

An Interview with Jacqueline Olive

Director of 'Always in Season'

Interviewed by Natalie Bullock Brown

N: Start off just by giving us your name, tell us a little about where you're from, and how you got into filmmaking.

J: I'm Jacqueline Olive. I am a director, producer, and writer of films, and primarily documentary films. I got into filmmaking because I fell in love with still photography and the power of an image to not just give you the information and facts of a situation or an event but to really bring you there so that you experience and you feel what goes on in a particular moment that you're capturing. I was taking photographs of my son, I took probably ten thousand photographs of him by the time he was two and then was hooked. So, I decided to work in the industry and got hired to shoot news, sports, and weather for an NBC affiliate in my hometown in Mississippi. Loved a lot about it, but didn't like that they were 60 second news packages. If you were lucky, you got to make 90 second news stories. I wanted to tell more in-depth stories and really looked into how I could do that and studied documentary film at the University of Florida and just moved into the industry from there.

N: Tell us about *Always in Season* and how that came about.

J: *Always in Season* is a documentary feature that examines the lingering impact of more than a century of lynching African Americans. I filmed in eight or nine communities across the country with relatives of the perpetrators and the victims of lynching, looking at how they were on a very grassroots level, looking at how they might be able to honor the victims, to acknowledge them, to repair the damage and lay the groundwork for reconciliation. The film ties that work around historical lynchings but through a very contemporary lens about the impact of what's going on right now. We tie that in the film to the story of the 17-year old named Lennon Lacy who was found hanging from a swing set in 2014. Many people, including his mother Claudia, believes that he was lynched. So, we follow her journey to get an FBI investigation opened into the case.

N: What drew you to that story? I understand the work that you were doing in communities around lynching. What drew you specifically to Lennon's story and to the community that he was apart of?

J: / I had been filming in communities across the country. So, I understood the horror that people faced historically around lynching. I had also moved back home to Mississippi and was there for seven years. During those seven years, I heard of at least four cases of young black men found hanging from a tree publicly from their own belts. Sadly, it was a very common story. I wasn't even working on a film about lynching at the time. I just heard it incidentally. That stuck with me when I heard in the media about Lennon's death. I couldn't imagine how a mother could deal with that level of trauma. My son was 17 at the time. I just couldn't imagine. I wanted to reach out to see what was going on there, how I might be able to help.

N: At what point did you decide that in the telling of Lennon's story, it was important for you to really incorporate the input of not only Lennon's mom, but also the community?

J: / I went there with that intention. The idea was to talk to everyone. I was never looking at the story as just whether Lennon was lynched or not. The driving force for me is how the police investigated his death. They did not consider the history of lynching terror in this country. They also didn't consider the racial divisions that are going on in **Bladenboro**. For me, beyond the question of whether Lennon was lynched, was all the ties that were going on in that community that have been happening historically. The police very quickly, sweeping the death under the rug with a cursing investigation that's happened historically. A community that's left with stories, left with speculation, and rumor. That's also reflected in communities that are dealing with historic lynchings. That's what drove me there was to find out, not just what was going on around Lennon's death, but to really suss out the impact on the entire community.

N: Since you were not apart of Bladenboro, how did you negotiate that outsider relationship that you had to the community? How did you approach the community? How did you approach Ms. Lacy? How did you do all of that to really pay honor and respect to the fact that you were coming in wanting to tell a story that wasn't your own?

J: That's a good question. **Questions of representation when you're a filmmaker, making a film in a community that is not your own are really important. They are questions that I ask of myself regularly. Not just about how I approach people but am I telling the story that accurately reflects what's going on in the community and their experiences?** And so a couple of things, there's one: I'm from Mississippi. I'm from the South. I'm a Southerner. So, there are things that I know even though I didn't grow up in a small town. Bladenboro is 1700 people. It's small. Even in the scope of what people consider to be rural areas.

There's a lot that I know about the South. There is a lot that often is not portrayed about the South that I started to see on the ground that reminded me of my experience in Mississippi and also things that I had anticipated seeing. I'm also an African American filming a story in part about an African American community and their experience around this horror. It was really important for me to show up in a way that is ahistorical. Historically, the story of African Americans around lynching terrorism have been covered up and they've been denied. It was really important to dig in and to really reflect everyone in the community. Folks that are black, white, and people of color about their experiences there around

Lennon's death. I reached out at first to Claudia and understandably Claudia wasn't able really to engage with the media and didn't want to engage with the media. Quite understandably, because she was deep in grief. I talked with Pierre and was really impressed as I spoke with him about how sincere he was. Neither Claudia or Pierre, by the way, said initially that they were convinced that Lennon was lynched or that they were convinced that he committed suicide. They both said that they wanted answers. They wanted to know what happened, regardless of where that led them. So, I understood very early on that the family had a lot of integrity. I reached out and connected with people in the community who did believe that Lennon was lynched like his friends, his neighbors, and people in the area who knew him. And it showed up across race. The other really interesting thing is that I expected that people would have various things to say about Lennon's character. As it is with most people, you get some people who like you, some people who don't like you. Literally, everyone that I talked to said what a beautiful person Lennon was and that he was a kind, warm,

loving person. And it was a loss of everyone in the community, even when they thought they he committed suicide.

/ I spoke with people who didn't believe that he was lynched. I really wanted to reach out and make sure to cover all of my bases so that I could understand fully what's going on from a multitude of perspectives, including the officials, the police officers, the medical examiner, the DA's office.

N: It seems like that would be a really challenging process to be African American, to be digging into a story about a 17-year old. Having a 17-year old son of your old, basically being in a similar situation as the mother of this young man. How did you separate yourself from the emotion, just the weight of what you were finding out, the conversations you were having and the ways that it connected to potentially your own story?

J: I'm a filmmaker first. I can make a film about racial justice issues. I could easily make a film about environmental justice issues. It can run the gamut. When I show up, I show up professionally in that role. That's the primary way that I show up in communities. I think it's really important, particularly with documentary filmmakers. There are power dynamics between the people that you film with who I never call subjects.

/ I like to refer to the people that I've been filming with just in that way. To really emphasize their humanity and not to objectify them. I don't ever use the term "subject." It reflects the power dynamics of colonialism. You have this gaze, when you talk about subjects, in on someone and too often it's done with people of color. You have this gaze in which you have a subject-master paradigm. So, I don't engage in that way. I occasionally use character but that's often fraught. I do that when I'm talking about story with people who understand and who are speaking that language with me.

/ But the people that I film with – it's really important that I get to know them and that I understand them beyond just the moment in which I'm filming. When I go in, I generally don't start with the camera. I don't start with an interview. I like to sit down and talk with people. If I

don't do that in person, I at least do that on the phone as prep before I go in and do an interview. I like to have moments in which we're not engaging just with the camera. I do that because it gives people the **opportunity to open up in a different way**. It's not for the sake, it's not for my ego sake, but it's because they can open up in a different way and share their story differently without the pressure of a camera, which is frequently hard to do initially. And it just gives them time to process their story in a different way with me. So, that they are present. They are more fully present and clearer perhaps in the interview when we sit down formally.

N: It sounds like part of the way that you approach your filmmaking is very respectful #1 but also requires a level of patience and willingness to allow time for the relationship that you're trying to build with the people that you are filming with organically. Is that true?

J: It's actually why I decided I wanted to make the film. I saw the media dropping in and dropping out of Bladenboro. It's part of the way that news is set up. Having worked in the industry, I understand that people have a deadline. Often that deadline is by the end of the day.

/ But I really thought that it was important to understand more deeply the story. I wanted to embed in the community and talk with people and get to know people and start to understand things in a way that I might not if I were there for a week or two weeks. So I stayed and filmed on and off in Bladenboro for four years.

/ It's really important to show up as a professional because the people that you're filming, they count on you to show up in that way. I was really aware even when I had really intimate times with people that I was filming with, like Claudia and Pierre and the reenactors, that's why I was invited there. It's because I'm a filmmaker. For me, I never like to blur the lines between filmmaker and friend when I'm working. We can become friends and we can develop really sincere attachments and relationships with each other, but I wanted to serve the **story and serve them as a filmmaker**. It's why I was invited into the community and into homes for dinner and that kind of thing

in the first place. Then I'm human.

/ This story does have a lot of emotional connection. I try to deal with my emotions in a way that I don't obligate the people that I'm working with to take care of me. So over the ten years, and I've had some really emotional interviews, is that I've never cried in an interview. I think that it's a good policy to try not to be emotional so you can be present for people. When you cry in an interview, people are then reacting to you. I really wanted people to stay in their emotions, to stay in the information that they wanted to convey. The only interview that I cried in was the last interview. It was an interview with Pierre. I was really aware of how he had been holding on for two years. It was two years later when I interviewed him. Holding on to his emotions in a way that often men have difficulty processing. You can see that Claudia has worked through her emotions, still working through the grief, but really in touch with how she feels and moving through that. I could see that Pierre was stuck. He also reminded me of my son. I understood the level of grief that had been pent up in him. It was really difficult. So, I cried because I'm human and it happens. I'm not saying to be a robot. But it's really important that I then in that moment didn't have Pierre taking care of me and so we moved on from that.

N: That's powerful. Let's kind of stay there cause you're talking about Pierre and the relationship that you developed with him, with his mom and with the community, but particularly with the family. What did you do besides what you just described in terms of really being professional and present during the interviews to assure them that you were going to take care of the story and that you were going to represent them in a way that would really honor how they felt, what they wanted to see happen, and so forth?

J: **/** I researched and developed this film two years before I began filming. I did that because I wanted to fully understand the scope of the terror. I wanted to be prepared when I got on the ground, when I started to

reach out to people. So I think the prep of development work - when you're looking at the people that you're going to film with, and you're researching them, and you're prepared to know as much as you can by the time you get on the ground about the story, about what's going on - I think really instills trust in the people that you're **filming with**. That's really important. I thought for hours about my interview questions. I wrote them down and I thought about, based on what I had researched about people, how they might respond so that I can anticipate the next level of questions. So, I think it's really important to be prepared as a filmmaker so that you show up in a way that instills confidence. In addition to just being clear about your intentions.

/ Early on in this project, I realized the necessity of being clear about your intentions because what it means, one, is that you can very effectively communicate to someone why they might want to tell their story to you. I talk to filmmakers often about how to get someone you'd like to film with to say yes. I've filmed with people from across the board: Klan members, grand dragons of the Klan, all kinds of people that you might not think would be interested in telling their story. But what I look at is what part of the thing that's sincere about my intentions that they might respond to with a yes. So, that drives a lot of things for me. It also means that when I'm filming in Bladenboro and I'm filming with the police and they're not responsive... which the police, the examiner's office, the coroner's office, the DA, no one did an interview. No one handed over their records and shared their records with me or with the family. When that happens, I can take another approach in which the film is about pressuring them around their records or I could've gone down... at one point, I was weighing "Do I go down the rabbit hole of a who-done-it with Lennon Lacy's case? Do I start to reinvestigate this case?" There's lots of information that I found on the ground. There are things that come out in the film *Always in Season*. But I remember that my intention is really about the impact on the community - the impact on the entire community as it relates to what's gone on historically around lynching. That really helps to moor your decisions as a filmmaker around what you shoot and what you don't shoot. What it looks like in the edit.

/ As often as you are clear with the people that you're collaborating with, the more transparent you are, then I think it instills more trust.

N: I just want to put a little pin on that. Or maybe an exclamation point, because one of the things that really impressed me about *Always in Season* is that you did not litigate the case. You presented the facts, you laid out all the information. I made all kinds of assumptions and conclusions on my own as a viewer, and I think that's what the best of documentary film does. It allows us as audience members to take in the information and come to our own conclusions. So, brava.

J: I appreciate that you experienced it that way because there were little bits of information that I wanted the audience to pick up and then to process for themselves in the middle of experiencing the film and later.

N: I think you did a great job with that. Once you got to the point where you had something to show and began to put a cut together - either a work sample or a rough cut - how often did you go back and share that with the family, the community, and who was a part of that screening feedback loop?

J: / I screened the film with my team, and we screened with colleagues and some of our funders for feedback. But I never share the film with the people that I'm filming with. I never share the footage. I don't go back and do that because 1.) I never know when I need to go back and shoot pick-up. 2.) For that reason, it can change the way that they respond to me based on what they've seen. I don't want to impact any of that. The other thing is that I'm clear, whenever I film, that I am not necessarily telling their story. I'm telling objectively the story of all the people that are involved. So, I wouldn't screen the footage to get buy in to make sure someone's okay with how I portray them. I'm really careful about portraying people fairly. But if I did that, for example with Claudia, I would need to do that with the medical examiner and police officer. 1.) That's very time consuming. 2.) It's really about me as a director, being able to be present and parse out as fairly as possible what's going on in its totality in a story and not just from one person's viewpoint.

N: Thank you. I want to go back and talk a little bit about the funders.

J: Before you get to that, can I talk one more thing about the colonial gaze? At IndieGrits, I was on a panel with Naomi and Molly, a really great paneling, and Courtney Staton. We talked about representation.

/ I think one of the things that we don't often think about in terms of representation - meaning who tells the story? Are you from that community? If you're not, then who's on your team that is making creative decisions around how that story unfolds from development through post? In my opinion, that needs to be someone who's in power in production like the producer or co-director as opposed to a consultant from the community. I've heard stories where people say, who are from a different community and generally it's communities of color but who are not from that community, who say, "But I have proximity of that community. I know plenty of people from this community," or "I've worked with plenty of people and I really understand it." I think it's an insult - what it says as professionals who are people of color in this industry. In my case, being black, our own blackness is not valued. It's saying that it's not even worth collaborating with and having understanding of.

/ Not only do we have a responsibility to be accountable to the communities where we film and the people that we film with, but with our colleagues so that we are valuing how I show up as a Black woman or an Asian American man, how they show up with their own stories. The question of accountability is really around in many...It should be discussed in many realms of filmmaking and that's one of them - that we are accountable to each other as industry filmmakers.

J: **/** The other thing that I think is really important to acknowledge is that black people and filmmakers of color, black and brown filmmakers in particular, we have a full understanding generally of the communities across

this country that we live in - in a way that I think white filmmakers don't necessarily have because the mainstream has this cognitive dissonance about what goes on with people of color in their communities and issues around racial inequality, including poverty and inequities in education and all these other issues. Most of America and the American story is about ignoring that and it nullifies that. But as black and brown people, we actually have to understand everything in these communities. So, I think in ways we are better equipped to tell the American story and it's really important that we acknowledge that - that we don't just show up in our own stories in a way that I, as a black filmmaker, can only speak to stories about black people and African Americans, but 1.) I understand those stories fully and completely than most people. 2.) I understand this country in ways that people in my community are not encouraged to look at.

N: To that point - At what stage in the documentary filmmaking process would you say someone who is not a person of color should engage the community and people of color and to what extent? In what roles and what responsibilities?

J: / I'll start out by saying I'm not prescriptive. I don't like people telling me what to do so I never assume to tell people what to do. I think that the best path is that filmmakers who are not from a particular community - That could be white people looking in on stories of people of color and wanting to make a film that has to do with issues that resonate with them very deeply. I think it's really important that we all tell stories. You don't have to be from a community to be able to tell that community's story. And it's true for me as an African American woman, as a black woman, if I showed up telling a story about an Asian American community. Any time that you're an outsider, I think it's really important that you bring people on early on who can inform the filmmaking, who don't just consult with you, but who has the power to make decisions about how that story evolves. That happens in development. I make decisions early on in development about how I'm gonna move through production. Who I'm going to film with. Where those communities will be. What the treatment looks like. You make those decisions very early on. I think

it's important to bring again someone who's a professional lead into your project, a director or producer, from the very beginning. If you find that you are in the middle of a project and you realize that you have moved in this way without having someone on, bring them on **immediately**. Again, it's important that we are not just accountable to the community which is hugely important, but that we're accountable to each other professionally, that we understand and acknowledge the value that filmmakers of color have in this industry.

N: Do you have any thoughts? I totally appreciate your comment about not being prescriptive. Do you have any thoughts about what's going on when white filmmakers are telling the story about a black subject or a subject of color, a person who is black, a community that's black or a community of color. Right? At some point those filmmakers realize, I'm stuck, I don't really know which way to go and we're trying to get to fine cut or whatever and decide that they're going to reach out to a black producer or a black director. Someone to help them get across the finish line? What do you think about that? What's going on? Is that a best practice?

J: It's definitely not a best practice. I think that what happens is they've been challenged at some point or their funders are requesting that they diversify their teams, which is often the case. And when you bring on a producer late, again, they haven't made any of the decisions that really impact the film. As filmmakers we all know that we don't just show up with footage in the edit suite, but there are decisions that are really valuable in how the story lays out. Often those producers are consulting producers. So they often are in a position, whether they're hired and are titled/given that credit, they are so late on that the best that they can do is consult. That is ineffective. I think that's not adequate. The other thing to think about is that -

/ when we're telling stories about another community, there are questions we need to ask ourselves. We need to challenge ourselves and ask questions about representation. What are the tropes that we might be playing into? And we won't know them. So, my next question is who will? Who do I turn to and how do I test the things that I think I know about a community versus the way that they are? Am I on track? When I'm on track is the person that I'm featuring being reflected in their fullness? Have I just showed up and started representing someone of color with no context to where they come

from - from their community? Which I often see as the case. It's as if black people and people of color show up in certain films for the first time ever on the planet when they've been encountered by the filmmaker. So, that is really in some ways worse than having undertaken the effort of telling their stories. So, we have a lot of responsibility for each other and for the folks that we're filming with.

N: Tell me about the process that you encountered with funders. The extent to which funders understood the story that you were telling and the value of telling this particular story?

J: I got funding early on. My first shoot, I funded myself. It was \$1200 bucks that I put into the film. That's the most that I've put in. That was a stretch for me. I did a quick shoot. I now call it a test shoot because I filmed myself. After about four or five days of filming, I connected with the folks at Chicken & Egg Pictures, and I had a previous grant from the Puffin Foundation. The funding from Chicken & Egg allowed me to move into production. They very quickly connected me with Lisa and Bonnie with Catapult Film Fund. Both of those organizations supported me at times when I wasn't able to get other funding and really helped me to go back and film in Monroe with the reenactors for three years in a row. Then we started to bring other funders on and they started to connect with this story and really people were increasingly more supportive. I'll say that from the very beginning, funders understood the story. They understood that this film was about grassroots efforts for justice and reconciliation around lynching. They understood the concept.

/ I didn't even understand the story fully, early on ten years ago, when I began making the film. As is the case for every director. So what I find is that as you get clearer about your story and as you can reflect it more in the footage and in your writing and your proposal writing, then funders will start to connect. But it's important that... I was told before I even began the film that it's not likely that you're gonna get funding for a film about lynching. I didn't listen to that. It's important that you get clear again about your intentions and your commitment to a story because that's gonna drive you through the lean times. The clarity is gonna help you be able to communicate your story and move more deeply into it and to reflect the core of your ideas increasingly more as you move along through the process. As funders start to see that, it will resonate with them. And so, there were funders... we have tons of support. It's a real gift that there are visionary

funders out there who are looking at supporting projects around racial justice issues in the way that *Always in Season* is showing up. We've had support from Sundance, Tribeca, IDA, Firelight Media, and many organizations. It was really important to me to engage with funders in the South and regional funders like Southern Documentary Fund and Cucalorus Foundation and Alternate Roots. We have funders across the board who have not just provided financial resources, but have been champions of the film which is really huge. It's a beautiful thing to sustain you over a decade of making a film. And they've also provided mentorship. I look at our funders and that relationship as a partnership. It's been enormously valuable.

J: From the beginning, organizations have really understood the message of this film that it's about the value of looking at justice and reconciliation around issues of racial terrorism. Folks like Working Films have been supportive really from the very first stages. Molly and Anna have been incredibly helpful at consulting with me on issues of impact and engagement unofficially and then officially through their Kickstart grant. We were able to pull together an Impact Summit in Atlanta to start the first conversations with organizational partners around how to move the film out into communities in companion and partnership with their work.

N: What do you hope audiences will take away from your film?

J: I want audiences to understand that lynching was racial terrorism. Often we think of lynchings when we think of them all as these individual cases of anonymous black men hanging. When we start to look at these contemporary cases of black people found hanging publicly in the last decade, including Lennon Lacy's case, we think of them in terms of a one off. When we look them, it's very easy, very satisfying to determine whether or not they were a lynching or whether or not it was suicide and then move on. That's the easy conversation. I believe that we need to look deeper. That we need to start to unpack what's going on in the institutions that we move through daily like policing, that we encounter on a regular basis. Housing, the neighborhoods that we move through, education, the schools where our children attend or that are in our neighborhood if we don't have children or grandchildren attending and look at the inequities. And so to look deeper at these cases so that we start to unpack what's going on systemically around injustice in this community along the lines of race and sexual identity and all of those issues that we're encouraged to dehumanize people around. In this country when we're comfortable talking about people who immigrate to this country or people who come for safety, people who come from other countries because they're trying to escape the dangerous situations that they're in. When we refer to them as aliens,

when we're comfortable using that terminology, that's the same dehumanizing language that's been used historically to terrorize black people. So, it's a warning sign, it should be - that things can turn violent and that they can turn dangerous. It should be a lesson. This history, it should be a lesson to understand how we can better start to move through our communities and really build a country in which everyone is treated fairly and equitably.

N: What's the change? When an audience member sees your film and then moves out into the world, what would you have them do? How would you have them think differently, move through the world differently and so forth?

J: I worked to craft this story with Don Burnier, who's an extraordinary editor and my co-writer on the project. We both created the narrative in a way that people will be immediately drawn to have conversations even in the theater before they even leave the theater. I'd like people to follow up those conversations in their communities, because there's a lot about this history that has been about cover-up and denial. There's a lot that we need to unpack.

J: We planned as a team to bring this film into communities across the country where lynchings happened, not just in the South. Lynchings happened in every state but four. And we want to bring the film to all of these communities so that people can start to have the dialogues that are needed.

/ Often people talk about whether or not filmmaking is effective beyond just talking and taking action. Well talking is a really important first step. Having dialogues about this history and what's going on now around racial justice that don't often enough occur with compassion and with depth is the first step towards building coalitions to take action. So, we plan to get the film out in communities across the country and model the way that these dialogues can unfold with people who are doing this work on the ground, like Claudia and Pierre and the reenactors in Georgia, who are already doing this work, and then experts we have in the film like Sherrilynn Ifill who's the head of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, and Bryan Stevenson, the head of the Equal Justice Initiative. Then to do it in coalition with the people on the ground who are connected to lynching, family members of the victims and their perpetrators, as well as community leaders and organizations doing this work so that people can determine for themselves what's meaningful in their communities in terms of repair specific to

what happened in each individual case around lynching so people can start to very much on the ground work together around this history. Then use those relationships to build coalitions to work around issues of racial justice like police brutality, mass incarceration, inequities in school, the school-to-prison pipeline. It is a matter of the audience in the moment and later on looking at their family connections to lynching to look to where their own stories connect with the stories of lynching so that they can start to understand how it has shaped them, their families, and their communities.

N: I'm really interested in what you think about the connection between accountability, as a filmmaker, storytelling and then impact.

J: It's all connected. It all begins for me with my intentions from the very beginning -

/ Intentions for making a film from the very beginning, for making *Always in Season* in particular. My intention has always been to start these conversations for the film to be used as a tool for dialogue around these issues of justice and reconciliation. That was the driving force from the beginning, even as the film took shape and evolved over time, especially as it evolved overtime. That was the anchor. That's what I could come back to to, one, motivate myself to continue to get centered in the purpose, but also to drive how production was carried out and how the film moved through the edit. And I'm sorry I forgot your questions.

N: I'm asking about the connection between accountability, storytelling and impact.

J: / Once your intentions are clear then that drives the storytelling. It drives how you show up in a community, who you speak to you, who's featured in the film and in what way. It drives how you work with your editor, your sound designer, your composer to ultimately shape the story and then it drives how you get that story out to the communities. Your intention around all that really should feel like a through-line from the beginning to **the end**. Quite interestingly being on this side of things after 10 years, which is a really great place to be, I can see the through-line. There were

points at which it was cloudy, things were cloudy in process as it often is. That was the anchor. It's really valuable for the film, for the community. It's also valuable for you as you're practicing your craft as a filmmaker.

N: Would you say that if you had not had the accountability piece down, that you would've gotten to your goal, your intention and that coming into fruition?

J: You know I can't say. Who knows? I don't know where I would've gotten if I hadn't been clear early on. I could've gotten clearer in the middle of the process or the end of the process. I do know that I would have been a lot less focused on the work that I was doing. I would have had to regroup or had someone regroup me along the way. Throughout the process, very interestingly, I've been committed all the way through. I think that because I've had clarity at the beginning and because I've spent two years researching and really getting clear about my intention early on, it meant that I could be focused at times when it's easy to give up. And at times when people don't show up necessarily in the way that you want them to or that you think they need to. And it turns out that's always the way that they're supposed to show up. All of those things can throw you off of your goal and your mission around filmmaking. Who knows where I would've been if I hadn't had that intention? I do know that it would've been a rockier road. It would have been a lot less satisfying for me along the way.

N: Let me rephrase. What I'm really trying to get at is: If you had not decided, number one, I'm a professional. So a part of what that means is I'm going to listen to all the voices in the community. If you had not decided that you were going to take that approach, do you think you would have realized your intention?

J: / It would've been a very different film if I had not shown up in the way that I showed up. It's the value of each us as filmmakers is that there is a uniqueness about us in the way that we show up that makes the way we tell a story valuable. It also means that there's no competition in the process. That no one can tell the story that you're telling. So because I showed up with the intentions that I had, you can see them reflected in the film. You can see the fullness, and as much as I could in 90 minutes, of the people and the community's thoughts on Lennon's death in this case and also the thoughts on the reenactment. You can see that reflected in the community. There aren't lines around the reenactment across race. There are black people

who show up in the film who are opposed to the reenactment. I try not to use those dichotomies of black and white and oversimplifying an issue. It was really important for me to show the full complexity of not just the community and what's going on around the ground which is hugely important. The South is often stereotyped. It was also important for me to show the nuances around the issue and how people showed up on the many sides of the issue. So, it would've been a very different film if I hadn't had that intention.

N: So, talk about Claudia and Pierre and their openness to telling you their story, sharing that with you, and trusting it with you.

J: So when I showed up in Bladenboro, it was early on after Lennon was found hanging. I showed up open. I didn't know what to expect. I was really struck by the level of openness that Claudia has. I think about often with these police shootings and also with Lennon's death. I think about how I might respond as a mother. I can't imagine having the grace, not to be curled up in a ball, not be angry beyond everything. Right? I think it's not just remarkable that Claudia has moved through this in the way that she has and that is in large part due to her faith. She has tremendous faith...religious faith. But it's also about the fact that she has an open heart and that she is moving through life determined to be open. I wanted the film to reflect that, to not just show Claudia in the stereotypes of either a broken, devastated mother, which you'll see on the news, or this classic strong mother or strong black woman, which she is, but she's more than that. She's also remarkably open in the middle of this and really generously gave of her time. She and Pierre, really most people in the community, I find that even when there are people who might be seen as adversarial being reflected adversarially because they're on the other side of an issue. I find that they are also open if you allow them to tell their story.

/ One of the techniques of a filmmaker is that 1.) I don't stop rolling. 2.) I don't interject into someone's comment. I like to give a lot of breathing space after someone speaks so that you get the reflection that's expressed in their faces like you see often with Claudia. You can see that in the film, not just understand where she is through her words, but through the expressions on her face. If you give people time enough to get their story out and to tell it in a way that feels full for them, and one of the ways you do that is that you're there long enough. That you have multiple interviews, that you're there on the ground, that you have some verité shoots in which they are not

sitting uncomfortably in front of a camera. It was a gift and really impressive the degree to which Claudia and Pierre have been open and as been the case with pretty much everyone that I filmed with in the community.

N: Have you shown *Always in Season* in Bladenboro to the community of people that you interviewed and that are included and also in Moore's Ford?

J: Yes, in Monroe.

N: So talk about the reaction and the extent to which those communities have reflected back at you what your intention was.

J: We just screened, here at Full Frame, the film for the first time in North Carolina, which is really exciting. It was a wonderful thing in particular. I think this might've been the most expressive audience of all the screenings that we've had. It was a great thing to hear people react in real time as they're watching the film. As a filmmaker, it's really wonderful to see how people are responding scene to scene. And Heather Rattelade who is from Fayetteville, she was one of the attorneys on the film on the case who's featured in the film and the mortician F.W. Newton were there. And they saw the film for the first time. It was a beautiful thing to share it with them. They were really excited about the project and felt that the film was a really powerful reflection of what they knew the story to be on the ground.

/ Claudia and Pierre got to see it at Sundance at the premiere, which was really incredible. And so that's my biggest concern is that the people that I'm filming with really appreciate the way that their story is told and that they see the value of it even when they don't agree with every scene, from scene to scene. I'm sorry I had a thought. Tell me your question one more time.

N: I just wanted to know the extent to which those communities that you shared, that are part of the film - Once they see it how did they reflect that?

J: We haven't screened the film yet in Bladenboro. I am looking forward to doing that immediately when we start to roll out our impact and engagement campaign. Right now we're focusing on festival screenings.

And I see festival screenings, particularly the Q&A as the first opportunity to start to have these conversations that we plan to have more deeply as we start to go in and do community screenings. It's really important for me that, not just people in Bladenboro which is enormously important, but people all over North Carolina in neighboring communities who've been impacted by Lennon's death as well. That they see the story, that they see themselves reflected on the screen, and that they have the opportunity to engage around the film.