know, I have no compunction about that at all. And so we want to make these juxtapositions very clear and really complicate, have a way in for people who sort of don't quite understand how their actions may support systems of white supremacy, and what the gulf between what you say is and what you do is, if that makes sense.

LAURA FLANDERS: Talking about our awareness as a society now, the Department of Homeland Security, the Justice Department, watchdog groups, often identify white supremacists, right-wing extremists, violent extremists, however you choose to define them, as a potential

threat. What do you make of what is actually being done, and what it perhaps might look like effectively to police extremist, violent groups like the Proud Boys?

MICHAEL PREMO: Yeah, the policing question is really complicated, because you have even people in the sort of mainstream culture, the conservative mainstream culture who have very particular ideas around who America is for and who America represents, and these are people in positions of power. And so I think it's very complicated to try to police ideas, but I think we have to, I think what the obstacle is, is often we flatten people into these two-dimensional ideas of who we think they are or what we think they are, and that prevents us from having any sort of conversation. And I think people across the political spectrum do this. Like, stereotypes are a very effective way to sort of de-legitimize somebody that you disagree with fundamentally. But those stereotypes create an obstacle to being able to sort of police these ideas and root out pernicious sort of things that are undermining even the potential for democracy to be a functioning system. And so I think that we need to be able to engage in conversations with people we disagree with in more functional ways, and that's one way at getting out and rooting out some of these pernicious ideas.

LAURA FLANDERS: Before we get to us and our interpersonal though, there's still the institutional. The FBI seems to have no problem profiling, and pursuing, and often prosecuting terrorists of the Left, people like eco-terrorists, we even have a word for it, but less easy it seems on the other side.

MICHAEL PREMO: Yeah, that's right. I was just listening to the congressional hearing for the potential next attorney general, and one of the questions that was posed to her was around completely ignoring recommendations from the research by the Southern Poverty Law Center, because this, you know, Republican senator was labeling them as a sort of anti-Christian organization. So I think we have some structural work to do to be able to rid our institutions of these ideas.

LAURA FLANDERS: I did want to hear more about where you see places for work to be done, and you've alluded to it, but one question I have is where do you see the fissures inside the far Right and even inside the individuals themselves? And then, where do you see possible points of connection? You've mentioned one, and I think your guy, Thad, you know, was radicalized by Michael Moore, you know? So that's one point of connection right there.

MICHAEL PREMO: It's hard to get through the noise and the backlash around DEI and, you know, woke, and all these sort of buzzwords that have become sort of buzzwords to the Right. But I feel like if we can use different language, there's opportunities for penetration and deeper understanding around race and how privilege affects society. I think another point is around the crisis of masculinity. I think we don't have, and by we, I mean men, in particular cisgendered

men, there's a lack of space within our society to express vulnerability and talk constructively around what does it mean to be a man in this current age. I think often these conversations are had through finger pointing, and shaming, and calling people out rather than calling people in.

LAURA FLANDERS: One of the others that struck me is it would probably help for us to have fewer wars. A lot of your folks are veterans.

MICHAEL PREMO: Yeah, and, you know, there's Kathleen Belew and some of these writers who have well documented how every American conflict abroad is followed by sort of an explosion of sort of far-Right militarized activity at home. And, you know, what we're experiencing is very much a result of these, you know, 20 years of this, quote, unquote, "forever wars" where people, you know, signed up for God and country, and, you know, maybe perhaps, you know, earnest reasons to try to, you know, be involved in something, and many people join the military just to have a way out of their community, just to get a job, just to, you know, get an education. And all of these sort of complicated reasons for that involvement are not necessarily talked about in our broader society. People are sort of lumped in and grouped into these stereotypes. And, as a result, when they re-enter society, there isn't the support needed to be able to help folks reacclimate, refocus, and process the sort of trauma of those experiences in a way that can make them sort of productive to a pluralistic democracy that we're hoping to build.

LAURA FLANDERS: What do you make of the culture we're creating around culpability, liability, accountability, impunity? Trump, of course, being the first felon now to sit in the White House, but having been sentenced to no time?

MICHAEL PREMO: Well, I think, one of the biggest things that it'll do is sort of reinforce this culture, this lack of accountability culture in which we exist, where people can, you know, commit acts of violence with impunity and without any sort of accountability. And that's, you know, kind of scary, because I think what it pretends is, you know, with the potential for an escalation of violence. We're in an era now where one political party, primarily the Republican party, no longer sees the Democrats as a legitimate partner in governance. And when one political party no longer sees the other party as a legitimate partner in governance, it increases the potential for sectarian violence. And we've seen this in other countries around the world over the last, you know, two, three decades. And I think that's the era that we're entering now that'll really be signaled by these pardons, because that's sending the message that January 6 was peaceful, and January 6 was sort of an inconsequential protest, just like any other "protest," quote, unquote.

LAURA FLANDERS: I'll ask you the question we ask everybody in this show, which is, you know, what do you think is the story that the future will tell of this moment?

MICHAEL PREMO: People, you know, 10, 15, 20 years from now, will look at this moment as a turning point in American democracy, when some of the sort of the infrastructure of reason that buttresses the system of democracy was chiseled away in a really significant way. I think we're turning a corner, and democracy in America is going to look very different in the next century.

LAURA FLANDERS: For those who thought his bark would be worse than his bite, Donald Trump is chomping down doing just about everything that he and Project 2025 said he would. Those January 6 felons, he pardoned them all, including those who'd been convicted by a jury of their peers of acts of real violence. Now, he's laying off workers and shutting down offices having to do with gun control, climate, and racism, and sexism in jobs. We know enough now to recognize what's going on, the us-versus-them politics, the leader with no shame, the "pet nation" kept hungry but fed and watered through a personal slush fund. We have seen this show before. The critics of the academy, the courts, politics, in the press act more or less silent. Well, that's because they've been hollowed out by years of cash, and compromise, and corruption, and they basically today perform the role of looking on. So what is left? Well, I'm reminded of the late-great leader Cecile Richards of Planned Parenthood, who said that, "Caring is the one essential quality." It's the one essential activity too, it seems, and the one that got under the skin of the Proud Boys shown in the movie "Homegrown." It was that big spontaneous expression of public caring against cruelty, that went by the name of BLM, that seems to have really shaken them up. Could it, again, provoke a reaction of a different kind? We'll find out. But I hope you join us. Feeling a temptation to go numb? Don't. Subscribe to our free podcast. Get a full, uncut version of every week's conversation, all the information's at the website, and we hope you'll check it out. For "Laura Flanders & Friends," I'm Laura, till the next time, stay kind, stay curious, and thanks for joining us.

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