



SHARK DOG FILMS

presents



a film by Jonathan Schroder

USA // Documentary // English // 87 mins // Not Rated

[Official Website](#)

[Facebook](#) // [Instagram](#) // [Twitter](#)

**Publicity Contact:**

Lisa Trifone // Bright Iris Film Co.  
[lisa@brightirisfilm.co](mailto:lisa@brightirisfilm.co) // 317.362.5378

**Booking Contact:**

Susanne Jacobson  
[susannecj@gmail.com](mailto:susannecj@gmail.com)

“Takes a scrappy look back at the incident [and] ultimately reveals that **there’s a lot of gray area in our political landscape....**Will likely have both liberals and conservatives shouting back at the screen.”

—*San Jose Mercury News*



## Logline

After a confrontation between a student and a Native American elder on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial goes viral, filmmaker Jonathan Schroder sets out to understand the incident, the media’s obsession with it and the larger ramifications for both one small Kentucky community and our country as a whole.

## Short Synopsis

January 18, 2019. Surrounded by cheering classmates on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, 17-year-old Nick Sandmann instantly and unwittingly became a global headline as he appeared to confront Nathan Phillips, a Native American elder, at that year’s heated March for Life rally. Overnight, clips of the interaction went viral, Sandmann and his classmates hit with a tidal wave of worldwide outrage and the entire Cov Cath community suddenly at the center of uncomfortable conversation. A graduate of that elite institution, filmmaker Jonathan Schroder watched it all unfold with keen interest. Seeking to better understand the scene on the steps, the people involved in it and its larger ramifications for the community, the media and our democracy as a whole, *The Boys in the Red Hats* deftly explores the media’s obsession with immediacy over accuracy, the danger in prioritizing intent over impact and what it’s going to take if we ever hope to bridge the deep divides in our communities—and our country.

# Full Synopsis

January 18, 2019: it was the smirk heard round the world.

Surrounded by cheering classmates on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., 17-year-old Nick Sandmann, a student at northern Kentucky's private, affluent Covington Catholic High School, instantly and unwittingly became a global headline, internationally villainized on social media and in the 24-hour news cycle as he appeared to confront Nathan Phillips, a Native American elder attempting to keep the peace at that year's heated March for Life rally by beating a ceremonial drum as he moved through the crowds. Overnight, video clips of the interaction went viral, Sandmann and his classmates hit with a tidal wave of worldwide outrage, their safety threatened and the entire Cov Cath community suddenly at the center of uncomfortable conversations about racism, privilege and politics.

A graduate of that elite institution, filmmaker Jonathan Schroder watched the incident—and the subsequent media blowback—with keen interest, knowing firsthand the deeply formative nature of an adolescence spent inside the entitled Covington Catholic bubble. Seeking to better understand the scene on the steps, the people involved in it and its larger ramifications for the community, the media and our democracy as a whole, Schroder set out to investigate how one fleeting interaction can become a global controversy. Along the way, *The Boys in the Red Hats* deftly explores the media's obsession with immediacy over accuracy, the danger in prioritizing intent over impact and what it's going to take if we ever hope to bridge the deep divides in our communities—and our country.



The steps of the Lincoln Memorial, in a scene from *The Boys in Red Hats*

## INTERVIEW WITH JONATHAN SCHRODER (DIRECTOR)

**What compelled you to tell this story?** I am an alumnus of Covington Catholic High School. It was a very surreal experience to watch this story unfold and go viral and to read online banter between family, friends and fellow alumni. I had a real visceral reaction to the video clips that were first circulating and I formed an opinion quickly.

**This incident is the perfect Rorschach test in that each person who witnesses it sees something different. How did you see this event initially? Was your perspective changed by making this film?** We discuss the idea of a Rorschach test with Julie Zimmerman who wrote about it in an article for The Atlantic. It really is the perfect analogy for how people experienced this event and formed their opinions. When I saw the first video, I mainly felt angry and embarrassed. The evolution of my perspective is what you will see in this film.

**How is your coverage of the event different from the media's coverage?** We set out to establish a timeline and the evolution of the story as more evidence emerged. We discovered that things were not so black and white and the story was multifaceted. We take the audience through those evolutions versus how they experienced the actual event, which was more black and white. The media went from 'they did it' straight to 'they didn't do it.'

**Why do you think the media and most nay-sayers reacted before delving deeper into the story?** Instant gratification and the need to respond instantly to the content we consume could be reasons. The initial video was a shiny and tempting object for the media. Without context, they had free range to speculate and ignite a debate if that was the goal. When you look at the event in context, in the midst of Trump's administration, with a nation divided, that video would trigger anyone on both sides of any aisle. It was throwing gasoline on a fire.

**How much do you feel that the 24/7 news cycle contributed to this story's "imperfect" storm?** We explore the role of the 24-hour news cycle and how it escalated narratives while playing catch up to what appeared to be a viral perfect storm. However, it was imperfect in that there was virtually no fact checking.

**Do you think this story would have blown up to the extent it did if the country wasn't so divided socially and politically?** The political climate was a factor, and the fact that the students were wearing "Make America Great Again" hats was a catalyst. The hats are a symbol with layers of meaning. The students became a target that day and in the media.

**As a filmmaker with roots in the community, was it a challenge to remain objective?** It was certainly a challenge for me to stay objective because of my own personal experiences at Covington Catholic. I knew it would be going into making the film. We all knew we would need to work outside of our comfort zones and bring in all perspectives; letting the facts speak for themselves.



**Was there an “Ah-Ha!” moment you experienced during the making of this film?** There were a lot of them! Some people were completely closed off to opinions different than their own. It was fascinating to see how people absorb a story, combine it with personal philosophy, and regurgitate it as their own.

**What did you learn about what happened with the boys that you didn’t know prior? How did that change your opinion of the incident?** I was surprised to learn the extent in which the Black Hebrew Israelites were involved. This group harassed the boys with the most God-awful insults imaginable. By the time Nathan arrived on the scene, the boys were all riled up and the situation escalated from there. I was also surprised the media didn't focus more on this group and that they were more or less dismissed.



An aerial view of Covington Catholic High School in Park Hills, KY in a scene from *The Boys in Red Hats*

**What did you hope to achieve by making this film?** I wanted to find out the truth of the situation and better understand how and why this story snowballed through the media the way it did. I believe we achieved this.

**What is revealed in your film that is “new news” to audiences, or not well-known?** Context. People will be able to look back at the situation with fresh eyes and better see how the media sacrificed journalistic integrity for a bird in the hand.

**Do you believe most people live in a bubble? Is Covington Catholic an elitist bubble?** Both of these questions are explored heavily in the film. I think it is human nature to want to be surrounded by like-minded people, and with the rise of social media, we’ve created silos to exist comfortably and interact with things we like and agree with. It also makes it easier to disagree in ways that aren’t so civil without much consequence.

**As a member of a community perceived as “white privilege,” what do you wish people knew about the positive aspects of living in a bubble (if any)?** Most of my growth came from leaving my bubble, which I did as soon as I was old enough. That’s not to say I didn’t benefit from my upbringing. Being an alumnus of Covington Catholic was like having a built-in brotherhood/fraternity I could call on at any time. On the other hand, the institution did us a disservice by not adequately educating us or exposing us to racial diversity.

**Do you think this incident may have started a movement for media accountability?** I think it will take a collective effort from people like Nick to take a stand because, unfortunately, the best way to get the media to change the way they collect and report news is to hit them in their wallets.

**What was your biggest hurdle while making this film? How did you overcome it?** The boys and Nick specifically were on complete lockdown while we were filming the interviews. This made it really difficult to tell the entire story without their involvement. These boys were getting death threats, so keeping their anonymity was of the utmost importance.

**What personal growth did you experience in the making of this movie?** I learned to empathize with people who do not share my personal beliefs. I also gained an appreciation for the intelligence of the people I interviewed on both sides of the issue.

**What do you hope audiences will take away from having seen the film?** I hope audiences consider the importance of personal research and vetting news stories. It’s important to not outsource that responsibility to the media. I would love for them to think twice before launching a Twitter rant or simply retweeting something they believe to be true. Listening to what others say, no matter how uncomfortable it is, is so important. Not every conversation has to be a debate

## INTERVIEW WITH JUSTIN JONES (WRITER, PRODUCER)

**As a producer, what was the biggest hurdle you encountered in the making of this movie?** The first hurdle was telling a story about two people who wouldn't participate. The Covington Catholic community believed they were under attack. As a result, there was hesitance to participate in the film. Nick Sandmann had a barrier of lawyers and a PR firm preventing penetration to Nick. No one from Nathan Phillips' group would go on record for fear of that legal team. As a result, we were forced to change perspective of the film from individual vs. individual to a wider context.

**Why do you believe this story is an important one to tell?** This story is important because it provides a strong visual representation of power imbalances tolerated in America. The stark contrast of a young, white, male student wearing a MAGA hat, smirking at an elderly native man was hotly debated because it elicits strong reactions of a sad history of oppression and violence against many segments of American society and the lack of power and privilege these communities still struggle against. Perhaps Nick Sandmann doesn't deserve the hatred people gave him and perhaps Nathan Phillips didn't deserve the hate people gave him. However, their juxtaposition created a visual metaphor for shameful parts of our history. The media did a horrible job of framing this story in context, so the film is important in that it elaborates on the social contexts relating to race, class, power and privilege that created this viral moment.



Filmmaker Jonathan Schroder (left) and producer Justin Jones (right) in a scene from *The Boys in Red Hats*

## MEET THE FILMMAKERS

**JONATHAN SCHRODER (Writer, Director, Executive Producer)** is an award-winning filmmaker, and dynamic storyteller on a mission to bring larger-than-life stories and their subjects to the forefront. A Kentucky native, Jonathan began his career over two decades ago in NYC producing television projects for Spike TV, Nickelodeon, MTV and Comedy Central. Upon relocating to Los Angeles, he became an accomplished screenwriter working with top Hollywood producers, and in 2005, wrote and directed *Jimmy and Judy* starring Edward Furlong. The film won several Best Picture awards on the festival circuit and received worldwide distribution by Anchor Bay. From there, Jonathan went on to pioneer a new genre of unscripted television as the co-creator of Nat Geo WILD's hit series *The Incredible Dr. Pol* for which he was Executive Producer for 19 seasons and over 200 episodes. Currently, Jonathan is developing several new projects with his production company Shark Dog Films.

**JUSTIN JONES (Writer, Producer)** has worked for National Geographic Studios for the past six years. He was a field producer for three years on Nat Geo WILD's #1 hit series *The Incredible Dr. Pol*. Originally from Michigan, he now resides in Los Angeles where he is actively working on several documentary productions including a second documentary with Jonathan Schroder.



JASON NEFF (Director of Photography)

**JASON NEFF (Director of Photography)** has worked in the film and television industries for over two decades and in various capacities including Writer, Director, Producer, Editor and Cinematographer. His work as Director of Photography on the critically acclaimed and highest rated National Geographic Wild show *The Incredible Dr. Pol*, spans almost a decade. Within that span, Jason also served as DP on *Nightcap with Dr. Pol*, *Calling Dr. Pol*, *Shane Untamed*, *Sex Decoy: Love Stings*, *Hometown Heroes* and *Rob and Amber: Against the Odds*. His television work as Camera Operator includes *It's a Brad Brad World*, *Shahs of Sunset*, *Plastic Wives*, *The DUB Magazine Project*, *Donald J. Trump Presents: The Ultimate Merger*, *Swamp Loggers*, *Wild Animal Repo*, *Pictureka!*, *Solitary 4.0*, *Rehab* and *Solitary*.

Jason made his directorial debut with the 8 min short *Wendigo: An Interview with Larry Fessenden*, which is also wrote, produced and served as Director of Photography. Other film credits include *The Making of 'Dunsmore,' The Warped Tour Documentary*, and the short films *Kiss* and *The Duke at Fox*. He is currently in post-production on *Jock*, which he directed and produced with Linda Ellman.

**JOHN DILLEY (Editor)** is an award-winning editor, story editor, and writer based in San Francisco. Films he has cut or written have screened at the Sundance and Slamdance Film Festivals, on PBS, at the Cinémathèque Française in Paris, and at other venues throughout the US and Europe. Dilley was selected by IFP as an Emerging Storyteller as part of Independent Film Week in Lincoln Center, and received a Golden Gate Award from the SF International Film Festival in 2015. He has edited or story-edited multiple feature films including *Watershed*, produced by the Redford Center and narrated by Robert Redford, *The Promised Band* (Best Documentary, Cinequest 2016) and *Collisions* (Imagen Foundation Award Winner 2020).

**KAREN EVERETT (Story Consultant)** is one of the world's leading documentary story consultants, as well as an award-winning documentary filmmaker. She taught editing for 18 years at the Graduate School of Journalism at UC Berkeley, named the #1-ranked documentary program in America by *Documentary Magazine*. Karen founded New Doc Editing, LLC, an editing and story consulting business that helps filmmakers structure compelling documentaries for venues such as PBS, HBO, Sundance and other top film festivals. Author of *Documentary Editing*, she has directed and produced six of her own documentaries, including the award winning PBS biography *I Shall Not Be Removed: The Life of Marion Riggs*.

**JUSTIN KERKAU (Composer)** is a composer, multi-instrumentalist and sound recordist operating in Portland, Oregon. His work includes commercials projects, film scores and music production, along with work as an interviewer for public radio and sound recordist for reality television. Kerkau graduated with an MA in Electronic Media Production from Central Michigan University and is proficient in music theory and audio engineering.



In association with  
**FIRST FIGHT STUDIOS**

*Presents*

**A film by JONATHAN SCHRODER**

*Director*

Jonathan Schroder

*Written by*

Jonathan Schroder

Justin Jones

*Executive Producer*

Jonathan Schroder

*Producer*

Justin Jones

*Associate Producer*

Maggie Elston

*Story Consultant*

Karen Everett

*Director of Photography*

Jason Neff

*Edited By*

John Dilly

*On-Line Editor and Colorist*

Jesse Spencer

*Assistant Editor*

Ryan Swindlehurst

*Art Direction*

Andy Shindeldecker

*Music / Composer*

Justin Kerkau

*Audio Supervisor*

Andy Shindeldecker

*Camera Operators*

Zach Smart

Alex Arkeilpane

Kelly Kendall

Mark Myers

Numa Fernandez

Justin Jones  
Dan Wagner

*Drone Camera Operator*  
J. Cris Kendall

*Camera Assistant*  
Caitlin Willson

*Set Photographer*  
Mike Stankevich

*Production Assistant*  
Adam Fisher

**Post Production Sound Services**  
Ozone Music and Sound

*Supervising Sound Editors*  
*Narration – Recording, Editing & Mixing*  
*Dialogue – Editing & Mixing*  
*Sound Effects – Editing & Mixing*  
*Music – Editing & Mixing*  
*Re-Recording Mixers*  
Chris Hugan  
Marty Peters

**Opening Titles and Animation**  
First Fight

*Art Direction*  
Andre Foster  
Guy Allen

*Animation Producer*  
Eden Sabolboro

*Design*  
Joe Dao  
Watty Watkins

*Animators*  
Watty Watkins  
Jessica Rowden  
Andre Foster  
Guy Allen

*Legal Clearance*  
Justine Jacob

## **Interview Subjects (In Order of Appearance)**

Andy Becker  
Ian O'Hara  
Jim Wilson  
Jill Hamlin  
"Tanner"

Robert Barnes  
Julie Zimmerman  
Rob Neuhaus  
Margot Cleveland  
Vincent Schilling  
Allissa Richardson  
Jason Williams  
Jeffrey Blevins  
Mike Moroski  
Adam Howard  
Anne Branigan  
Jerome Bowles  
Mark Koenig  
Jennifer Kinsley

### *Special Thanks*

Jenny Apostol  
Matt Koenig  
Stacey Koenig  
Robert Knoll  
Kathy Zembrodt  
Chris Weideman  
Nicole Weideman  
Roger Pot  
Steve Erdman  
Benjamin James Howard  
Lawrence Wigman  
Bethany Brooks  
David Cinquegrana  
Roger Cohen  
Jeremy Beck  
Leo Sherman  
Justin Flynn  
Curtis Hasselbring  
Kyle Cassel  
City of Covington – Devou Park  
Skip and Pink Schroder

## **Soundtrack**

“Louder”

Written By

Jonathan Schroder and Benjamin James Performed by The AFs

“Let’s Be Friends”

Written By

Jonathan Schroder and Steven Erdman Performed by Lawrence Wigman

“Hierarchy”

Written By

Mathew Wigton and Adrian Dominic Walther Artist: Moments and Shimmer

“Steadfast”

Written By

Mathew Wigton and Adrian Dominic Walther Artist: Moments and Shimmer

“Countdown”

Written By

Bryant Richard Lowry

Artist: Bryant Lowry

“Fever”

Written By

Bryant Richard Lowry

Artist: Bryant Lowry

“Climbing to Greatness”

Written By

Cody Kurtz Martin

Artist Name: Cody Martin

“Heavy Music”

Written and Performed By

Justin Kerkau

“Through the Flames”

Written By

Caleb Etheridge

Artist Name: Caleb Etheridge

“Big Baller Reel”

Witten By

Dean William Palya, Jr.

Artist Name: Ghost Beatz

“Stay Woke”

Witten By

Dean William Palya, Jr.

Artist Name: Ghost Beatz

“Ballerina Cantina”  
Written By  
Matthew Wigton  
Artist Name: Dresden, The Flamingo

“Split Second”  
Written By  
S.L.J. Kalmeijer  
Artist Name: Sounds Like Sander

“Allons-y”  
Written By  
Matthew Wigton  
Artist Name: Falls

“Treblemaker”  
Written By  
Marshall Usinger  
Artist Name: Alternate Endings

“Judgment Day”  
Written By  
Kevin Austin Grahm  
Artist Name: Austin Graham

“Explorer”  
Written By  
Matthew Wigton  
Artist Name: Shimmer

“Hol”  
Writer and Artist:  
Stephen Keech

“Innocent as Doves”  
Written By  
Cody Kurtz Martin  
Artist Name: Cody Martin

“Fear of the Other”  
Written and Performed By:  
Justin Kerkau

© 2021. All rights reserved.