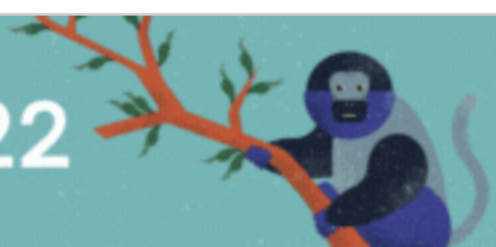


Hybrid Edition



10-14 Oct 2022



DOCS

## Exclusive clip: A look behind the scenes of MSNBC's first docuseries, "Model America"

By Andrew Jeffrey    September 16, 2022



### Top Stories



**DOCUMENTARY**  
Scenery and Workerbee bring "Human Playground" sports docuseries to Netflix



**FORMATS**  
Fremantle partners with 110% Content to launch "Unbreakable" format



**DOCUMENTARY**  
Grierson Trust reveals final nominations for 50th British Documentary Awards



**PEOPLE/BIZ**  
Marc Graboff, president of WBD global business and legal affairs, to step down



MSNBC is is set to premiere its first docuseries on Sunday (September 18), a project that connects a fatal police shooting 32 years ago to the current era of the Black Lives Matter movement.

The **four-part *Model America***, produced by Anchor Entertainment, Psycho Films and NBC News Studios, will stream on Peacock and be presented under the MSNBC Films banner. The series tells the story of Phillip Pannell, a 16-year-old Black youth in Teaneck, New Jersey, who was fatally shot in the back by white police officer Gary Spath. Spath's subsequent criminal trial sparked heated protests from Teaneck's African American community, drawing national and international attention to a town that presented itself as a model of interracial harmony.



Michelle Major and Dani Goffstein co-directed the series, with **Ethan Goldman** and **Keayr Braxton** executive producing for Anchor Entertainment, and Goffstein, Sam Canter, Eric Cook and Joe Weil executive producing for Psycho Films. **Amanda Spain** and Rashida Jones serve as executive producers for MSNBC Films, along with **Elizabeth Fischer**, **Andy Berg**, **Liz Cole** and **Noah Oppenheim** for NBC News Studios, and Tyger Williams.

Ahead of *Model America's* Sunday premiere, Major and Goldman spoke with *Realscreen* to discuss the new series, and highlight its timeliness and relevance today.



#### How did you first get involved in this project?

**Michelle Major** (pictured above): Dani Goffstein and his team at Psycho Films, along with Tyger Williams and Ethan Goldman from Anchor Entertainment, had already begun working on getting this story made when Ethan reached out to my agent. Dani had some really interesting material, and I felt an immediate connection to the story. It was also clear that Dani and I would have very different and crucial skill sets to contribute to the telling. Needless to say, for me, it was an immediate yes.

**Ethan Goldman**: I was first made aware of this project by [executive producer] Eric Cook, who Anchor is collaborating with on a couple of other projects. Eric mentioned that his friend, director Dani Goffstein, had been working with his mentor from USC, Tyger Williams, on developing a film around the killing of Phillip Pannell. This incident had haunted Dani as a kid growing up in Teaneck. Once I met with Tyger, Dani and his creative partners at Psycho Films, Anchor immediately signed on to help bring this important story to light.

#### Michelle, what was your working relationship like with Dani Goffstein? In what ways did your collaboration aid your approach to this story?

**Major**: When telling a very polarizing story like this one, it's always important to consider the perspectives of as many different voices as possible. With Dani and I being from such different backgrounds, we naturally challenged one another to consider the story from every possible point of view and to make sure that every voice was represented in the telling. I think the series is more powerful and will hopefully appeal to a broader audience because of this.

#### What makes this story a timely one to revisit now, and why is this the right time to dig into this story?

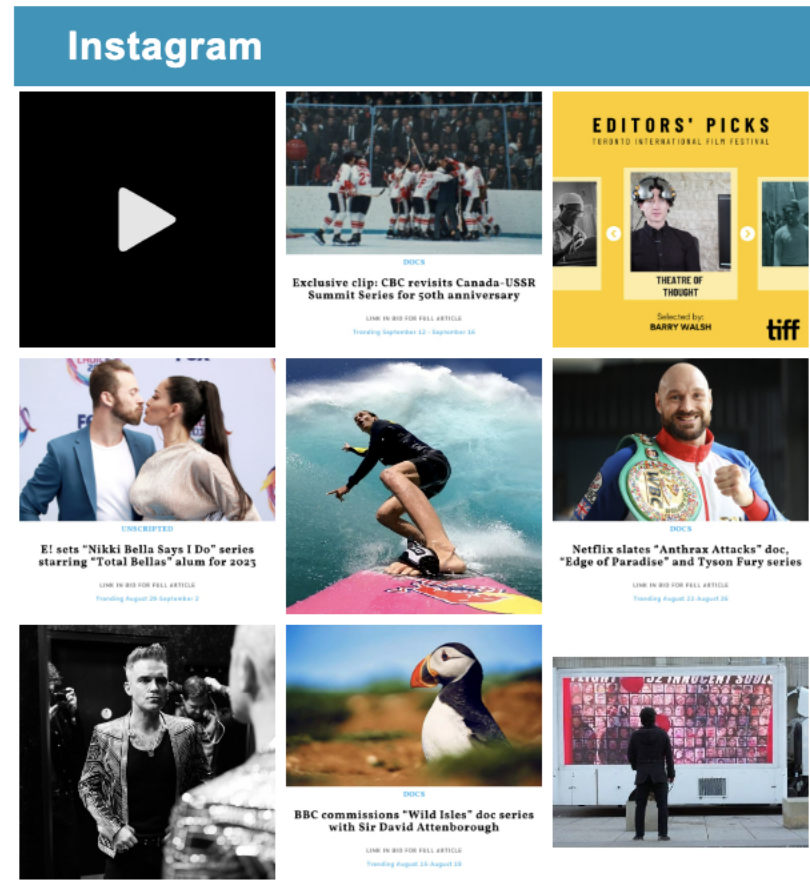
**Major**: The story of the killing of a Black teen by a white police officer in 1990, in so many ways, marked the beginning of what we now see as the modern-day Black Lives Matter movement, and yet so few people remember or know Phillip's name or his story, even in the town of Teaneck where it occurred. Phillip's story is also important to tell now as a cautionary tale for any town, group or organization in this country that thinks it has solved the problem of racism. This story reminds us that "racial harmony" is a goal for which we need to continue to strive, not rest upon. When we think we've solved the problem, it's exactly the time when we need to look again and consider what we may have missed, what lingering discord might remain there, just below the surface.



#### What made MSNBC Films a good fit for this series? How did that partnership come about?

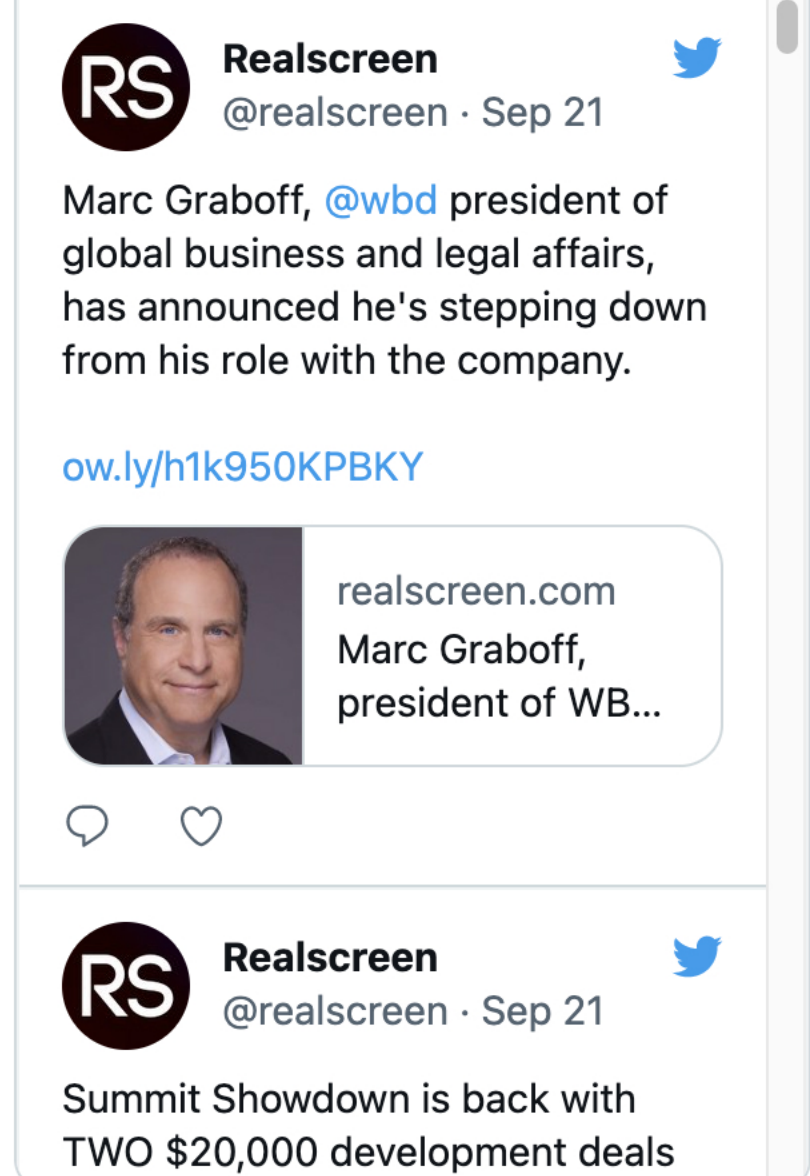
**Goldman** (pictured above): From the outset, MSNBC was one of our top choices as a broadcast partner for this series. Given their commitment to investigative journalism and impactful storytelling, we knew they could be a strong platform to tell this story. We also had dedicated, supportive partners in NBC News Studios — president Liz Cole, executive producer Liz Fischer, and head of development Andy Berg — who had provided us with countless hours of news footage from their vast archive that dates back 80+ years, that documented the tragedy in Teaneck as it happened back in 1990.

#### POPULAR POSTS



#### Twitter

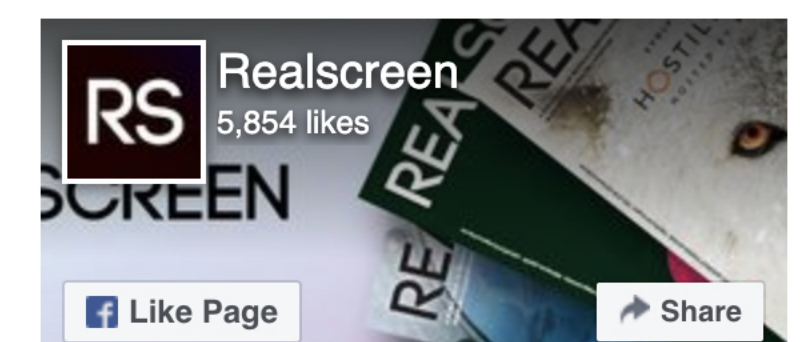
##### Tweets from @realscreen



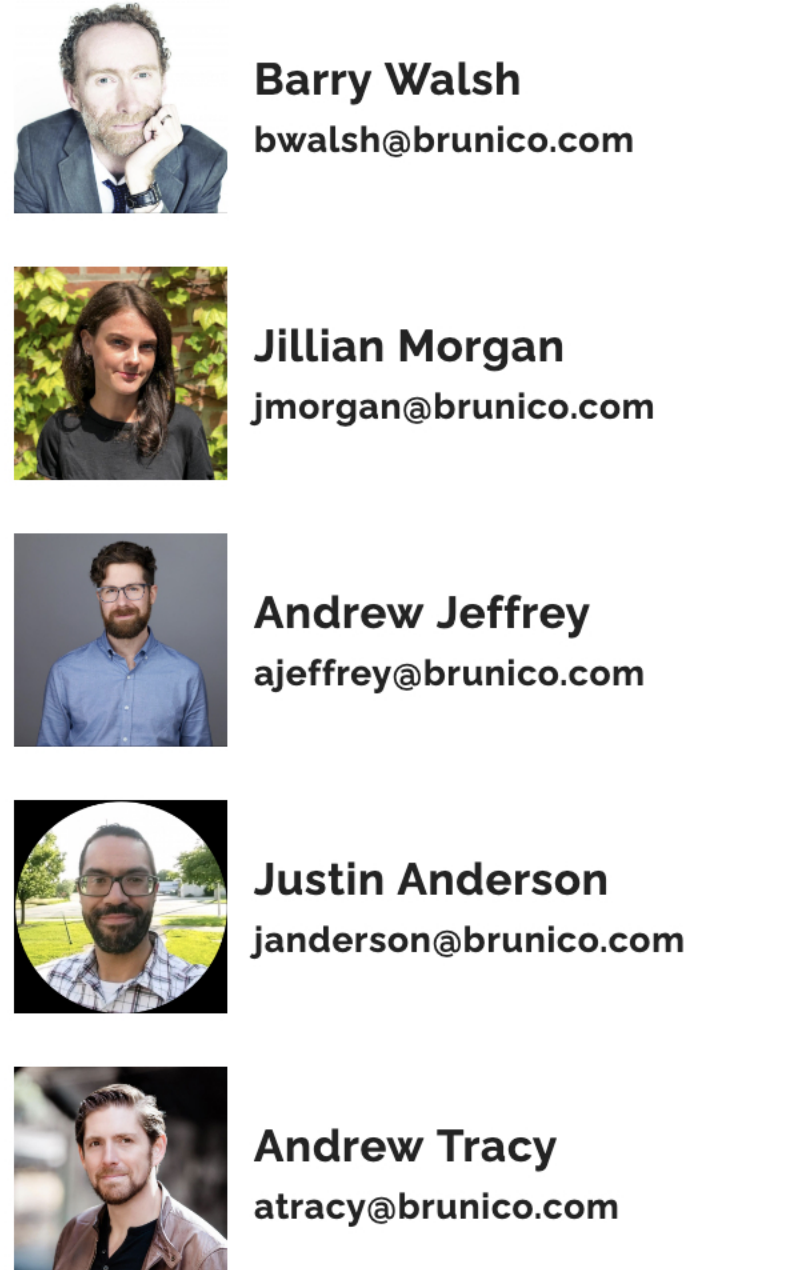
#### Follow @realscreen

14.1K followers

#### Facebook



### Contributors



#### SEE ALL CONTRIBUTORS

