



AMERICA YOU KILL ME

The rise, fall, and legacy of gay rights warrior Jeffrey Montgomery
& the ongoing struggle for equality in the Midwest.

DOCUMENTARY FEATURE/ PRESS KIT

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AMERICA YOU KILL ME, LLC. | 1343 Lakepointe Street,
Grosse Pointe Park, MI 48230

“He is among the most visible and accomplished advocates for safety and equality
of GLBT people in Michigan history... a hero and living legend.”

Gov. Jennifer Granholm, Michigan Governor 2003-2011



SYNOPSIS

In 1985, a young man named Michael was killed outside of a bar in Detroit. After the funeral, his boyfriend Jeffrey was horrified to learn that police were not even going to investigate the murder. To them, it was 'just another gay killing', and not worth the resources.

In 1991 Montgomery co-founded the Triangle Foundation to fight back against anti-gay violence and support victims of hate crime attacks and abuse. Undeterred by death threats, vandalism, sabotage, or even being placed on the hit-list of the Aryan Nation, he wielded wit and intellect to confront politicians and push local/national media to better report on gay issues.

Through advocacy and legal support, Triangle grew to encompass other needs of the community such as job discrimination, housing discrimination, social representation, and more. Montgomery was a critical voice during the media storm around the Scott Amedure murder, commonly known as the "Jenny Jones" Trial. He would coach prosecutors on battling the so-called 'gay panic defense' in dozens of trials, including the Matthew Shepard murder in Wyoming. For years, Triangle held back the worst of the right-wing legislative attacks, directly impacting tens of thousands of lives through support and legal counsel and stood as a beacon for a community held in contempt by much of its midwestern state.

By 2003, far from the coasts, it would become the 4th largest statewide LGBT organization in the country.

Beyond his foes on the religious right, Montgomery would cause friction within his community, among conservatives who deemed his outspoken pro-sex, anti-racist, trans-inclusive positions to be too progressive or even dangerous. Many of his most controversial positions have now been widely adopted by the movement.

In 2007 Montgomery retired in controversy, with his health in decline but his radical voice intact. In 2016, he passed away at the age of 63, but through this project, his legacy lives on.

This film is about what it takes, and what it costs, to be strategically effective at creating change.



PROJECT OVERVIEW

AMERICA YOU KILL ME is a feature-length documentary about gay rights warrior Jeffrey Montgomery.

In 2013 Jeff was persuaded by his brother, John, to share stories of his activist work, observations about the LGBTQ+ community's rise as a social and political force, and the goals still left to accomplish.

The project was initially imagined as a memoir told entirely in his own words, and a long interview (conducted by Detroit radio host Craig Fahle), became the foundation of the picture. While an illustrated version of this conversation could well have sustained an entire film, it quickly became clear this was a much larger tale. Thus, we reached out to other voices, including fellow activists and politicians, as well as those he impacted, enraged, or inspired.

The original goal had been to launch a speaking tour, kicking off a new phase in Montgomery's long career as an advocate, but with his passing that ending is sadly no longer possible. What we can do is honor his work and create a permanent document of what he fought so hard for.

This is not a hagiography. He made mistakes, and he made enemies, and from the start of the project he was adamant about never being involved in the post-production editorial process.

The title, which has taken on additional meaning, comes from an acclaimed speech he gave at Brown University for the inaugural Matthew Shepard memorial, following the trial in 2000, articulating many of his core values and ideals. That full address can be found [here](#).

While this film centers on an individual, it intends to raise awareness of other leaders who, like Montgomery, made sacrifices to create a better world than the one they found. Activism is not without cost, and those who dedicate their lives to it do not often reap rewards of treasure or comfort. Current and future generations can benefit from learning what those leaders did to create the social climate we have inherited.

PRODUCTION BACKGROUND



In 2019, a rough cut of the film was invited to be screened to a group of industry professionals as part of Kartemquin Films' KTQ LABS. This session helped to sharpen the film through this feedback, discussion, and expertise. This program has helped over 150 projects progress towards completion, some of which have gone on to premiere at festivals including Sundance Film Festival, New York Film Festival, SXSW, Hot Docs, Full Frame, DOC NYC, Vienna International Film Festival, and True/False, and to be broadcast on Netflix, PBS, OWN, and the Sundance Channel.

In 2020, the film was set to premiere as the opening night showcase for the FREEP FILM FESTIVAL in Detroit back on April 22nd - before the pandemic indefinitely postponed that event. At the time we were racing to complete the film and decided to treat this as an opportunity to expand the scope, upgrading motion graphics and adding animated sequences. While it was disappointing to lose our original premiere date, it did provide time to revisit and improve the film.



In March of 2022 the America You Kill Me team was invited to show Jeffrey's documentary at the 2022 FREEP Film Festival which marked the first live audience event in Detroit area theatres since the advent of the pandemic. As a result in April 2022, we were honored to be part of the Detroit Free Press's FREEP Film Festival, at Detroit's Redford Theatre and Birmingham's Imagine Theatre. The two screenings went over extremely well to a positive and appreciative audience. We got two standing ovations and won "The Spirit of Michigan Award " for the film that best exemplifies the State Michigan's spirit of ingenuity and creativity - both in film making quality and topic.

2022 Michigan Screenings of America You Kill Me

In 2022 with this major event the team decided to concentrate on screening America You Kill Me in Jeffrey's home state of Michigan.

In June, AYKM was shown at the Edsel Ford House theatre in Grosse Pointe Shores, followed by an additional viewing at Grosse Pointe Park's Schalp theatre. In between those two showings, Detroit College for Creative Studies (CCS) hosted a special showing to its students, faculty, and guests. Also, in June, our director Daniel Land traveled to Midland's Center for the Arts for a midday showing of Jeffrey's documentary

. Mid-Summer saw "America You Kill Me" have a multi-night run in July at Cinema Detroit, the city's only truly independent cinema. In August, The Players Club in Detroit, the oldest men's theatrical club in Detroit, hosted a special showing of "America You Kill Me" to honor Jeffrey Montgomery who was a long-time member of the Players.

in September, we took another road trip up to the Upper Peninsula for a show at the Soo Film Festival. Finally in November, we took part in the inaugural Bagley Street Film Festival created by the Matrix Theatre Company (founded in 1991). At this festival, we were proud to be awarded "Best Documentary Feature".

INTERVIEW SUBJECTS / APPEARANCES (selected)



JEFFREY MONTGOMERY - In interviews from 2013 to 2016, his voice is at the center of the film

SENATOR CARL LEVIN - US Senator from Michigan (1979-2015)

GOV. JENNIFER GRANHOLM – Michigan Governor (2002-2011), U.S. Secretary of Energy

MAYOR DENNIS ARCHER - 67th Mayor of Detroit (1994-2001). First mayor to meet with gay community leaders.

KATE KENDELL, Esq. – Executive Director, National Center for Lesbian Rights.

IKE McKINNON – Detroit Police Chief (1994-1998), Detroit Deputy Mayor (2013-2016)

CARMEN VAZQUEZ – Founding Director, 'The Women's Building'

SUE HYDE – National LGBTQ Task Force. Director of Creating Change Conference (30 years)

REV. DR. RENEE McCOY – National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gay (NCBLG)

JOHN KAVANAUGH – Activist, Author - 'Welcome to The Gay Age'.

GREG VARNUM – Montgomery's former assistant, Triangle Foundation

SEAN KOSOFSKY – Director of Public Policy, Triangle Foundation

CURTIS LIPSCOMB – Executive Director, LGBT Detroit.

KARY MOSS - Executive Director, Michigan ACLU

JAMES MONTGOMERY – Associate Producer, Bandleader, Singer, older Brother

JOHN MONTGOMERY – Producer, Restaurateur, oldest Brother.

TIM RETZLOFF, PhD. - Author, Professor of LGBTQ Studies/U.S. History @ Wayne State University.

JIM LESSENBERRY – Former Triangle Board Chairman, Animal Behaviorist, Pilot.

THE TEAM

DANIEL LAND

DIRECTOR / EDITOR / DP / VFX

Daniel Land is a Detroit-based filmmaker and visual artist. He completed his first feature-length motion picture in high school, graduated from the College For Creative Studies, and since directed music videos, commercials, and an array of narrative, documentary, animated, and experimental shorts. As a visual effects supervisor, he has led teams of artists to design and deliver purposeful VFX imagery for television series (Battles BC, Art of War) and Hollywood feature films (Saving Lincoln, Isa, Game of Death). On the historical feature 'Saving Lincoln', he also served as 2nd Unit Director. 'Voyagers', an animated short he co-directed with Paul Frieling, was a finalist in the 2015 Cinespace competition in Houston, and his music video for Audra Kubat's 'Sparrow' was nominated for a Detroit Music Award. Land also currently teaches at the College for Creative Studies. In 2014 he was awarded a Kresge Arts Fellowship in Film Direction.

JOHN MONTGOMERY

PRODUCER

John Montgomery is a documentary producer, restaurateur, and former record business executive. He became the National Promotion Director (FM radio) for Warner Brothers Records from 1975-1977, after being the first WB salesman to gross \$1,000,000 a month in the San Francisco market. Heavily involved in promoting/marketing acts such as George Harrison, Fleetwood Mac, Neil Young, Rod Stewart, Bonnie Raitt, and as Vice President of Sales and Promotion for Sire Records (1977-1982) promoted Madonna, The Ramones, Talking Heads, Pretenders, and Dead Boys. As Jeffrey's older brother, he is also responsible for convincing him to open up and share his story for this film.

JAMES MONTGOMERY

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER

James Montgomery is an award-winning blues musician. His vocal and harmonica playing talents as leader of the James Montgomery Band has garnered a number of major label album releases plus a Grammy Nomination as well as placement in both the New England Music Hall of Fame and the Rhode Island Music Hall of Fame. Over the years he has worked with a variety of major musicians from Johnny Winter, James Cotton to Aerosmith and many more. He has been involved with several documentaries including the Paul Butterfield documentary and his current work as Co-Producer of "Bonnie Blue- James Cotton's Life in the Blues". and a documentary with Morgan Freeman and Willie Nelson, "Delta Rising" that explores the rich history of the origins of Blues in the Mississippi Delta. His involvement as Co-Producer of "America You Kill Me" has provided both creative and critical fund raising efforts for the project.

MARK BELTAIRE

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER/MARKETING DIRECTOR

A 30-year veteran of broadcast, marketing, and e-marketing, Beltaire supervised the launch of several major automotive brands including creative development and production of all video and print-based elements. He also developed interactive, multi-city satellite broadcasts, beamed live to 30+ United Artists movie theaters in support of multi-launch events.

Beltaire has been a friend of the Montgomery family since an early age and brings a unique understanding of Jeffrey's career.

AMERICA YOU KILL ME

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JIMMY DIXON

SOUND DESIGN

Dixon is an Audio Engineering graduate from Columbia University and has served as sound editor of feature-length productions (Into the Wake) and short films (You Bet, Valhalla Blues). He founded Homestead Studios in 2013 for production sound, post-production, and musical recording. Recently, he produced, recorded, and mixed the Audra Kubat album, 'Mended Vessel'. Dixon is currently based in Los Angeles.

AUDRA KUBAT

COMPOSER

Detroit Music Award winning singer/songwriter Audra Kubat has released 5 albums to critical acclaim in a career that spans over 20 years. A composer, performer, and educator, Kubat's work has earned her a place in the community as a resource for empowerment through songwriting and music for all ages. Previous film collaborations include 'The Death of Michael Smith' and 'In-Zero'. She has shared bills with Aimee Mann, Rodriguez, Roberta Flack, Greta Van Fleet, The War and Treaty, Whit Hill, and Jolie Holland, to name a few. Currently, she is promoting her sixth album, and teaching workshops and classes with Inside Out Literary Arts Project, Living Arts Detroit, Wolf Trap and the Detroit Institute for Music Education (DIME).

CONSULTANTS / PARTNERS

WOODHULL SEXUAL FREEDOM FOUNDATION

LGBT DETROIT

KIMBERLY SCHROEDER, ARCHIVIST / HISTORIAN
WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

TIM RETZLOFF, PhD.
CONSULTING HISTORIAN MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

JOHN ALLEN, LEGAL COUNSEL
ALLEN BROTHERS, PLLC.

CATHY RENNA,
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR NATIONAL LGBTQ TASK FORCE

BETWEEN THE LINES

MICHIGAN ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union)

NATIONAL CENTER FOR LESBIAN RIGHTS
KATE KENDELL, Esq., EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

JOHN CORVINO, PhD., PROFESSOR and CHAIR of PHILOSOPHY DEPT.
WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

Fiscal Sponsorship Provided By: Documentary Educational Resources

The film was also honored to be joined in 2020 by DOCUMENTARY EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES as our fiscal sponsorship partner. DER was founded in 1968, with a mission to support and distribute ethnographic film and media which promotes cross-cultural understanding. For over fifty years, DER has been a leader at the intersection of documentary filmmaking and social science research and is an internationally recognized center for documentary anthropology and ethnographic film.