

***“It’s a really great documentary
that deserves to be seen.”***

Rod Lurie, Director of *The Outpost*



Encounter at the Lincoln Memorial.

Directed by Steve Oldfield
Produced by Ryan Anderson

***“Whatever side of the aisle you find
yourself on, Rush to Judgment is
a remarkable and important doc.”***

Alan Ng, FILM THREAT



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It all started with an **encounter** at the Lincoln Memorial that went **VIRAL**...



Award-winning documentary filmmaker **Steve Oldfield** and producer **Ryan Anderson** started working on their documentary, ***Rush to Judgment***, the very weekend the story broke in January, 2019.

“I was familiar with the school and I knew something wasn’t right,” said Oldfield. “We came up with the name right away that weekend and started shooting at a protest that following Monday,” he said.

Their more than year-long investigation yielded exclusive information never before revealed by the media. Their documentary features several exclusive interviews, including the boy in the MAGA hat at the heart of the story, Nick Sandmann and his father.

The filmmakers also scored an exclusive interview with an African-American student from Covington Catholic and his family whose lives were also deeply affected by the encounter at the Lincoln Memorial. Oldfield and Anderson interviewed members of the controversial Hebrew Israelites religious sect along with other students and chaperones who were there.

Oldfield and Anderson wanted to show the impact the viral video had on the people involved but that was just the beginning of their journey. They also watched hundreds of hours of YouTube videos to craft a conversation featuring a variety of diverse (and opinionated) voices online.

The filmmakers want to encourage conversations about civil discourse online and how the news media should handle viral videos and social media mayhem. Oldfield interviewed some nationally recognized authorities including Julie Irwin-Zimmerman, a contributor to *The Atlantic*; veteran radio news reporter Neal Augenstein of WTOP Radio in Washington; and Joseph Starrs, Director of Journalism and Communications at the Fund for American Studies.

Oldfield is a lifelong journalist who graduated from Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism where he founded Northwestern Student Television during his sophomore year. He is also a fellow of the Institute on Political Journalism and is currently an Assistant Professor of Communication at Thomas More University.

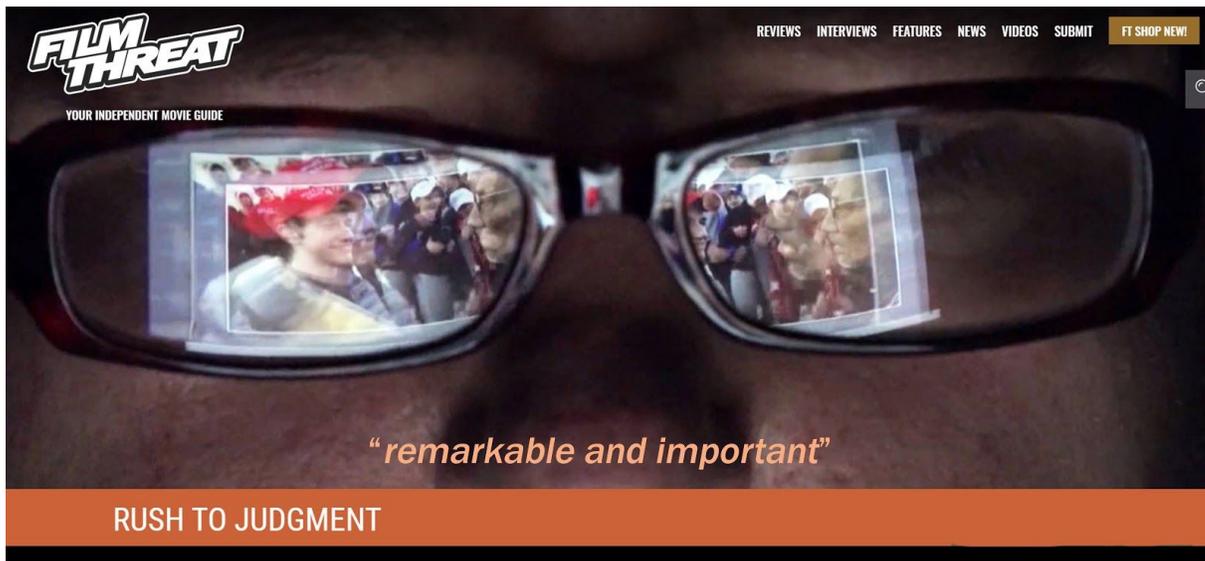
In addition to the documentary, Oldfield and Anderson hope to keep the conversation going on college campuses and with groups around the country. They have created an interactive, multi-media experience and will be speaking to a group of college journalists this Summer. They will be launching an in-person and virtual college tour in the fall. They are represented by The Contemporary Issues Agency. (CIASpeakers.com)



Producer Ryan Anderson (left) and Director Steve Oldfield staged a “work in progress” screening at the Over The Rhine Film Festival in 2019. They conducted surveys and took part in a panel and Q&A.



Persistence pays off: after reaching out for more than a year, Oldfield and Anderson scored exclusive interviews with Nick Sandmann and his father Ted. (photo: Anderson, Nick Sandmann, Ted Sandmann, Oldfield)



By [Alan Ng](#) | July 29, 2020

It's a question worth asking. Just because the worst person in the world was elected President of the United States, does that mean we get to abandon our principles and values as human beings until he leaves office. Our political anger has fueled cancel-culture, and its unintended consequences are massive.

Steve Oldfield's documentary *Rush To Judgement* covers the journalistic fiasco associated with Covington Catholic High School student Nicholas Sandmann and the infamous video where allegedly he "assaulted" Nathan Phillips, a Native-American veteran, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. NOTE: as of this review, Sandmann has settled two defamation lawsuits with CNN and The Washington Post for a reported \$500 million total. At this rate, he's on track to receive \$2 billion when it's all said and done.



We all remember the viral video of Sandmann donned with a MAGA hat looking smug as he's face-to-face with Nathan Phillips beating his drum just inches away. Left and right went to immediate judgment against Sandmann.

Undoubtedly, the kid has to be racist, and naturally, he has to be bullying a Native American because that's what all Trump supporters do! The main-stream media went on full attack labeling Sandmann, his fellow students, and Covington Catholic High School as the worst example of Trump racism. Admittedly, it doesn't look very good.

Within days, Sandmann would appear on the *Today Show* only to be lectured by Savannah Guthrie, and the veteran Phillips would appear on every other news channel telling his story about how the boys went out of their way to confront the veteran. In an unfortunate event, an internet troll would misidentify and effectively dox the wrong Covington student releasing his address and place pressure on the culinary school he wanted to attend to reject his application, and he wasn't even there.

As time passed and as the full footage of the Covington confrontation was released to the public, we soon realized that narrative being presented on every single news channel and podcast had every element of the story wrong...except that Sandmann wore a MAGA hat. Phillips wasn't even a Viet Nam veteran, as reported. In his defense, the media said he was a Viet Nam veteran, and Phillips never corrected them.

As an investigative documentary, *Rush To Judgment* does what documentaries should do, and that's present the facts. Admittedly, the film's thesis was to clearly call out the media's "rush to judgment" and questions the state of journalistic integrity regarding the truth...whether it fits your desired narrative or not. Filmmakers layout the entire story with copious amounts of news footage piecing together the whole narrative along with interviews with the key players, including Nicholas Sandmann and a few political pundits—mostly on the right—offering commentary.



“...effectively presents the details of the fateful event...”

In the end, the film not only effectively presents the details of the fateful event and tracks how the story spun out of control in the public eye. It also serves as an indictment of how divided we are as a nation. Highly charged political stories like this burn like wildfire—all from knee-jerk reactions and the media landscape chomps at the bit for salacious stories to tell, just for ratings, clicks, and views.

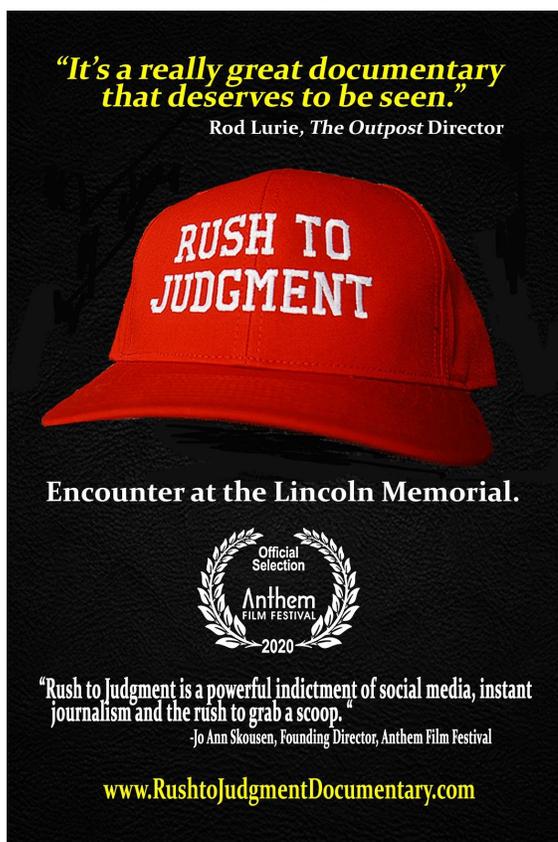
Whatever side of the aisle you find yourself on, *Rush to Judgment* is a remarkable and important documentary and presents a case study about the broken state of journalism and the volatile state of the national debate (Newsflash, no one debates anymore). One of the tenets from my old college critical thinking classes urged me to “rigorously question ideas and assumptions rather than accepting them at face value.”

If you're going to ruin a child's life, make sure you have the facts before you do. In the end, what's the cost of destroying a person's reputation simply because we don't agree with them? So far, \$500 million. Now, everyone's gonna want a MAGA hat.

Rush To Judgment was scheduled to premiere at the 2020 Anthem Film Festival—a Libertarian event.

RUSH TO JUDGMENT (2020) MOVIE SCORE: 8/10

Directed and Written by Steve Oldfield Starring: Nicholas Sandmann, etc.



Covington's lesson

by Leif Le Mahieu

| August 06, 2020 11:00 PM



Steve Oldfield at the Lincoln memorial.

On July 24, Nick Sandmann [announced](#) on Twitter that his \$250 million defamation lawsuit against the *Washington Post* had been settled. Sandmann's suit revolved around the *Washington Post's* coverage of a viral video of Sandmann and his Covington Catholic classmates at the 2019 March for Life in Washington, D.C. The footage showed the students, many of whom were wearing "Make America Great Again" hats, interacting with Native American activist Nathan Phillips at the Lincoln Memorial. This interaction quickly earned the students widespread condemnation and scorn from media pundits, religious leaders, and politicians.

They believed that Sandmann and his classmates were harassing Phillips by blocking his path and chanting inappropriate slogans. To many in the media and on Twitter, the Covington Catholic students represented the white supremacy and bigotry they believed to be so prevalent in Donald Trump's America. Footage of the event and witness testimony revealed a more complicated story. While waiting at the Lincoln Memorial for school buses to pick them up after the March for Life, the students were approached by a group of Black Hebrew Israelites. This group began shouting vulgar and racially insensitive comments at the students. Phillips, who was in Washington for another demonstration, walked in between both groups, beating a drum. He walked straight up to where Sandmann was standing alongside his classmates. Sandmann, unable to back away because of the large crowd, stood as Phillips proceeded to beat the drum in his face. Phillips believed he was deescalating a tense situation, while Sandmann later confessed he did not know what was happening.



*Ryan Anderson and Steve Oldfield with Nick Sandmann and his father.
(Photo via Ryan Anderson and Steve Oldfield)*

The day after the incident, filmmakers Steve Oldfield and Ryan Anderson decided to investigate and produce a feature-length documentary on the controversy. The end [product](#), titled *Rush to Judgment*, was set to premiere at the Anthem Film Festival in Nevada in July before cancellation due to COVID concerns. Despite this setback, Oldfield and Anderson still hope to take the film to college campuses, film festivals, and a streaming service this coming year.

“We want everyone to see this, including people who might not agree politically with wearing a MAGA hat, or might not be, you know, a fan of President Trump. This isn’t about Trump, this isn’t about politics as much,” Oldfield explained. “It’s about what do you do with an image that you’ve been given, what do you do with a video, how do you react to it? Do you share it, or do you investigate it?”

The initial coverage of the Covington controversy surprised Oldfield, as he had filmed at Covington Catholic for a promotional video and had been impressed with the students’ conduct. Spurred on by this and the fact that he had exclusive access to footage of the school, Oldfield called Anderson, and they began to discuss making a film the day after the incident. Going through hundreds of YouTube videos to create a back-and-forth between online commentators and interviewees, Anderson believes that viewers of the film will come to recognize the importance of critical thinking. “Really, the overall, arching goal of it for me was to get people to just think more critically — really pay attention to how they’re consuming media and, you know, research.”

After years of working in TV news, Oldfield believes the coverage of Sandmann and his classmates represents a low point in the history of TV broadcasting. “This is the classic case of why journalists can never take something they see that’s blowing up on social media and just put it out there as a news story, without doing any research,” he said.

Some of the journalists who were quick to pile on the Covington students appear to have learned their lesson. Featured in the film, Julie Irwin Zimmerman, a contributor to the *Atlantic*, wrote an [article](#) discussing her handling of the story. In it, she wrote, “If the Covington Catholic incident was a test, it’s one I failed — along with most others. Will we learn from it, or will we continue to roam social media looking for the next outrage fix?”

Politically, both Oldfield and Anderson identify as libertarians. They believe this gives them a unique vantage point to tell the story. “We saw this as a big Democrat vs. Republican kind of thing, which we thought was really wrong, the way that people assumed that Nick Sandmann was a monster because he was wearing a MAGA hat,” Oldfield said.

When putting together interviews for the film, Sandmann deeply impressed Oldfield. “Nick Sandmann is one of the nicest, smartest, most articulate kids I have ever met, and I’ve worked as a high school teacher for 10 years,” Oldfield said. “And what I would say is, all

these hateful people on the internet who decided to attack him and make him a symbol of bigotry in this country, they picked the wrong kid.”

In the film, Sandmann relates how the media drowned out his perspective. “Their rush to judgment I think was aided by the fact that Nathan Phillips had put out four or five interviews by the time I was able to talk.” Sandmann’s father, Ted, discussed with Oldfield the violent nature of many of the messages directed at his family. Threats included “We know where you live,” “We’re going to put your son six feet under,” and “You better be watching over your back every day.” “Every time you step out the door, you’ve got to realize now that I’m not in the safety of my home,” he explained. “I’m out here, and the world has changed.”

Sandmann was not alone in experiencing the rage of the social media mob. In fact, the ire of the crowd first directed itself at Covington student Michael Hodge, who people believed to be Sandmann. Hodge actually wasn’t with the school, but away attending his brother’s wedding. Someone found his mother’s phone number and called to inform her how horrible her son was. Others in the online mob threatened violence against Hodge and his family, while some told Hodge’s mother that she should have aborted her son.

This anecdote illustrates the sobering reality of social media’s effect on the news cycle and its toxic consequences for civic discourse. Oldfield wants consumers and content producers viewing the film to “learn that it’s not OK to just trust a picture and a tweet, and that it is not OK to say the most hateful, horrible thing you can about someone you disagree with online because you think that’s going to make you look good.”

With no verification or further research, the mob decided that Sandmann, Hodge, and their classmates were evil and thus deserving of hate. This environment is exactly what Oldfield and Anderson expose in *Rush to Judgment* and why the film speaks so powerfully to today’s cancel culture environment and its vigorous enforcers.

Leif Le Mahieu is a journalist whose work has appeared in outlets such as WORLD and Religion Unplugged .



Director Steve Oldfield - Bio

Steve Oldfield is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and educator. He received several awards for his last documentary, *Lines of Sight*, about painter Jim Hall, who created a daring new art form he called “Lineillism” after nearly being blinded by the Shingles Virus. Steve’s doc won the Viewer’s Choice Award at its premiere during the Indie Gathering International Film Festival. *Lines of Sight* also received the “Resiliency In Aging Film Award” from the Third Action Film Festival and the University of Calgary. In addition to playing other festivals across the U.S., *Lines* is currently airing on KET, Kentucky’s PBS Network.

Steve also co-directed *Covington at 200: Points of View* which aired on KET and won a Kentucky Historical Society Award in 2016.

Steve has taught broadcasting and documentary film at the University of Cincinnati, Northern Kentucky University and Thomas More University, where he is currently an Assistant Professor in the Dept. of Communication. Steve also mentors young filmmakers in the Greater Cincinnati, where he created the *Student Service Film Festival* in 2019. Steve is also a member of the Broadcast Film Critics Association and has reviewed films for several major market television stations and was syndicated on the Fox News Edge Affiliate Feed for more than a decade. He received an Emmy Nomination for his coverage of Sundance.

Steve is a graduate of The Covington Latin School and Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism. He is a fellow of the Institute on Political Journalism and the Poynter Institute for Media Studies. Steve has a master’s degree in Public History and created a traveling art exhibit called *Lineillism Revealed*. He also has collaborated with museums in the Greater Cincinnati area, including the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center.



Producer Ryan Anderson - Bio

Ryan Anderson brings his extensive knowledge of blogging, political commentary and independent media to *Rush to Judgment*. He also has worked in cable television in Maryland, producing and hosting an interview program aimed at teenagers and young adults. Ryan watched hundreds of hours of YouTubers talking about the encounter at the Lincoln Memorial and viral video. His work helped to create a deliciously diverse conversation among YouTubers from around the world. Ryan is a mentor and key player on the administrative team for the *Student Service Film Festival*.