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## EXPLORE HOW ONE REVOLUTIONARY NEWSROOM IS CHANGING THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE IN “BREAKING THE NEWS,” SET TO PREMIERE ON PBS’S INDEPENDENT LENS ON PRESIDENTS DAY, FEBRUARY 19

JANUARY 3, 2024

*Launching The 19th\*— an Unprecedented Digital News Startup  
Highlights Unrepresented Perspectives and Sparks a Larger  
Discussion Around Race, Gender, and Policy*

(San Francisco, CA) January 3, 2024—INDEPENDENT LENS announces the premiere of “Breaking the News,” the critically-acclaimed and crowd-pleasing documentary by Heather Courtney (“Where Soldiers Come From”), Princess A. Hairston (“Ladies First: A Story Of Women In Hip-Hop”), Chelsea Hernandez (“Building The American Dream”), and Diane M. Quon (“Minding the Gap”). The feature documentary takes the viewer inside the newsroom as a group of women and LGBTQ+ journalists launch a digital news startup seeking to buck the white-male status quo of U.S. newsrooms.

“Breaking the News” will premiere on INDEPENDENT LENS on Presidents Day, February 19, at 10 p.m. ET (check local listings). The film will be available to stream on the [PBS App](#) and will also be accessible via [PBS’s flagship YouTube channel](#).

“Breaking the News” follows the launch of *The 19th\**, a news startup that seeks to change the white, male-dominated news industry, asking who’s been omitted from mainstream coverage and how to include them. Bringing the viewer right into the newsroom during tense moments as the startup launches in a pandemic amid rising social unrest, the film provides an inside view of what it takes to challenge the status quo and break the mold in American media. Shot over three years, the film documents the honest discussions at *The 19th\** around race and gender equity, revealing that change doesn’t come easy, and showcases how they confront these challenges both as a workplace and in their journalism. But this film is about more than a newsroom; it’s about America in flux and the voices that are often left out of the American story.

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“For far too long, white men have dictated which stories make the news and which voices are included. *The 19th\** is writing a new history by reporting the news through the lens of those forgotten voices, and showcasing that bringing lived experiences and diverse perspectives to the news industry is crucial, even if it is not an easy venture,” said co-directors Heather Courtney, Princess A. Hairston, and Chelsea Hernandez. “As the story developed—from the pandemic, to the 2020 election, to the watershed coverage of *Roe vs. Wade*—we were continually inspired by *The 19th\**’s perseverance and openness, and we hope those who watch the film will be inspired too, to have open discussions, and make change.”

“It’s one thing to talk about the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion; it’s another thing to take the actions necessary to build a diverse team and true equity. We hope *The 19th\** can be a model for other newsrooms, and workplaces in general, to not be afraid to make change, and to not be afraid to mess up sometimes during the journey.”

With reporters spread across the country, *The 19th\** co-Founders Emily Ramshaw and Amanda Zamora and their team cover national politics and policy from the lens of gender and race. Philadelphia-based editor-at-large Errin Haines covers politics and often breaks major stories, including the first national story on the killing of Breonna Taylor. Latina reporter Chabeli Carrazana is based in Florida and reports on gender and the economy. Kate Sosin leads coverage on LGBTQ+ stories, including the increase of anti-trans bills being passed by states all over the country.

Despite best intentions, *The 19th\** struggles with its own blind spots, as illustrated by Sosin who identifies as nonbinary and pushes for wider gender diversity within the newsroom. They’re often frustrated by the lack of inclusive coverage and language being used at *The 19th\**, at times feeling burnt out by the additional labor of educating their colleagues. “Breaking the News” highlights these tough conversations, as well as those around racial inclusivity throughout rising tensions in 2020 and beyond, showing how they reshaped the organizational culture and editorial direction.

“‘Breaking the News’ illustrates the importance of independent journalism in a functioning democracy by showing how and who decides what stories become the news,” said Lois Vossen, INDEPENDENT LENS executive producer. “*The 19th\** features reporting by women and LGBTQ+ journalists in their effort to disrupt homogenization inside newsrooms. With that same spirit of

disruption, filmmakers Heather, Princess, and Chelsea document how this startup became a provider of news to the rest of the industry—an industry that is struggling with cutbacks and an increased cynicism from readers as they question where the news comes from.”

“Breaking the News” received Open Call funding from ITVS.

Visit the INDEPENDENT LENS [website](#) to learn more about the film.

### **About the Filmmakers**

#### **Heather Courtney, Director/Producer**

Heather Courtney is an Emmy® Award-winning filmmaker, and a Guggenheim, Sundance, and Fulbright fellow. Her film “Where Soldiers Come From” (POV) was funded by ITVS, and won an Emmy and an Independent Spirit Award. Other films include the award-winning short documentary “For The Record,” which will air on PBS’s Reel South in Spring 2024, “The Unafraid” (America ReFramed), and the IDA and SXSW Award-winning “Los Trabajadores” (INDEPENDENT LENS).

#### **Princess A. Hairston, Director/Producer**

Princess A. Hairston is a director and Emmy Award-nominated editor in New York City. She has produced and directed films, and has edited several documentaries including “Ladies First: A Story of Women & Hip Hop,” “This World Is Not My Own,” “LulaRich,” “Pier Kids,” “Fresh Dressed,” “Masterpiece of Love,” and “Capture with Mark Seliger.” Her work has been recognized with many nominations and awards.

#### **Chelsea Hernandez, Director/Producer**

Chelsea Hernandez is an Emmy Award-nominated Mexican-American filmmaker based in Texas. Named to the DOC NYC’s 40 Under 40 Class of 2021, Chelsea won a Silver Telly Award for Social Impact for her first feature, “Building the American Dream.” She is a fellow of Tribeca All Access, BAVC National Mediamakers, and Firelight Media Doc Lab.

#### **Diane Quon, Producer**

Academy Award-nominated Diane Quon is a documentary producer, whose work includes: the Oscar-nominated “Minding the Gap”; Emmy-nominated “Finding Yingying”; “For the Left Hand”; Emmy-nominated “Wuhan Wuhan”; Oscar-shortlisted “Bad Axe”; and “AKA Mr. Chow.” Diane is a member of AMPAS, the DPA, and the PGA.

## CREDITS

### Director and Producer

Heather Courtney  
Princess A. Hairston  
Chelsea Hernandez

### Producer

Diane Quon

### Executive Producers

Sally Jo Fifer  
Lois Vossen  
Keith Maitland  
Sarah Wilson  
Jacqueline Olive  
Nico Oppen  
Shizuka Asakawa  
Ken Pelletier

## ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS

INDEPENDENT LENS is an Emmy® Award-winning PBS documentary series. With founding executive producer Lois Vossen, the series has been honored with 10 Academy Award nominations and features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, INDEPENDENT LENS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Acton Family Giving, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and National Endowment for the Arts. Stream anytime on the PBS App. For more visit [pbs.org/independentlens](https://pbs.org/independentlens).

## ABOUT ITVS

Independent Television Services (ITVS) is the largest co-producer of independent documentaries in the United States. For more than 30 years, the San Francisco nonprofit has funded and partnered with documentary filmmakers to produce and distribute untold stories. ITVS incubates and co-produces these award-winning titles and premieres them on our Emmy Award-winning PBS series, INDEPENDENT LENS. ITVS titles appear on PBS, WORLD, NETA, and can be streamed on various digital platforms including the PBS App. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Acton Family Giving, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation, Wyncote Foundation. For more information, visit [itvs.org](https://itvs.org).

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