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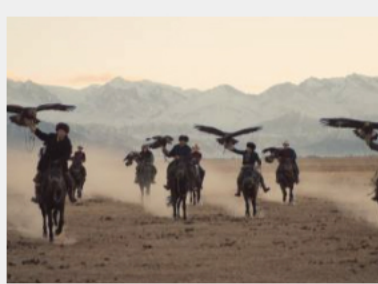
DOCS

MSNBC slates "Model America" as its first docuseries

By Andrew Tracy September 7, 2022



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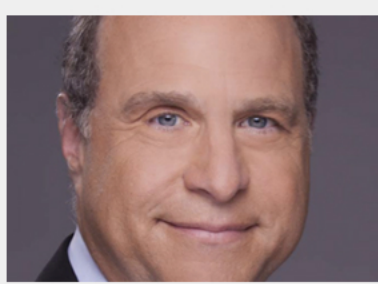
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MSNBC has slated a September 18 premiere for the four-part docuseries *Model America*, which explores how a fatal police shooting in 1990 that became a flashpoint of Black community protest and activism has taken on a new resonance in the era of the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Produced by Anchor Entertainment, Psycho Films and NBC News Studios, *Model America* is the first documentary series to be programmed for the network. It will be presented under the MSNBC Films banner, and will also stream simultaneously on Peacock.

On April 10, 1990, Philip Pannell, a 16-year-old Black youth in Teaneck, New Jersey, was fatally shot in the back by white police officer Gary Spath. Although Spath's claim that Pannell had been reaching for a concealed weapon was initially backed up by an autopsy, a second autopsy undertaken by the state medical examiner confirmed eyewitnesses' statements that the boy's hands had been in the air at the moment of his death. The revelations, and Spath's subsequent criminal trial for manslaughter, sparked heated protests from Teaneck's African American community, and drew both national and international attention to a town that had cultivated a self-image as a model of interracial harmony.

Spath was acquitted in the trial by an all-white jury, and a subsequent civil case launched by Pannell's parents was settled out of court.

In the docuseries, which is co-directed by Michelle Major and Teaneck native Dani Goffstein, the filmmakers both chronicle the original case and trial, and explore how the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement has given Teaneck residents a new lens through which to view this 30-year-old tragedy. Among those interviewed for the doc are members of Pannell's family; the former mayor of Teaneck, as well as former police officers; Rev. Al Sharpton, who visited Teaneck at the time of the 1990 protests along with fellow civil rights icon Jesse Jackson; and author Mike Kelly, who documented the Pannell shooting and Spath's trial in the 1995 book *Color Lines*.

"Before Ferguson, Baltimore, and countless other cities plagued by racial injustice and police shootings, there was Teaneck," said MSNBC president Rashida Jones in a release. "*Model America* tells the painful story of a fatal encounter that shocked a nation and transformed Teaneck into a symbol of racial strife. Three decades later, we're still seeing the same narrative play out again and again across the country. As the first documentary series at MSNBC, this story ties our past to our present, reminding us of how far we still have to go."

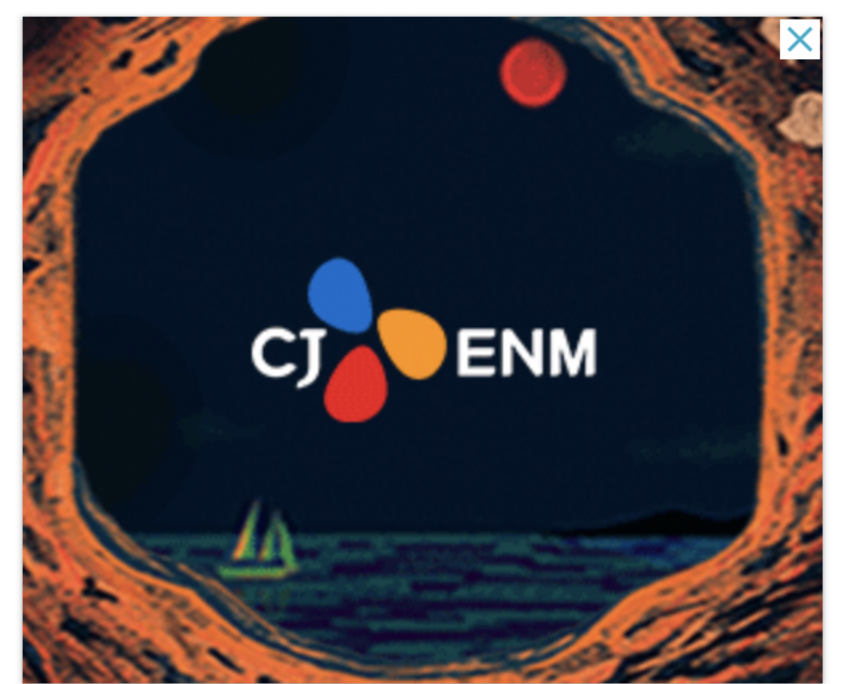
Executive producers are Ethan Goldman and Keayr Braxton (Anchor); Sam Canter, Eric Cook, Joe Weil and Dani Goffstein (Psycho Films); Amanda Spain and Rashida Jones (MSNBC Films); and Elizabeth Fischer, Andy Berg, Liz Cole, and Noah Oppenheim (NBC News Studios). Tyger Williams is also an EP on the series.

TAGS:

Amanda Spain, Anchor Entertainment, Andy Berg, Dani Goffstein, Elizabeth Fischer, Eric Cook, Ethan Goldman, Joe Weil, Keayr Braxton, Liz Cole, Michelle Major, Model America, MSNBC, MSNBC Films, NBC News Studios, Noah Oppenheim, Psycho Films, Rashida Jones, Sam Canter, Tyger Williams

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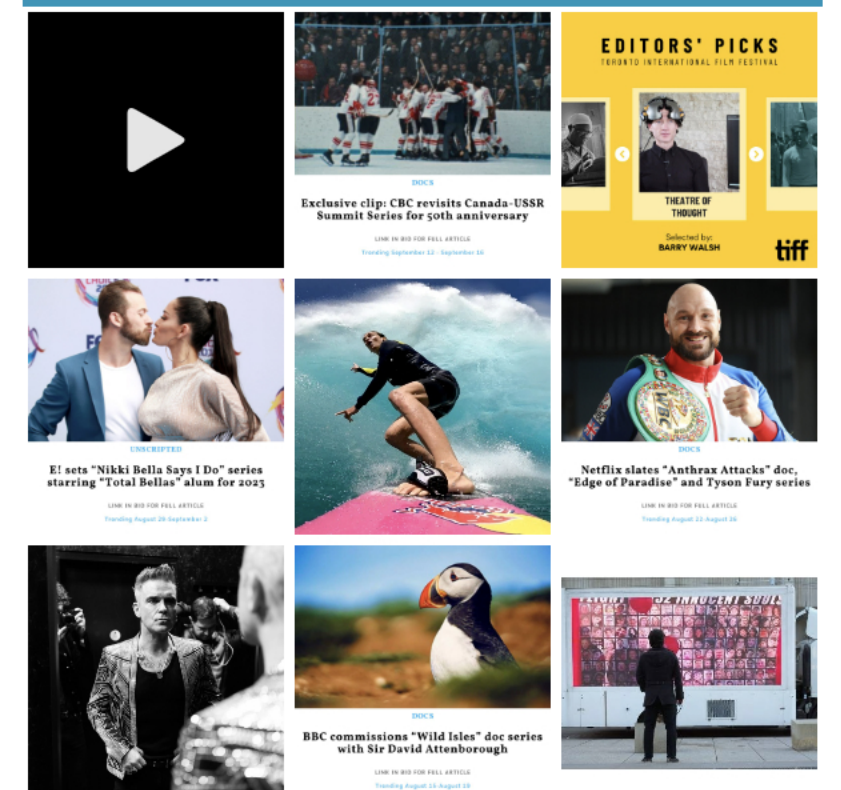
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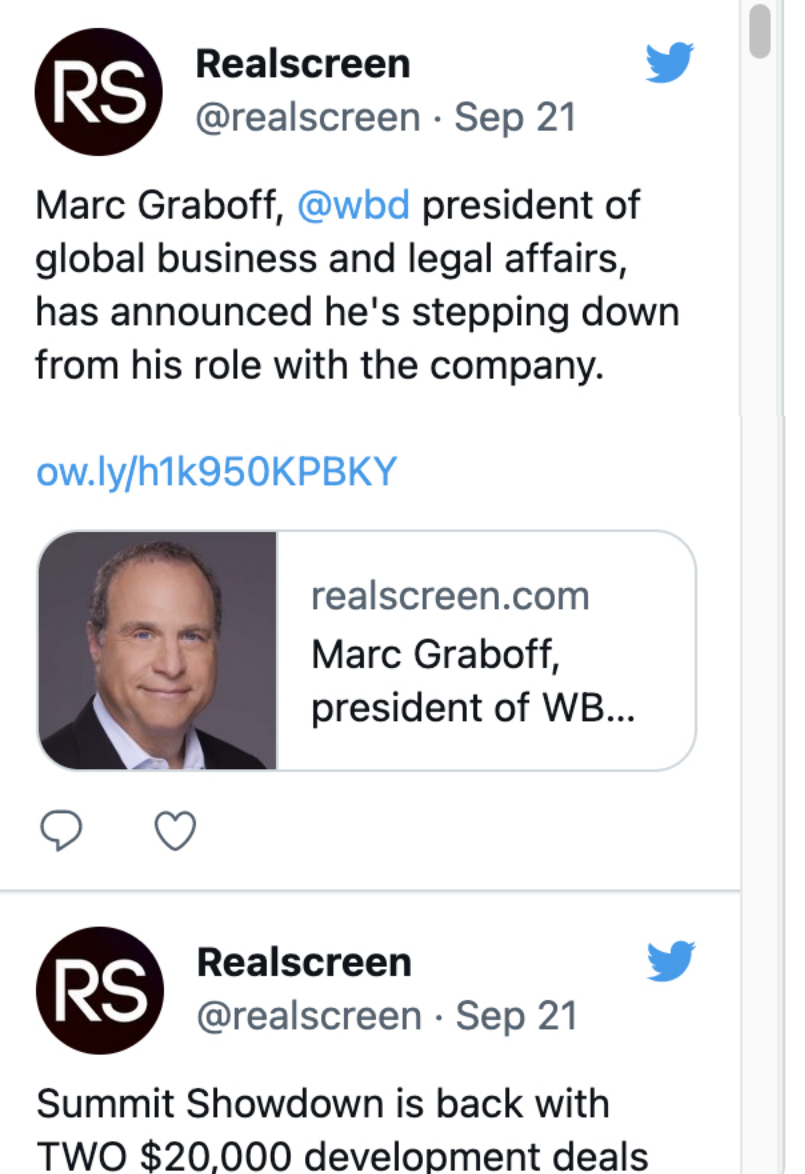
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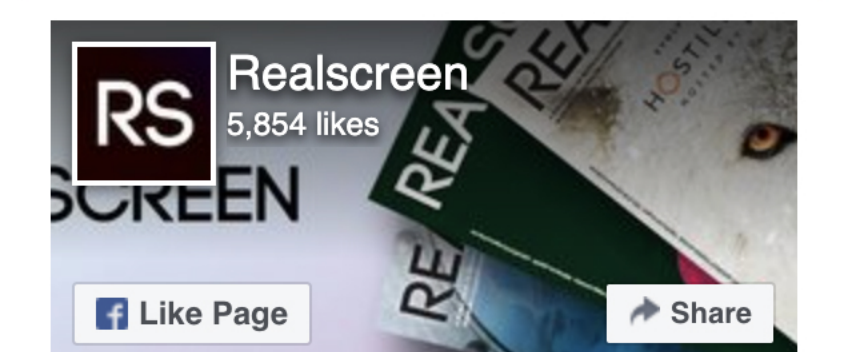
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