



## DOC NYC Friday Fix

### Transcript: Episode 6

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Thom Powers: [00:00:06](#) Welcome to DOC NYC Friday Fix. I'm Thom Powers, the festivals artistic director coming to you from my home in Montclair, New Jersey. This is episode five of our weekly series. There is so much going on in the world that we can't fix, but we can deliver you a fix of our favorite filmmakers. We took a break last Friday for the Memorial day weekend, but you can watch past episodes of this show at the link below. Just go to More on Friday Fix ([www.docnyc.net/news/fridayfix](http://www.docnyc.net/news/fridayfix)). I want to remind you of some highlights from our last show. We had Nadia Hallgren on talking about her new Netflix documentary "Becoming" about Michelle Obama's book tour. We also had Nelson George talking about the importance of interviewing our elders during this pandemic when we're losing so many. You can watch that episode four and all of our episodes. Just if you go to the link more on Friday fix.

Thom Powers: [00:01:08](#) Today's episode is sponsored by NEON, the distributor that swept this year's Oscars with parasite. Tomorrow, NEON is presenting a special online screening of The Biggest Little Farm director John Chester chronicles his family story of creating a biodiverse farm. During our current time of home isolation, many of us are paying more attention to our plants and animals docs. It seems like a perfect time to watch The Biggest Little Farm that will deepen your connection to the natural world. For more information, you can go to NEON rated slash B L F or you can go to the link below "More on Friday Fix. I want to go through some housekeeping before I bring out our first guest. I encourage you to introduce yourself in the chat box. Tell us where you're from. If you have nice things to say, please share your comments.



- Thom Powers: [00:02:04](#) If you experience video delay, go to the help menu up on the top right and switch to compatibility mode. The best browser for Crowdcast is Chrome. That will make a big difference if you have problems. If we experience any tech issues, we'll try to give you updates in the chat section or on our Facebook page. This video will be recorded so afterwards you can share the link for later viewing. Also, we've started doing something new with all of our webinars classes and Friday Fix: we're creating a printed transcript that usually gets released a few days after the show is finished. So if you want to read this you can do that in a few days. So later in the show I'm going to be talking to the directors of Crip Camp, but my first guest is Marc Levin. We tried to connect with him last episode and got thwarted.
- Thom Powers: [00:03:01](#) Now we're pleased to bring him back. Before I do bring him on, I'm just gonna tell you a little bit about Marc. He's been making films since the 1980s, many of his documentaries are set in America's inner cities covering the war on drugs and prisons, themes that he also explored in his fiction film SLAM. In 2015, Mark was at DOC NYC for his film Class Divide set in the New York city neighborhood of Chelsea where he's lived and worked for many years. And in that film, Marc was looking at the educational differences between rich and poor families, a theme of education that also returns in his new work that we'll be discussing. Last November he was back at DOC NYC for his film, Cory in Brick City that studied Cory Booker's years as Newark's mayor. His new project is a series of shorts for Quibi. It plays like a feature film only broken into 15 chapters. It's called I Promise about a public school in Akron, Ohio. It was the school was started by LeBron James to help underprivileged kids get a better education. Let's just look at the trailer for that film.
- Speaker 2: [00:04:24](#) I'm going to be a police officer. I'm going to be a nurse, be a scientist kind of thing. Teachers telling me that I wouldn't be able to meet them. No one cares about. I don't feel safe in the neighborhood. We have an obligation as a country to help those students. Welcome to your first day at the, I promise I didn't know how to create school. Let's figure it out. A lot of our students come to school with the same emotional support. There's half the country supporting us and there's half the country that are like, you're going to fail. Like they're super heroes.



- Thom Powers: [00:06:04](#) Alright. We're going to bring in Marc now joining us from Amagansett Long Island. Welcome Marc.
- Marc Levin: [00:06:14](#) Hey Thom. Good to see you.
- Thom Powers: [00:06:17](#) Glad to have you here. So this project, I Promise, you we're filming you and your crew were filming from in the school year of 2018 to 2019. Can you talk about how the project got started in the first place?
- Marc Levin: [00:06:35](#) Sure. LeBron James has got a production company called SpringHill Productions and he's got a foundation of LeBron James family foundation and they were looking to chronicle a year one of this startup which is a public school, very innovative. And I guess I was one of a number of directors they interviewed. It's funny, the two things you mentioned in the introduction I think were part of what got their interest, one Class Divide which obviously was told from the point of view of kids on the two sides of the street on 26th and 10th Avenue. And then Brick City, which obviously I did a deep dive into Newark not far from where I grew up. And you know, public education and the future of it was very much on the agenda. So I think those things caught their attention and Phil Byron at Springhill and then...
- Thom Powers: [00:07:40](#) Was Quimbi in the picture at that point or...?
- Marc Levin: [00:07:43](#) No, Quibi was not in the picture. This was conceived as, you introduced it, as a feature documentary. It wasn't until a year ago, actually, it was last March that Quibi had literally just opened an office in Los Angeles. When I stopped by I didn't know anything about Quibi. And I have to admit, when Jeffrey Katzenberg came in and sat down with John Robinson and I, I literally said to him, I said, Jeffrey, what is this a Three-card Monte? I'm doing a feature documentary and now I hear it's like everything's seven to 10 minutes. What's going on here? So he said to me, he laughed and said, have you ever read the DaVinci code? I said, yeah. And he goes, well, Dan Brown wrote over a 400 page novel, but every chapter is just two to three pages. And Marc, I'm convinced that the future of both distributing stories and consuming stories is going to be quick bites, I. E. Quibi. So I was like, Oh I wasn't sure. We were two thirds of the way through shooting, and he kind of tried to reassure me,



Marc, c'mon, Brick City was on Sundance channel, you had commercials, Chicago Land was on CNN, you had commercials. You know, it's not that different. You've worked in commercial TV you know, every seven to 14 minutes there's a commercial break. So I kind of left thinking, okay, yeah, maybe it's not that different. Hmm.

Thom Powers: [00:09:09](#) Yeah. So that's really interesting to me. I didn't realize that it shifted to Quibi midway through production because, you know, I watched it on my phone. So much of the action is framed for the you know, the vertical vertical space of the phone. How did that work out?

Marc Levin: [00:09:31](#) It was a lot more of a challenge than I think I assumed when I left at meeting in March that by the summer of last summer I was like wondering, you know, did we make the right decision here for a few reasons. One just, you know, it was conceived as a, as a feature documentary and I didn't want to shortchange what I felt was incredibly emotionally charged material and, and families and kids and teachers who would open up to us. I didn't want them to any way feel shortchanged or exploited. Two, we realize, Oh, we have to do two versions which is a horizontal version. And you just showed a vertical version, which you know, is how a lot of people watch stuff on their phone. So that was a challenge. And then three, the biggest challenge was that Jeffrey and his team insisted on cliffhangers at the end of every episode.

Marc Levin: [00:10:33](#) And we had, you know, chapterized a film or you know, that's fairly common, but sometimes you land and, and there's a real resolution and you know, you can take a deep breath and feel wow that, that, that was moving or beautiful or touching and move on. No, not here. It was like cliffhanger and you couldn't, they refused at least at that time to, you know, have a, a 15 second coming next. No, it had to be an organic integration. So you know, it was a challenge. I got to admit it worked out better than I thought, you know, in terms of it, how it played cause I was worried.

Thom Powers: [00:11:11](#) Well, I mean, I didn't know any of those things when I watched it and and I certainly experienced it as a, you know, free flowing experience. So let me ask you about some of the contents of this. We saw in that trailer, you know, someone says half the



country was rooting for us, half are expecting us to fail. You know, we've watched a lot of well-meaning education reforms. I think about Mark Zuckerberg coming to Newark with a hundred million dollars, you know, no one was really happy with that experience when it was over. I wonder when you were going into this, you know, what were you braced for in the kind of, you know, typical curve of like hope to disappointment that these things often go?

Marc Levin: [00:11:52](#)

That's a good question cause obviously the liftoff was, there was such hullabaloo, LeBron was there, you know the, the global media was there, so there was so much attention that and such expectations within two weeks, the place descending into chaos. And I have to admit that I, th our small team, we looked at each other and said, you know, the idea of getting these kids who were two to three years behind in reading and in their education up to grade level, it seemed unrealistic and almost impossible. Just getting them in the classroom was a challenge in getting them to behave and not act out. But at the same time we realized that, and this, you know, I got to give LeBron James a lot of credit. I mean, I'm a basketball fan. Of course I've always rooted against him because he's on the wrong teams.

Marc Levin: [00:12:49](#)

But the idea that, you know, when he first said I'm going to start a school he was advised to start a private Academy. You can control that. You don't have to deal with the board of education to teacher's union, the janitor's union dot dot dot. He said no, I went to a public elementary school. Okay. So then what about a charter school? You still got a little more flexibility? He said no, I went to a regular elementary public school, so they went and negotiated for a good year or two to work that out. Then on top of that, you said, I want it for the most at risk students in the public school system because that's where he was at. He was absent a lot, homeless. So in second grade they give a test and the bottom 25%, there was a lottery for kids that landed in that.

Marc Levin: [00:13:40](#)

So I guess we had some of the same stereotypes. Oh, these kids are going to be slow. They're going to be behind. Not as bright, not as quick. No. That was a misconception that create the creativity of so many of these kids was apparent very early on and that the issues were the home life, the poverty in the neighborhood violence, all of the social issues that we're dealing with. That's what was holding so many of them back and part of



so much of the social and emotional issues that they were struggling with. But we realized in terms of your question, okay, there's drama here, no question about it. And these kids are going to grow in some way, shape or form. So whether the school succeeds or not, these kids are going to tell a story. And that from the beginning was the idea. Let's tell it from their point of view. So we felt we were ensured that there would be compelling and dramatic storylines from these kids. We didn't expect quite honestly going to your original question that the school might, it might take two or three years for it to show some academic achievement. So we were stuck in March when the tests happen and we were there. But that was like the icing on the cake. And I, I think we felt like we were almost living in a Disney film at that point.

- Thom Powers: [00:15:13](#) Cause you really do see these kids make a difference. And I mean LeBron James is that the celebrity face of this school, but your film really pays respect to the teachers and staff who are doing the day to day really hard work. I think of a moment where there's a teacher, Mrs. Whorton, who's trying to calm down a very traumatized kid and helping him go to his happy place. And you really see like what a good teacher does in that moment. I mean, can you talk about the quality of the staff at the school?
- Marc Levin: [00:15:48](#) Absolutely. you just mentioned one of the standouts, Angel Whorton, amazing. A woman teacher. And that scene is a magical scene with Nate. I, I'll tell you, you know, right at the beginning, I remember one day, you know, when we were just getting into it, and we came back from a day at the school and we all said, okay, we'll meet down at the diner for dinner. And everybody collapsed. Nobody made it to dinner. We woke up the next day at breakfast and said, how do teachers do this everyday?
- Thom Powers: [00:16:30](#) All of us who are homeschooling right now have been asking that same question for the last 10 weeks.
- Marc Levin: [00:16:36](#) Right! And, and, and it's true, the, the emotional commitment, especially in a school like this where, where the focus is on first this emotional, what they call social emotional learning, trauma based learning where you got to get the kids' trust and you've got to get the kids to feel secure before you can move on to the



academic side of the equation. That takes so much energy. I was moved. I come from a family of teachers. My mom was a teacher too. My sisters are teachers. And yet to see the commitment, the sacrifice it, it was just moving. I think now in the, in this COVID era now, all of us are sensitized to essential workers, you know, public school teachers, you know, public health workers, public transportation. But that, that was a huge part of it. And I think one of the good things is that the foundation invited me out and Brandy Davis who was the, is the principal invited me out before the school opened so that I could meet with all the teachers as they were in training.

Marc Levin:

[00:17:44](#)

Because of course they had like questions like it's not tough enough. We're dealing with you know, the student population of at risk kids and now we've got a film crew that's going to be here for like nine months. So I did tell him some of the stories from Brick City. I told them some of the stories of Chicago Land where the, the focus of Chicago ended up being in finger high school on the South side. A school that, you know, had huge problems. And the principal of that school was a young woman, Liz Dozier who's now running one of the largest foundations looking for innovative ideas in public education. So my point was just that we can be part of the teaching, we can be part of what's happening here, not simply flies on the wall or people getting in your way or causing to services. Use us.

Thom Powers:

[00:18:37](#)

Let me ask you two quick questions before we go. There's a question that came up in our question section and if people have questions, I encourage you, use that Q&A section. Liani is asking how you handled consent with the kids. And I'm interested in that too because there's moments in that film where the kids are talking in a private circles. The teachers and the teachers are even saying, you know, what you say here, only goes here. So can you talk about that process?

Marc Levin:

[00:19:08](#)

Sure, well the, the casting process, you know, which obviously is key in, in, in a film like this we're very open and transparent. First of all, I made it clear. I went in every class and told every student and teacher, if you don't want to be on camera, fine, just tell us. We will make sure you're not, we respect your privacy too. I said, if you want to see what it's like, we have a little classroom, we've taken over, we call it the freestyle studio. Come see us. You can do whatever you want. You can tell a



joke, you can dance, you can sing, you can just stare and make faces in the camera. You can do whatever you want. Of course, Vincent came to that, one of the students in the film and when I sat and I just asked him, I said, Vincent, what do your parents do? He looked at me and he said, whatever I want them to, and we knew right from the start he was a piece of work. But so,

Marc Levin:

[00:20:04](#)

Those students that were open and interested, then we contacted their parents and I met with all the parents and I made it clear that, look, this could be uncomfortable at times for this to work. You have to be open to showing some of the struggles that you've gone through with your child that your family has struggled with. Or else if it succeeds and we see the growth, it's not gonna mean anything. You can't be a puff piece. And to the school's credit, to the foundation's credit, they were behind that approach that this had. In fact, its teachers constantly pushed me. People need to know what we deal with. They need to know the challenges we face every day. So one day Shauna, another young student scholar, when she crawled into that locker and Jackson captured that moment, obviously that was very sensitive.

Marc Levin:

[00:21:00](#)

And whether we could use a moment like that or not. I met with her father who had been in and out of trouble. I met with her grandfather who she lived with and we spent time getting to know each other. Same with Nate and his family. Spending a good amount of time, you know, you want to see our films, you want to see Class Divide, you want to see Brick City. So it was really about building trust and giving them a heads up that there are going to be moments that are uncomfortable for the family, but hopefully it will be worth it. And finally, the need for what you see happening. Your kid is lucky. Your family is lucky all over the city and all over this country. You know, their kids like your kids, but they are not getting this kind of education, not getting these wraparound services, not getting this. "We are family approach" We need to amplify that message. You need to help us do that. So that was kind of the pitch.

Thom Powers:

[00:21:59](#)

Before I let you go. One minute there's this film Stockton On My Mind. It was supposed to premiere at the Tribeca film festival. Your, your latest work. It's going to be on HBO in the summer. Can you just tell us a minute about Stockton On My Mind?





- Marc Levin: [00:22:16](#) Yeah. I would just say Stockton on My Mind, working on these two simultaneously was fascinating because this is also part of that story of a, as mayor Michael Tubbs, the youngest mayor of a major US city says his mission is to upset the setup and the setup for somebody like him who was born of a teenage mom and a father who was in prison for most of his life was either prison or death. Somehow he defied that, made it to Stanford University. Became elected mayor at age 26 of Stockton, California, a city that Forbes had called the most miserable city in the United States, which is ground zero for the subprime mortgage meltdown and the great recession and has turned his city into a social policy incubator with the first basic income experiment, a scholarship program for kids that graduate high school and the very innovative violence reduction program. So at a moment now in, in our country's life where we're thinking about when we come out of this COVID-19, what is the new social contract? What have we learned? How, how, how do we make the public good front and center instead of only private profit? The seeds for that are, have been planted in a place like Stockton, California which is now ground zero.
- Thom Powers: [00:23:46](#) for kind of new paradigm that I think is very much going to be on people's minds.
- Thom Powers: [00:23:53](#) Well, Marc, thank you very much for joining us. I hope everyone gets to watch, I Promise on Quibi and we look forward to seeing Stockton on My Mind this summer on HBO. So keep up the good work.
- Marc Levin: [00:24:07](#) Thom. Thank you so much. You too. You keep up the good work, right. Okay, well goodbye everybody in Jersey.
- Thom Powers: [00:24:14](#) Okay, thanks very much. Alright let's say goodbye to Mark. I'm going to bring in our next guests Nicole Newnham and Jim LeBrecht from the film Crip Camp. There's so many people right now in our room that I'm having a hard time finding them. Hold on. Mmm. Oh, there's Nicole. Okay, Nicole, I'm inviting you in. Let me see if I can find Jim now.
- Thom Powers: [00:24:55](#) Hi, Nicole.
- Nicole Newnham: [00:24:56](#) Hi.



- Thom Powers: [00:24:59](#) I'm just having....
- Thom Powers: [00:25:06](#) Give me a second while I find Jim. There's well over a hundred people in our room
- Thom Powers: [00:25:39](#) Jim, are you there? If you're there, maybe raise your hand in the chat room and I'll see you there. Hi. Oh, there he is. Okay. Hey, welcome. Sorry sorry for the pause. So Nicole and Jim's film is Crip Camp. It won the audience prize at the Sundance film festival this year. When it when it had its premier it's now playing on Netflix. Jim has a career as a sound mixer and sound editor. He's has credits on more than a hundred documentaries. This is his first time as director if I'm, if I'm right there. That's where I gathered from my IMDB. Am I right about that, Jim?
- Jim LeBrecht: [00:26:27](#) Yes.
- Thom Powers: [00:26:29](#) Nicole is a veteran director whose credits include the Revolutionary Optimists about the children in the Calcutta slum fighting for better conditions. I do have a clip from the film. So let's just take a second and watch that to kind of get us in the Headspace of Crip Camp.
- Thom Powers: [00:28:09](#) Alright. So you can get a sense from that, that film that in the seventies, it was a place where people from all over met each other and they went on to become the the foundation of the disability rights movements that that's explored in the film. So Jim, let me start with you. I mean, there's partly a personal history of yours. How long have you been waiting to tell this story?
- Jim LeBrecht: [00:28:43](#) Well, I think that I've always kind of had a great sense that there was stories around disability that I wasn't seeing in in documentaries. But I think that in the last five, 10 to five, five, five to 10 years, it really became important to me that, that we needed to do something. And fortunately, I had worked with Nicole on three of her feature documentaries and we became friends and she was wrapping up Revolutionary Optimists. We had lunch and talked for a while and kind of at the end of the conversation I had been pitching her other ideas about, you know, films around disability and I kind of off handlly said, you know, what I've really always wanted is a documentary about my summer camp.



- Thom Powers: [00:29:39](#) So Nicole, let me bring you in. I mean, when you heard that, you know, what were you thinking?
- Nicole Newnham: [00:29:47](#) Well, to be honest, like I was very excited about engaging with Jim in this way because I'm, over the years of working together, Jim had become an increasingly vocal and powerful voice for better representation for people with disabilities in, in our industry. And also for filmmakers with disabilities in our industry. And, you know, I would come in and, and Jim would be talking about, you know, fighting for better access at this festival or you know, a casting decision that had upset the disability community and frankly, like it was an education to me that there even was a disability community or disability culture, all of those things. Jim and I had started discussing. And and so I was very excited to think about actually working together with Jim on something. But when he mentioned the camp, I think to be honest, I kind of like inadvertently may have rolled my eyes a little bit because I feel like summer camp is the kind of thing that people often say like, Oh my God, I went to this amazing summer camp because summer camp is such an important experience for, for everybody, you know.
- Nicole Newnham: [00:30:55](#) But then Jim starts talking about his summer camp and it was like unlike anything that I had ever been able to even imagine, you know, I mean the concept that there had been this sort of hippie Valhalla on utopia where, you know, young Jim was going around and smoking dope with counselors and, and you know, making out with his girlfriend for the first time and all of these things. I just, it even his description of it made me realize the limitations that, that I have in terms of my capacity to sort of like think about disability, community and culture. And also it just sounded like so much fun. So then Jim started talking about the fact that he had a theory that the sort of powerful experience of liberation that the kids had at the camp was somehow connected to the Exodus of a bunch of those campers out to Berkeley and their involvement in the independent living movement. And then the struggle that came later with this, with the 504. So then we started talking about, wow, could you actually draw a line from the camp all the way to this sit in and this kind of Epic victory. And and we set about you know, calling up folks from Jened and kind of reaching out to Jim's networks and, and trying to see if that, if that theory had weight.



- Thom Powers: [00:32:15](#) Well, I mean that's what's so interesting about this film is because it really feels like it's doing primary research. You know, when I think of comparable films about the civil rights movement or the gay rights movement, they're often drawing upon books that have been written or other historical texts. And, you know, I'm not close enough to the disability rights movement to know the literature. But it sounds like what you're describing, you know, that story hadn't been told before.
- Nicole Newnham: [00:32:44](#) Yeah. I mean, I think, I think you know, there, what do you want to take that one, Jim?
- Jim LeBrecht: [00:32:49](#) Well, I mean, we did rely on certain texts that we kind of came across, including HolLynn D'Lil, who's in the film and her book *Becoming Real in 24 Days*. And but you know, you're not really far off the mark. It's not like there's been this like big tone that is the, you know, the, the, the film is based on certainly there are having books around their movement like *No Pity*, Joe Shapiro's book. And that, you know, we're one of the first books I read to really understand it.
- Thom Powers: [00:33:29](#) So we see in that footage, there's all this incredible archival footage from the time when you were at the camp. Jim and it's, it's hard to imagine this film without that footage. Although when you just described the, the origin story of this film, I don't hear you talking about that. You know, when did you know that you were going to be able to lay your hands on this footage?
- Jim LeBrecht: [00:33:56](#) Well, I mean, in one of our earlier conversations, I had mentioned to Nicole that I remember this group of hippie video people showing up at a camp and that there had wound up being a short documentary called something like the *Crab Epidemic at Camp Jened* for the handicap that wound up on Manhattan Cable Television. And I had also remembered that they gave me a camera. It strapped a big porta pack on the handlebars in my wheelchair and somebody was pushing me around campus. I held the camera. So we knew that there was something out there to find, but the question was, did this footage exist still? And who are these people? And the only clue I really had was I remembered the name people in the group. So, but Nicole wound up finding them through due diligence.



- Thom Powers: [00:34:54](#) That's amazing. I want to ask something that someone is actually asking the, in our questions section about the title Crip Camp. This is a provocative title and it, you know, it sounds like the kind of thing that you could get in trouble for saying in a, in a different context. Can you talk about, you know you know, why you wanted to use that as a title?
- Jim LeBrecht: [00:35:21](#) Well, I think that we, we both, Nicole and I both appreciated the fact that it was provocative and, but that it really spoke a great deal to not everybody in the disabled community. Some people are really unhappy on this word, but for us it's been reclaiming the word cripple and that this has been in use for, for decades among certain people who I think that if you wanted to try to, you know, identify the people that really identify culturally with a disability with a political bent. And so, and Corbett O'Toole who was in our film, I remember her asking me when we were friends, Hey, did you go to Crip Camp? And I was like, I never heard the term before myself, but I immediately knew what she meant. And so I think that we really accomplished what we wanted to with the title.
- Thom Powers: [00:36:20](#) Good. It's in our questions section someone specifically asking if you got any pushback on that title and if so, where that came from?
- Jim LeBrecht: [00:36:30](#) I mean, we see some, there's been one or two emails that have come in and I, you know, I wonder whether they watched the film or not because they're just complaining about the title and it would use the word crip and look, for some people it's very painful. And, and that's, you know, we accept that and we understand that and hopefully they understand the context of the use if they see the film. And, you know, we had discussions with Netflix about the title obviously. But it was a good conversation about help us reclaim this word. This is what we've been doing. And this is the meeting and this is why it's important. And they got on board.
- Nicole Newnham: [00:37:14](#) We felt like, you know, this thumb was really up against a lot of kind of tropes and and, and was really had to fight against a lot of the kind of ways that people typically look at stories that are told around disability. So sometimes we would say, well, our film is about this summer camp for disabled teenagers. And people would go, Oh, you know, and you could tell they were



immediately going to this place of this is going to be this sort of charming, heartwarming, inspirational story. And we needed a title that would communicate two things. One, no, this is not, you know, this is more punk rock and two that it's a story told from the inside out, you know, and it was hard to find a title that, that did all that. So, and also I think we loved the idea that as the narrative came together, you know, it's the Crip Camp is the, is Jened. It Is camp Jened, but it's also, it's also the 504 building. It's also the community writ large, you know, is sort of what it stands for.

Thom Powers: [00:38:18](#)

Hmm. There's a followup question about the historic footage asking what kind of state, and you find that in? I, I take it it was video footage, not on film. You know, typically we see a lot of degradation video footage from that era. So what was that experience like?

Nicole Newnham: [00:38:39](#)

Well, you know, the crazy thing was, you know, I found this tiny little ad in the back of an old magazine from 1971 about early video activists for the Crabs tape. And that's how we tracked down Howard Gutstadt, who is one of the members of the people's video theater. And the beautiful thing is that the people's video theater was going around doing community empowerment by holding these pop-up video theaters where they would film in communities and then they would play footage back to the communities as an empowerment tool like you see in a scene from the film. So they had that sort of same spirit that our film has 50 years ago. And when we tracked Howard down, he was in San Francisco and he was on the board of a radical bookstore is how we found him. And he was like, yeah, we actually do have all the footage we shot there.

Nicole Newnham: [00:39:28](#)

We haven't seen it since then, you know, since we edited that Crabs tape all that time ago. But it's funny you should contact us now because we happen to be in the midst of doing a digital transfer of the archival at the Bay Area video coalition. And there had been a government grant that Bay Vac was offering to people to support their transfer of historically important video footage. And so so we knew not only that they had the footage, but that actually it was transferring. Well, you know, it had held up well, which is sort of a miracle because Ben Levine the other member of the people's video theater who we spent time with and who worked with us had apparently moved 17 times and



the footage had been in like 17 different basements over those 50 years.

Nicole Newnham: [00:40:17](#)

So I mean, there was this like amazingly powerful emotional moment when Jim and I met Howard for the first time and Howard saw Jim and recognized Jim is this kid that, that they had handed a camera to all those years ago. You know, now picking up the story and running with it. It just, it felt like to us, it started to feel, even though prior to finding the footage, we were like, maybe we do recreations, you know, how are we going to bring the camp back to life? Finding the footage made us really feel like the whole project was meant to be.

Thom Powers: [00:40:48](#)

Hmm. In the film you deal not just with this political movement, you deal with care the lives of your real life characters with they're.... Well with the sex, drugs and rock and roll of of the 1970s. And, you know, it really made me realize watching it how often we see lives of disabled people framed around something else that that leaves out those kinds of details. Can you talk about, you know, the, the, in your intention to, to add those kinds of you know, aspects of of, of people's humanity?

Jim LeBrecht: [00:41:34](#)

Well, I mean I think it's not, some, not so much like adding it, but revealing it. It's always been there, you know, and it's just that I think that if you look at the stories that we see, those tropes are really either overcoming the odds or, you know, tragedy or, you know, in certain feature films, "please kill me because of I'm disabled" And so, and I think that that was one of the things we really just wanted to do, that these are real people was real lives. They went to this camp, this is what happened to them in their lives. And in tracing the story, you really, as Nicole mentioned, this real inside look at what we've, the, the, the joys and the unbelievably screwed up things that happened to us in our lives. But what's what we wanted to make sure it was that people really saw the joy in our community

Thom Powers: [00:42:37](#)

Someone is asking about representation not only in front of the camera but behind the camera. Either Jim or Nicole. I mean, can you talk about what you've witnessed in the film industry around getting more representation for the disabled community in the film business?



Jim LeBrecht:

[00:43:01](#)

Well, I mean, I think that, you know, when Nicole and I started working and one of the things that happened was that she saw the things that I wasn't able to do, that she could do because of accessibility and which actually really helped me understand a little bit better really what I was facing. I just know I couldn't get into to buildings and such. But there has been a lot of movement in the last couple of years to really improve you know, representation and you know, we've been asking for for inclusion writers but there's been some really good work happening. And we're starting to see slowly, at least in, in television a shift of more characters with disabilities or realistic storylines, but we are still very, very far behind. The stigma around disability is still very strong and people have a lot of fear, you know, well, you know, is this going to be a problem that I'm not anticipating? Can this person do the job? You know, you know, how are they going to get around all these different things? But it's all very, very solvable. And, you know, we are out there working, but there's just too few of us.

Nicole Newnham:

[00:44:17](#)

One thing that was really wonderful that happened on the project that I think actually found its way to include the spirit and feeling of the film was that because you know, Jim has been such a strong voice around this, our project developed a culture of that, of kind of acceptance and understanding of everybody's limitations because every single person on the team has them, you know or people's people's needs. What, what did, what did people need to be able to do their best work? And so we found that that kind of culture as applied to every single person on the team put us in a more kind of open, trusting, loving relationship with each other, which is, you know, as everyone knows who works on documentary films it's really important because it's such a tricky difficult collaborative process that requires so much honesty and openness. And so we ended up kind of feeling like I think everyone felt like the sort of you know, amazing culture that we developed on, on the team was something that we would want to take on to our next project. Both in terms of being able to make sure that we have real diversity and representation on a team, but also just because it made a better film.

Thom Powers:

[00:45:45](#)

So this film has been on Netflix since March, but you keep on doing things with it. I know I interviewed you for an article and you've done over 20 conversations and now you've got this weekly online summer camp going, I wanted to acknowledge a





really sad passing and in the community of, of your team Stacey Park Milbern, who was a impact part of your impact producing team passed away just 10 days ago. Can you share some memories of Stacey with us?

- Jim LeBrecht: [00:46:28](#) Yeah, I've been fortunate enough to become acquainted with her over the years, just being part of the,
- Thom Powers: [00:46:44](#) Oh, but Jim, I lost your audio for a second. It seems like you might have frozen...
- Nicole Newnham: [00:46:58](#) I could talk a little bit about Stacy.
- Thom Powers: [00:47:00](#) Well, why don't you pick that up, Nicole, and hopefully we'll get a gin back in a second.
- Nicole Newnham: [00:47:06](#) Looks like he's coming back. We had the incredible good fortune of hiring Stacey Milbern and Stacey Park, Milbern and Andrea LaVant to be the co-impact producers of our campaign. Both of them are incredible activists and also, you know, communications professionals and, and, and just incredible people. And and they have really created an impact campaign that I think is pretty revolutionary and you know, was certainly beyond our capacity to imagine how the, how the community and the disability rights and disability justice movements could take this film and really use it to support and push forward the movement today. And then when COVID-19 hit Andrea and Stacey had this brilliant idea of using the summer as a capacity building moment and and holding a virtual Crip Camp that would be 16 sessions taught by cutting legislators in the disability community, but structured around the theme of camp and community.
- Nicole Newnham: [00:48:23](#) So it kind of has this like joyous community gathering feel as well as it's like dealing with really, really critical issues for, for the movement. And this moment. Stacey, I think more than any human I've ever met had this incredible ability to just dream big and be manifesting those dreams at this almost at the same time as she was dreaming them. And she also just had this really tough kind of fearless way of of, of standing up and pushing forward, but also doing it in this really welcoming open, loving way. I mean, it's, it's a little hard to talk too much about her



having, having suffered this loss so recently, but she was one of the most incredible people I've ever met in my life.

- Thom Powers: [00:49:20](#) Hmm. Well, thank you for that. Jim, is your audio working?
- Jim LeBrecht: [00:49:26](#) Can you hear me?
- Thom Powers: [00:49:26](#) Yes, I can hear you now.
- T: [00:49:30](#) Anything more you'd want to add to what Nicole said too?
- Jim LeBrecht: [00:49:33](#) Yeah, I would just say that, you know, just her ability to think beyond the stars and then to be able to pull it off, you know, well, we're going to do these 16 webinars and gee, we hope that we can maybe get a thousand people to sign up for them. And that indeed it was happening. And indeed now to this day, we have over 6,000 people signed up for them is remarkable. But she did have this ability to really be fierce but also very, very open and just a great spirit. We're all gonna miss her.
- Thom Powers: [00:50:10](#) Thank you for sharing that. For people who want to know more about the Crip Camp with summer camp going on now online you can go to the "more on Friday fix" button and we have something, some information about it. And we also have a remembrance of Stacey Park Milbern you can read more of there. So as we wrap up here, can you talk to me about the reactions you've been getting from both people in the disabled community who are perhaps discovering some of this history for the first time and people from outside who may take away different things from it?
- Jim LeBrecht: [00:50:54](#) Well, I think that we're, you know, a lot of people in the disabled community are saying, thank you. This is like the film we'd been waiting for. We had one comment that I saw on Facebook that was for the first time in my life, I feel knowable, which was really quite stunning. Nicole?
- Nicole Newnham: [00:51:15](#) I loved when we were at the Museum of Modern Art screening, somebody said something to the effect of like, "Thank God. Now when people say, well, what book should I read? Or where should I start? Or how can I learn more about your community" that this person said "now, I can just say go watch Crip Camp and get back to me" So yeah, it does. We've had, I think that the



other thing that has been incredibly gratifying to us is that it feels as though it's a very activating film. Like people stand up and, and, and want to take action after seeing the film. And we've had several instances of before covert when we were having screenings of, you know, people jumping up and taking folks to task, you know and and demanding legislative change or better access, you know, right in that very moment.

Nicole Newnham: [00:52:06](#) And we've also seen examples of people actually like forming online movements for particular disability related causes, you know, and literally saying inspired by what we saw people do in Crip Camp. So to the extent that we also tried to make the film a little bit of a how to you know, make change in, in showing kind of so much detail around how 504 victory was won. It seems as though people are really taking that to heart. And and, and you know, in a time, like right now, when, when so much change needs to happen. That's really heartening

Thom Powers: [00:52:43](#) Is, you know, in the film we see a specific push that took place for the disability rights act today. Is there a specific focal point or a piece of legislation or things that people who care about this issue should be paying attention to?

Jim LeBrecht: [00:53:02](#) There's various, excuse me. There's, there's various legislation that's still up. I'm going to forget what the acronym stands for, but it's DIA, which is around you know, being able to live in community. But we're just fighting to keep what we have in tact also. So, and you could really, really see it even in the response to covert in which there were plans of deciding who got ventilators if there was ratcheting for healthcare. And that was based on, some of it was perceived on quality of life. And nobody knows what our quality of life is unless you're, you know, you're disable yourself.

Thom Powers: [00:53:52](#) Very well put. As I wrap this up, someone was asking about the the, the, the Crip Camp seminars that are happening in the summer. And if you can talk a little bit more about what you're hoping people will get out of that?

Jim LeBrecht: [00:54:14](#) Nicole, you want to take that or...?

Nicole Newnham: [00:54:15](#) Oh, I mean, one thing, one thing is just, I mean, just that people, I think there's two things. People can come in and learn about



the community and the and some of the issues and some of the strategies and some and, and some of the movement building that's happening. And so we're seeing that a lot of people are kind of coming into the movement and, and to the community for the first time, which was really one of our main impact goals. We did have a brain trust with a lot of people from all over the country, from different parts of the disability movement who said, you know, that's still what we, you know, kind of interestingly like what is still needed maybe more than anything else or places like Jened, be they virtual or be they physical where people can gather in community and, and organize.

Nicole Newnham:

[00:55:04](#)

And and so that's, that's one thing we hope, but the, the sessions are dealing with everything from kind of how to deal with internalized ableism. Two, there's a session on sexuality and disability too. There's one about civic engagement, you know, they're, they're, they're really, you can actually go on the website and see the list of all the different sessions, but but we're noticing that there's already like a lot of community building and connection coming coming together, even though it is virtual. Somebody started a spin off Facebook group and people from all over the world are joining that group and finding and meeting each other and deciding to work on various things together. So, so it's like definitely that, you know, we, the speakers are incredible in the sessions are incredible, but it's also just a space for people to come together, make connection and, and make the community stronger. And I think, you know, you're seeing people who are working in organizations or teachers or people in all different kinds of fields who are actually treating it as a, like a professional development opportunity. And then there's people who are like, you know, teenagers who are, you know, coming to it and coming into the community for the first time.

Thom Powers:

[00:56:18](#)

Hmm. Well, it's a wonderful extension of the film. As I said before, the is on Netflix. Anyone with Netflix can watch it. Jim and Nicole continue doing all kinds of screenings. I think someone was asking the questions, how they can contact you? I, I presume there's some kind of through the camp, there's a ways to to reach out to the film team?



- Jim LeBrecht: [00:56:43](#) If you go to the website that [cripcamp.com](http://cripcamp.com) also [info@cripcamp.com](mailto:info@cripcamp.com) is a good way to get ahold of themselves. So.
- Thom Powers: [00:56:54](#) Okay, great. Thank you both so much for taking your time. I'm going to say goodbye to you before I give some highlights of what's coming up, but thank you. Nicole and Jim,
- Nicole Newnham: [00:57:06](#) Thank you too. Great to talk to you.
- Jim LeBrecht: [00:57:08](#) Thank you so much, Thom.
- Thom Powers: [00:57:09](#) Bye. Bye.
- Thom Powers: [00:57:12](#) Right. so I want to give a plug for what we've got coming up at DOC NYC next week. We've got a new class a on Tuesday and Wednesday. It's an online class focused on Social Impact When the World is Inside. We're going to hear from an all star cast of impact producers from three continents, North America, South America and Europe, including representatives from NEON, Good Pitch Local, Exposure Labs, and the Perspective Fund. During quarantine, all these folks have been doing really innovative things to reach new audiences and I'm very much looking forward to hearing their experiences. Tickets are \$10 for the two sessions. You can watch them live or you can watch them later at any time. We'll also publish a transcript for ticket buyers. You can still enroll to watch our recent classes on finishing your film remotely. And then there was another one on creating highly clickable content. For more information on all these classes you can go to "More on Friday Fix" at the link below. And again, I want to thank our sponsor NEON and remind you to gather with your family tomorrow night for a special screening of The Biggest Little Farm. It will be followed by a live conversation with the filmmaker and farmer John Chester plus a special guest from the farm. Let's just watch the trailer from this really wonderful film.
- Trailer: [00:58:50](#) Trailer
- Thom Powers: [01:01:23](#) It's such a good film I'm looking forward to watching it with our ten-year-old tomorrow night. For more information, go to the link below. More unfunded, more. What is, what is it called? "More on Friday Fix" I was stumbling because the next day I



wanna tell you about is our Monday Memo. Too much alliteration in the DOC NYC world. You can sign up for free. It gives you all the documentary news in an email every week. You can sign up at [docnyc.net](http://docnyc.net). This show has been recorded and will be available at this link. We'll also post a written transcript and you can access on [docnyc.net](http://docnyc.net) that will be up in a few days. Please come back next Friday. June 5th, my guests include Oscar winning filmmaker Fisher Stevens. He has a long track record making environmental documentaries like The Cove, his latest combines car racing with environmental themes. It's called And We Go Green about formula E racing with electric cars.

Thom Powers:

[01:02:28](#)

The film had its world premiere at the Toronto film festival and it's being released next week. I'll also talk to Kirby, Dick and Amy Ziering about their powerful new documentary On The Record. They follow women in hip hop as they decide to go public accusing Russell Simmons of rape on the record debuted this week on the new platform, HBO Max. The New York Time review praised the film for its quiet, forceful emotional clarity. You can RSVP for next week, show at the link below "More on Friday Fix" Please spread the link around on Facebook and Twitter. Tell your friends, the more the merrier. Thank you to the DOC NYC team, Sarah MODO, Caitlin Boyle, and Raphael and a house. And we hope you'll join us again for your next Friday fix. Have a great weekend.