

Speaker 1 ([00:04](#)):

Welcome to The Bill Walton Show, featuring conversations with leaders, entrepreneurs, artists, and thinkers, fresh perspectives on money, culture, politics, and human flourishing. Interesting people, interesting things.

Bill Walton ([00:24](#)):

Welcome to The Bill Walton Show. I'm Bill Walton.

([00:29](#)):

Global streaming services are projected to reach over 1.5 billion subscribers in 2025. Worldwide spending on TV and film production has surged over 220 billion dollars a year with Netflix, Disney, Amazon Prime, and HBO Max alone accounting for more than 75 billion of that spend, and almost all of the spending goes towards woke progressive themed entertainment. By now, most of us are aware of the left successful decades long march through our institutions, but can we regain this ground? Are the culture wars winnable?

([01:10](#)):

Today, we're going to talk specifically about Hollywood and the business of film storytelling. Conservatives who have basically surrendered the culture wars often claim, "We can't fight back because the left is naturally more artistic and given to storytelling. Our side is more interested in politics and making money." Well, I don't believe that's true, and neither does my guest today, Michael Pack, who actually wrote those words, which I borrowed for the introduction.

([01:40](#)):

The culture wars are winnable if we take them seriously and start by producing our own independent features and documentary films. As much as Netflix and the major Hollywood studios spend, independently made productions have attracted globally twice as much money, almost 150 billion dollars. So the money should be there. We just need to get into the game.

([02:05](#)):

Joining me to explain how this can work and we can reclaim our culture through film, and it's a big opportunity, is Michael Pack, my friend, documentary filmmaker, former CEO of the US Agency for Global Media. He's produced over 15 award-winning films for public television, and most recently, and we're just re-releasing a show Michael and I did three years ago, most recently, his film was Created Equal: Clarence Thomas in His Own Words, which is a fantastic documentary and particularly important for us to take a look at again today.

([02:41](#)):

So Michael, you recently wrote a piece, I think it was in Washington Examiner, Long ... What was the-

Michael Pack ([02:48](#)):

Long Liberty.

Bill Walton ([02:49](#)):

Long Liberty, yeah, it was a terrific piece, but you basically made a longer case for why we need to be in the game.

Michael Pack ([02:56](#)):

Right. So if people want to read it, they can go to the Long Liberty website or my Twitter feed has it too, MichaelPack_, but I think it is really important. I think the culture wars are winnable. As you said in your introduction, I was briefly in the Trump administration. I think politics is actually a harder game to win. The administrative state has really dug in and civil servants have really strong protections and they're prepared to counterfight.

[\(03:28\)](#):

Whereas the culture is still relatively a free market. We can make films. We can set up streaming companies. We can set up distribution companies. We have simply seeded that turf to the left, as you said in the introduction, on the assumption that they're naturally suited to it, but nothing could really be further from the truth. We have simply let them have it. I always say it's not a culture war when only one side has an army in the field and the other side just writes essays about how they don't like that army. Who could win a war under those circumstances?

Bill Walton [\(04:01\)](#):

I probably read too many of those essays.

Michael Pack [\(04:03\)](#):

Yeah. I mean, there were essays written by my friends and people I like and that's fine, but we have to be making culture, not just complaining about it, and it is not that hard to do and we can do it.

Bill Walton [\(04:13\)](#):

Well, the essence of the, and I hate this word, you need to help me find a better one, content. We need a much better word than that, but you talk about story and the need to tell stories and how that's different from PowerPoints or it's different from a screed where you're trying to win people over your point of view. Instead, the most effective way to win hearts and minds is the telling of stories.

Michael Pack [\(04:40\)](#):

Absolutely. I mean, that has been true from time immemorial, from the first cave paintings to the Bible, to today, to Shakespeare, to today. I mean, that is how people learn to understand the world, and each story is a model for how the world works. You mentioned our Clarence Thomas documentary. We didn't just have a bunch of experts talking about Clarence Thomas' jurisprudence. We had him tell the story of his life and it's a very exciting story with twists and turns. He's born in a Gullah speaking part of Georgia just outside of Savannah. English is not his first language, raised by his grandfather, and then rebels against the traditions that his grandfather raises him, becomes a radical in the '60s, comes back to conservatism. I mean, it's a dramatic story and encapsulates in the story what his life means.

[\(05:32\)](#):

You don't need experts to tell you. People are more interested in finding stories, and stories or more full picture of the world. So we need to tell those stories. I think our side does not do a good job. Even in my own small fields of documentaries, many of the right of center documentaries are just very preachy, closer to propaganda than storytelling, and the left, in my opinion, does a really good job. Their documentaries are at a very high level.

Bill Walton [\(06:02\)](#):

So let's dig into story. So preaching in an audience doesn't work, and I'm looking at your article here. A series of anecdotes is not a story, and you talk about a story of something that happens to a protagonist or group of protagonists.

Michael Pack ([06:19](#)):

That's right.

Bill Walton ([06:20](#)):

Let's dig into that because I don't want to just say we need to tell stories. I want to understand what you think a good story is.

Michael Pack ([06:28](#)):

That's a good point because sometimes on the right, people use the rhetoric of telling stories, but then as you quoted my article, then they just have a stream of anecdotes. People are hurt by a particular policy. Somebody doesn't like it, you get a series of people hurt by it. That's not a story. A story is something that somebody ... There's a precipitating incident, someone takes a stand, and a series of things happen. Achilles refuses to fight, and that starts in motion the Iliad or Odysseus flees Troy and takes a journey back to Ithaca and has a series of adventures on the way. I mean, that's a story. People are concerned with people, character, and an arc, something that happens, with a beginning, middle, and end. Not a complicated idea. People intuitively understand it, but our films and documentaries just shy away from that, and I think to our detriment.

Bill Walton ([07:29](#)):

Well, somehow it's soft, not hard facts and things like that. My favorite short story, you probably already know this, Hemingway, was asked to come up with the shortest story he could. You remember this?

Michael Pack ([07:44](#)):

I don't. I don't.

Bill Walton ([07:45](#)):

Here's the story. For sale baby shoes never worn.

Michael Pack ([07:53](#)):

That is great, almost a haiku, that sort.

Bill Walton ([07:56](#)):

Yeah. So I'm particular because Sarah and I curl up and watch old movies at night because we like the stories they tell and they have a hero and they have a villain, and there are moral lessons in there, but it's not in your face.

Michael Pack ([08:12](#)):

I think those old movies are another proof that you can say you can make movies with conservative and traditional messages. Hollywood did it for 50 years with great success.

Bill Walton ([08:23](#)):

We talk about John Wayne and John Ford.

Michael Pack ([08:25](#)):

We did, I think, and John Ford, a great example of that and John Wayne. I mean, he became the prototypical American hero and people loved John Wayne around the world. They wanted to be like him. They came to America to taste the freedom that Westerns like the John Ford Westerns celebrated. Now, Hollywood movie is a complicated thing. They're not all right of center, but they generally were pro-family, pro-religion, pro-American, and they were hugely successful. So that proves that it can be done since one of the most successful industries in America did it for 50 years and did it successfully.

([09:03](#)):

I say that it's hard. Hollywood as it's gone left since the '60s has had trouble taking those traditional forms and twisting them to progressive messages. You have to tell anti-hero Westerns, far less appealing. They have to twist these forms to give a different message, but I think fundamentally these stories are stories of heroic individuals, usually not without flaws dealing with complex things and making choices.

Bill Walton ([09:33](#)):

Brad Pitt refusing to fight as Achilles was-

Michael Pack ([09:37](#)):

That's right.

Bill Walton ([09:37](#)):

This is a very flawed character.

Michael Pack ([09:39](#)):

Yeah. Achilles is a very flawed character. Almost always these characters are flawed. One of my favorite John Ford movies, *The Searchers*, John Wayne is a racist and he pursues Natalie Wood and bring her back from the Indians and attempting to kill her because she's been polluted by the Indians, and it's only through the end that he changes his mind and doesn't do that, but he is so polluted that he cannot rejoin normal society, but he's still a heroic figure, and John Ford extols the traditional society that John Wayne is on the outskirts of. It's a complex view, but one that's affirming of traditional American ideas.

Bill Walton ([10:23](#)):

Well, the problems I have with the modern stories that are told by Hollywood now is that the bad guys and the good guys, they're characterized by their labels and the things they believe like this person believes in climate change, he's a good person.

Michael Pack ([10:39](#)):

Yeah, that's right.

Bill Walton ([10:40](#)):

If he believes or she believes in, oh, I don't know, trans this or trans that, that's a good person if you just ... So if these political positions become the way they develop character and it doesn't develop character at all, well, it says is, well, these are just the tropes that they want to toss out.

Michael Pack ([10:59](#)):

Well, that's right. I mean, Hollywood has become so politicized in a narrow way. There are a lot of Hollywood dramas. The Good Fight, for instance, comes to mind, but there are many where you can really tell who's good or bad just by their political positions.

Bill Walton ([11:13](#)):

Now, you told a story, The Last 600 Meters, and that was a documentary. Did you make that in 2004, 2005?

Michael Pack ([11:21](#)):

We finished, I think, in 2008. It was about battles in Iraq in 2004. Fallujah and Najaf, the biggest battles of the war. We told the story in the words of the people who fought there from privates and corporals up to the one-star generals that were in the field. It was not about whether the war was good or bad. It told the story of these battles through the actions of these men and women. Oddly enough, that is the only film in my entire career that PBS has refused to air even though public broadcasting was its principal funder. CPB was its main funder. They felt that it was too pro-military, that we portrayed these young Marines and Army and Air Force people in too positive of light. They accused me of picking and choosing and using central casting, but I did not. I had to go with the people who actually fought these battles that the military let me film.

([12:20](#)):

So that one has never aired, but I think it's a case in point for how conservatives think. So for PBS that didn't want to air it, it was political in a way they did not like, too pro-military, but when we went around to raise money for it, conservatives said to us, "It doesn't have a clear enough message. It doesn't have a call to action. We're not told whether the war was good or bad. We're not told what to do, so we can't fund it. We would only fund something that was narrowly along the lines that we wanted to do." Whereas for PBS, they saw that it had a point, it was a point they didn't like, but for conservatives, they couldn't sort it out. They wanted me to end the film by saying, "This war is good. You should support George W. Bush or the war is evil," but this was a portrait of what it's like to fight these wars. People like General Mattis that had been in these battles, thought it was one of the best films about war he had ever seen, and true to the ground truth.

Bill Walton ([13:23](#)):

Well, his quote is great. He said, "It's uncaptured by politics ideology. Reveals the most bruising, ethical environment on earth, and the character of the young men that our nation sends in harm's way is infantry." So it-

Michael Pack ([13:39](#)):

Yes. High praise from somebody who knows. We are still struggling to get that released, actually, Bill. We still have it. It has never been released. I feel I owe it to the men and women whose stories I told to get it released. So we're still looking to find a way to give it a broad release. We need to raise some money for promotion and advertising. Maybe we can get it in movie theaters. I think now that the war

in Ukraine has rerouted America's attention on these kind of battles, it might be something to look at now, but these people fight our wars. We need to tell their stories. The stories that came out of Iraq were all hadith and Abu Ghraib.

Bill Walton ([14:22](#)):

Maybe a good time because I feel ... This is The Bill Walton Show. I'm here with Michael Pack, extremely talented documentary filmmaker, and we're talking about what it is to make a good documentary in particular focusing on story rather than ideology. It seems to be what we all respond to, left or right, but you mentioned release. I wanted to get into that because making a thing, and actually, I produced two movies, exec produced a third, and this was 10 years ago. The conventional paradigm was you make this thing and it costs two, three, five million dollars or whatever it takes to make it, and then you have to release it, distribute it, produce it.

([15:12](#)):

The paradigm is you have to get it into theaters, and that's breathtakingly expensive, particularly when you've got to do the ads, the P&A and that sort of thing. The distributor gets a big cut and the movie theaters get 50% of the ticket sales, and by the time you're done, you're wondering, "Why are we doing this?" Then you had the streaming sales or the DVD sales, and that's an art form, I suppose, that can happen. Is that still the paradigm we need to think about?

([15:45](#)):

I mean, if you look at what's happening in the writing world with Substack, where authors are going directly to an audience for paid subscriptions and they're not using, I'll switch industries now, they're not using the brand of a Hollywood company or a distribution company. Instead, it's just one off.

Michael Pack ([16:06](#)):

It's appealing to be able to go direct the consumer like Substack does. I know people in the documentary film business that are trying that model. You mentioned the P&A, the prints and advertising. It's very hard to get people to your site. It helps if you're on Substack, if you have a big reputation, if you're an influencer, if you've already got a big following on social media. It's hard to do with the one-off documentaries. I think at the moment it's still controlled by these big services, Netflix, Amazon, Hulu, HBO. So people I know, those left wing filmmakers that are friends of mine who I think are very talented and successful, they usually have a deal with either a major distributor that's on the left like a participant or Magnolia and/or a contract already in place from an HBO or, say, Amazon. So they don't worry about producing it first and then getting it distributed. That's the tough road to go.

([17:12](#)):

Our model had always been to have a plan on a PBS release. I mean, one reason we were always happy to do that, I'm not sure if it's still possible, is that we want our films to reach the middle of America where I think the battle for the future lies. A lot of conservative films are preached to the choir, an important thing to do. It's not bad, but we need to reach people who are undecided or not sure or confused. The Clarence Thomas film, we hoped the people who watched it were not people who were already Clarence Thomas fans, what's the point of that, but people who wonder and don't know and have their doubts about Anita Hill and remember the hearings or maybe this current news about Clarence Thomas and want to know more.

([17:58](#)):

So those are the people that are important to reach, and PBS still reaches a big national audience. So our film via PBS, few million people, not ... So that's at least a big number and we're able to get that. I hope

that we still can. PBS is really and CPB are obliged by law to reflect the diversity of views in the American people. I think they could do a better job, and NPR surely could do a better job.

Bill Walton ([18:27](#)):

I'm sure they pay a lot of attention to that.

Michael Pack ([18:31](#)):

Right. Well, the law is the law. They can be held to it by members of Congress.

Bill Walton ([18:36](#)):

You'd have to have an energized Congress and energized populists to say, "Look, we really care about the culture," and you look at all the cultural organizations. The president gets to appoint members to each of these cultural groups, and they're all funding these organizations, and you've got not only those cultural groups, you've got the Ford Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, all funding the documentaries on the left. I don't know what the law is, but they certainly don't seem to feel like they've got to have equal opportunities on both sides.

Michael Pack ([19:09](#)):

They do not. So yeah, there's a vast amount of pool. I say in my essay that the left has been spending at least tens of billions of dollars on documentaries alone. You had the bigger number they spend on entertainment all told and have been spending tens of billions since the '60s since the long march of the institutions that you mentioned in your introduction. They're spending tens of billions and have done it for 50 years. On our side, we spend at most tens of millions, a thousand times less. I've been the beneficiary of those tens of millions, so I'm appreciative, but you can't win a battle when the other side is a thousand times bigger. They built up all these institutions and an entire network of things, not even included in the dollar number. Film schools across the country are all essentially educating progressive filmmakers.

Bill Walton ([20:05](#)):

Well, you make the point that every college now has some film school, film department-

Michael Pack ([20:09](#)):

That's right, every single one.

Bill Walton ([20:10](#)):

... and there are almost 4,000 colleges.

Michael Pack ([20:12](#)):

That's right. So how many people are they graduating a year? Something like 200,000 to 400,000 wannabe left wing filmmakers.

Bill Walton ([20:21](#)):

So how many conservative heads of those departments have you met?

Michael Pack ([20:25](#)):

I have never met a single right of center teacher at any film school ever, not a single one. Now, they're very out front many of these places is about wanting their students to go out and be advocates, not just journalists just like in journalism schools, but even more so. So out of those hundreds of thousands of kids, you can cream off the 5% or so that have talent, where there's no funnel for filmmakers on the right. It's the same thing in funding sources.

[\(21:03\)](#):

You were mentioning the left wing foundation. So there's a pool of nonprofit funding for left progressive filmmakers, as you say, Ford and MacArthur and all the others. It's hundreds of millions a year at least. So those people have that funding. We have, again, less than a hundredth of that. So those films can go on PBS or go like our films that are in this nonprofit world and there's a huge pool of for-profit money out in Hollywood for supporting these films and companies that are out front about their wanting to spread progressive messages like Participant started by Jeff Skoll, a billionaire, tech billionaire whose politics are out front.

[\(21:56\)](#):

This is America. Anyone has any right to start a film company with any politics they want. I do not think there's anything evil or wrong about it. I just don't think we're doing it too. Washington is one side to be doing it. Everyone has a right to make films that express their views. The problem is that all the views are expressed are all similar. We need to do that too.

Bill Walton ([22:17](#)):

It strikes me there's a big opportunity.

Michael Pack ([22:19](#)):

It's a huge opportunity. I sometimes say it's a little bit analogous to Fox News, the beginning of Fox News where supposedly Roger Ailes and Rupert Murdoch said, "Well, if we do a right of center news organization, the others will split the left of center audience and we'll have the other half of the country, the right of center, all to ourselves." It's like that in the entertainment documentary world. It's all on one side. Conservatively speaking, a third to half of the country do not have those values. So yes, there's a huge underserved audience, enormous.

Bill Walton ([22:59](#)):

Well, we need to figure out a way to get ... As I said, I've made a couple of movies and it's expensive, but it's fun.

Michael Pack ([23:09](#)):

It's fun. It's really fun.

Bill Walton ([23:11](#)):

It's fun.

Michael Pack ([23:11](#)):

It's more fun than politics. I don't know why-

Bill Walton ([23:13](#)):

It's a lot more fun than politics.

Michael Pack ([23:15](#)):

I don't know why conservatives veer to that.

Bill Walton ([23:16](#)):

The actors are all pretty good-looking and the creatives are fun to work with and it's nice to be on a movie set. I think somehow we got to ... That's part of the reason I wanted to chat with you about this. I think we need to convey that this is not taking your castor oil.

Michael Pack ([23:32](#)):

That's right. It's the opposite. That's right. It's putting away your castor oil and having a glass of champagne.

Bill Walton ([23:38](#)):

Like Kenny, he's our director, he'd be happy to make a film with us. Okay. All right. So we've got this overwhelming monopoly and there's very few chinks in the armor we need to figure out. I think the key, as you think, is great, great story-

Michael Pack ([23:55](#)):

It is. It is the key.

Bill Walton ([23:56](#)):

... and getting that out and getting people excited about funding it. How do we-

Michael Pack ([24:00](#)):

One thing that we're doing that is a small effort in that direction is we have launched a new company, Palladium Pictures, to do long form documentaries like the Clarence Thomas film, but also, we're starting an incubator run by my son Thomas that will train libertarian conservative right of center filmmakers that since, as we said, there are so few and no film schools cater to them. So we're going to give grants-

Bill Walton ([24:29](#)):

Where's it based?

Michael Pack ([24:30](#)):

It's based here in the DC area.

Bill Walton ([24:33](#)):

In DC area, okay.

Michael Pack ([24:33](#)):

We'll have info about it on our website, palladianpictures.com, in a month or two. So viewers will have to write it down and remember, but we're going to give grants to young filmmakers to make short films,

five or 10 minute films. They'll have to apply. They'll have to have done something so they're not just at a film school, prove that they can do it, and have an idea, a story idea with a hook. My wife and I who run the company will executive produce and make sure it adheres to our standards and follows our-

Bill Walton ([25:10](#)):

What's an example of a hook?

Michael Pack ([25:12](#)):

Well, I mean, a hook would be-

Bill Walton ([25:14](#)):

Because we don't want to be pedantic, but how do you decide this is a good song or this is a good movie or concept?

Michael Pack ([25:22](#)):

By that I mean only you have to have more than just a story. You have to be able to make the credible case that you can tell it. For example, in the Clarence Thomas film, it's not just that I had the idea of telling Clarence Thomas' story, I was able to get Clarence Thomas to agree to tell it. So I had that asset, you might say by the end. The Last 600 Meters, the other one we discussed, the one about the war in Iraq, I had already found, for instance, this guy, Lucian Reed, who was a brilliant still photographer, who had great photographs of these battles and was willing to license them to me. I mean, I had some of the film assets that you need to put the film together. It can't just be a great idea. I mean, that's the difference between writing a book where all you need is the great idea and a film.

Bill Walton ([26:24](#)):

What do you need to assemble? When you're sitting there you think, "I've got a concept for this." You did Alexander Hamilton, you did George Washington.

Michael Pack ([26:33](#)):

Yeah, that's right.

Bill Walton ([26:34](#)):

What did you say? "Okay, I want to tell this story." What were the elements that you wanted to ... because I want this also to be a how-to show. So for all you at home wanting to get in the film business, this is the man to learn from.

Michael Pack ([26:47](#)):

Well, in documentaries, once you start having a film, you have to deal with the problems that that film an approach puts before you, and if you haven't done that, then you're not a filmmaker. Like the Hamilton and Washington film, who cares about a new film about Hamilton and Washington? They're vastly covered. So it's unlike The Last 600 Meters or Clarence Thomas. So we needed to come up with an approach that was different, and we did. Our approach was to not only have a bunch of professors and academics tell the story or have a bunch of dramatic recreations, but try to look for the reflection of that person in the present. So when we did the Hamilton film, we made that film in 2008. As you well know, Bill, the world was undergoing a financial crisis.

Bill Walton ([27:36](#)):

I do remember I wasn't paying attention to movies at the time.

Michael Pack ([27:39](#)):

Yeah, that's right, that's right.

Bill Walton ([27:42](#)):

I was thinking about the capital markets melting down.

Michael Pack ([27:45](#)):

So Hamilton dealt with the first financial crisis in the 1790s. So we went to the then treasury secretary, Hank Paulson, and asked him what he thought of Hamilton's handling of the crisis in 1790.

Bill Walton ([27:56](#)):

US Bank in 2008?

Michael Pack ([27:59](#)):

Yes, and then we asked him what did he think Hamilton would think of the way he was handling the current crisis, and another one that we did was we-

Bill Walton ([28:09](#)):

Is that in the film? I haven't that. Okay.

Michael Pack ([28:09](#)):

In the film, in the film, and then Hamilton, as you know, died in a duel over honor. So we thought, who today has gun fights over honor or fights over honor? So we talked to former gang members who had been in gun fights over their honor and asked them what they thought of the Hamilton-Burr duel and-

Bill Walton ([28:27](#)):

Oh, that's interesting.

Michael Pack ([28:28](#)):

... would they do the same thing, and every last one of them ... I mean, most of us think, "Oh, dueling, that's so stupid," but this was not their point of view. Once Burr dissed them, Hamilton had to fight. They thought, "For sure." There was no question. The thing they thought was crazy was actually Hamilton, due to his Christian beliefs, fired in the air, wasted his shot. That they thought, "Insane."

Bill Walton ([28:52](#)):

You don't do that.

Michael Pack ([28:53](#)):

You do not do that. So they had their perspective. Hank Paulson had his perspective. It's a film where we interviewed Rupert Murdoch, we interviewed Gore Vidal, we interviewed Larry Flint, people not ordinarily brought together in one film, and surely not on PBS. So we had a unique approach. We had a

unique approach. Otherwise, why do another film about Hamilton or Washington? We want to do another one in that series on Thomas Jefferson who is really under attack today from the left and the right. The whole idea, the enlightenment value, is that he-

Bill Walton ([29:28](#)):

That's called Rediscovering Alexander Hamilton or George-

Michael Pack ([29:32](#)):

Yes. They're all rediscovered, Rediscovering George Washington, Rediscovering Alexander Hamilton, and now we want to do rediscovering Thomas Jefferson.

Bill Walton ([29:39](#)):

So that's on the to-do list.

Michael Pack ([29:40](#)):

On the to-do list because, I mean, it's not just that he's under attack for being a slave owner and having an affair with Sally Hemmings and father and children, but the declaration itself, his greatest single achievement, is under attack. Do we really believe all men are created equal, and what do we mean by that? Should statues of Thomas Jefferson be allowed? Should UVA still honor him? I mean, he's under attack. The founding is under attack. Is he a flawed man? I'm personally more of a federalist, a Hamiltonian than a Jeffersonian, but I think he's a great man and wrote the single greatest political document in American history, the Declaration of Independence. It's time to look at them. We're coming up the 250th anniversary of the Declaration. We hope to tell that story in the mode of these other two stories, not just another biopic of Jefferson. So that's the idea of ... So we have something else other than just to tell his story. We have an angle into it.

Bill Walton ([30:39](#)):

So I worry about our monuments in Washington. I mean, you look at the Jefferson Memorial, I mean, it's vulnerable.

Michael Pack ([30:48](#)):

It is. It is.

Bill Walton ([30:50](#)):

Well, that's the French Revolution. We did a show with Stella Morabito called The Weaponization of Loneliness, which is interesting. She harkens back to how the totalitarian regime, somebody wants to control society, begins by destroying its symbols and its heroes and rewrites its history and it's a matter of isolation, and they all have that in common. I mean, the French Revolution, Robespierre, they toppled thousands of statues. They took over the Notre Dame Cathedral and turned it into the Temple of Reason, but then for those of us who don't lose hope because the French Revolution had something called the Thermidor, at which point the French decided this was not a good idea and they rose up against it. Maybe our filmmaker could be part of that Thermidor.

Michael Pack ([31:44](#)):

Maybe. They don't want to have another Napoleon exactly.

Bill Walton ([31:47](#)):

That didn't work out too well.

Michael Pack ([31:50](#)):

That didn't work out too well either, but yeah, I'm not a good predictor of the future. Other people specialize in that, but it's hard to believe that the progressive woke movement further and further left can go on forever, and I hope it can't.

Bill Walton ([32:04](#)):

Coming back to our issue, we got the incubator and you have funding for that, is that-

Michael Pack ([32:09](#)):

Yes, we have funding for that.

Bill Walton ([32:11](#)):

So if I'm a young filmmaker, want to be filmmaker, we find you on the website. You have to move to Washington to make a movie? You can make it any place you want?

Michael Pack ([32:21](#)):

We're thinking we'd focus on the United States, but yes, anywhere in the United States.

Bill Walton ([32:26](#)):

So the production value, the cost though, I mean, with iPhones and that sort of thing, it seems like the barriers to make a film are not nearly as high as they used to be.

Michael Pack ([32:35](#)):

In a way that's true, although when it comes time to shoot a film, it's like writing. It's not as if the cost of pens are high or even laptops are high. It's the ability to write is rare. When it comes time to hire a cameraman, the ones that have a great eye and can shoot are rare too. So it's not as if ... Surely, the barriers are lower. So we will fund these films probably up to \$25,000, not that much, but we think we'll go to people who already have small production companies and are trying to move up and have done maybe-

Bill Walton ([33:11](#)):

I don't want to dig too deeply into the craft, but I do. What's a good cameraman look for because you've worked with dozens now?

Michael Pack ([33:23](#)):

I've worked with a lot. There are never that many. There are hundreds of people who can have equipment and can shoot them and know how to use them technically, but we have the ... Depending on what you're shooting, you need a different kind of cameraman. For example, I think our cameraman, James Callanan did a great job in the Clarence Thomas film. The film is based on that long interview with Justice Thomas, who looks right in the camera and tells his story. So most of the film is him talking. So James did a great job of lighting it and making it look good and he has a brilliant eye and it took a lot of

equipment to make him look good. We rented a studio here and he did a great job with the recreations that we shot too, the boat going through the marshes.

[\(34:16\)](#):

Other cameramen that I've worked with are great at cinema verite, at following people around. For instance, we did a documentary where we followed Newt Gingrich around in 1998 from when he started his speaker, impeached the president, lost seats in the midterm, resign.

Bill Walton [\(34:32\)](#):

That must have been frenetic.

Michael Pack [\(34:34\)](#):

It was frenetic. I am internally grateful for Newt for not kicking us out and letting us keep filming. It was a difficult time for him, but he let us shoot, but that cameraman knew ... We're moving around with Newt in a big crowd and we're only the ones following him. The other news people are huddling of elsewhere, but he knew where Newt was going to go. He was ready where Newt was moving to before Newt got there so he could shoot Newt approaching. I can't really do that. I don't have this kinesthetic sense of bodies in motion. I mean, I was always right behind it, and he was ahead or he'd be in another spot where the angle was good ahead of time. He's thinking ahead.

[\(35:22\)](#):

So that's a different kind of cameraman, not like a traditional Hollywood cameraman where the sets are all ... You have plenty of time. You're in control of everything. That's a cameraman that knows how to follow action where you're not in control, and that's an instinct, and you have to have a sound person who's with the cameraman and figures out when to be with the cameraman or when to be with Newt because if you want to get Newt talking, so you have to be with Newt, so you can't actually be with the cameraman, but you can't be in the frame if you're a soundman. You can't have your boom in the frame. So these guys-

Bill Walton [\(35:57\)](#):

You remember the old movies from the '30s where they had the microphone dipping down?

Michael Pack [\(36:01\)](#):

Yeah, that's right.

Bill Walton [\(36:03\)](#):

They hid the microphone in the bush next to the lovers.

Michael Pack [\(36:07\)](#):

It can still happen.

Bill Walton [\(36:09\)](#):

I am digging dip because I have spent some time in the business and the sound person, soundman, whatever, what are the characteristics of a good one of those-

Michael Pack [\(36:20\)](#):

Well, for that and a very good one-

Bill Walton ([36:21](#)):

... because I think of sound is one of the most important.

Michael Pack ([36:24](#)):

Sound is really important, and documentary filmmakers traditionally neglect sound even though in documentaries especially sound is more important. In the Clarence Thomas interview, although I think James did a great job lighting it, if you couldn't hear Clarence Thomas talking, what would be the point of the interview? So yes, sound is hard. It depends again on the kind of filming, but sound people need to know when to tell the director that, "The sound is so bad. You've got to find a way to redo it," even at the cost of stopping the action. That's a tricky thing.

([37:03](#)):

As I say, when they're following action, they have to follow the action from an audio point of view and know where the cameraman is. So they have to be unobtrusive too. They can't be in your face. They have to have a good array of mics and know which mic to pick. What can be picked up later in post-production, you can add a lot of sound in a way even easier than you can with picture later-

Bill Walton ([37:34](#)):

Post-production is so much fun.

Michael Pack ([37:35](#)):

Post-production is a lot of fun.

Bill Walton ([37:37](#)):

Adding the sound.

Michael Pack ([37:38](#)):

Yeah, right. You can always do that, sound effects.

Bill Walton ([37:41](#)):

I'm going so geek here. What about the editing?

Michael Pack ([37:46](#)):

So I think editing maybe in documentaries-

Bill Walton ([37:48](#)):

Because I've heard few people get a chance to talk to a filmmaker about how they actually do it. So that's why I'm wandering into this-

Michael Pack ([37:57](#)):

I think editor, most important of all jobs in documentaries, and it's very hard ... This goes to the earlier themes we were talking about earlier. So it's not hard to learn how to use editing software. Most people can learn in about a week or so, avid or premiere or the standard ones, but knowing how to cut and how

to structure a film is challenging. It's particularly hard in a two-hour film or a mini-series. So people who've cut a lot of five-minute pieces don't really know how to cut longer ones. People on our side aren't really trained in that. So the great documentary editors are very progressive woke people. They're the ones that have done it. They're the ones that have edited academy award-winning documentaries. They're the ones that have done a lot of long form. So it's very hard. In my life, I've only found maybe two editors that you could call right of center out of the maybe a hundred or so I've met. It's pretty rare, and they try to hide it or how come they have to keep working-

Bill Walton ([39:02](#)):

Well, it's good. There's big career risk.

Michael Pack ([39:04](#)):

Big career risks, and they have to keep ... They're gig workers, so there's no career in only editing right of center film so they have to be able to work for regular ABC, NBC, HBO, as well as for us, but it's challenging and it depends what different directors ask editors to do. I do not believe that editors can structure a piece, which is often what they say they do. It's the director's job to do that, but the editor has to give it shape. They have to realize that vision and pick shots. In the case of the-

Bill Walton ([39:46](#)):

So you spent a lot of time sitting next to the editors.

Michael Pack ([39:50](#)):

It took over a year to edit the Clarence Thomas film and the editor who was in New York, I'm in DC, I went to New York for one week a month and she came to DC for one week a month. So for two weeks out of the four, I was sitting with her and when I wasn't, I was sending her notes every day, but they have to have a memory of all this footage. Unlike with feature films, you have this huge, huge amount of footage, usually in films hundreds of hours, and so they know what's there in a way that even I do not know what's there. So they have to have that sense of what to get and where to find it or even what else is out there, what other solutions to problems that you have in the structure or in the flow of the film.

([40:40](#)):

Another key thing, and this is related to the story theme, is the rhythm and pacing. Stories need to have a pace. I believe Ken Burns is a great filmmaker. I like many of his films. I think his films have a pacing problem. They're all the same pace. They're all like this, flat. They don't rise to climaxes, they don't descend. You could come in at any time and it's moving along. I mean, that's his style, and obviously, it works for him. He gets a big audience, but I believe you need to build to a climax and go down and then build up. I think the audience needs that kind of rhythm. So that's a story related thing, rhythm, that is less needed if you're writing an essay or not doing a story.

([41:28](#)):

So with the Clarence Thomas film, we had to decide what were the peaks where we were going to spend a lot of time and how would the music clue the audiences in to where you were in the peaks and how to pace the editing. I'm going back to the editing, how to make the editing pacing clue people in to that rhythm too.

Bill Walton ([41:50](#)):

Well, there's a famous story about Alfred Hitchcock where he said, "Let me explain editing to you and how this reaction shots work," and he said, "Let's imagine there's a picture of Carey Grant staring at a window in an apartment building down in a park, and there's Carey Grant smiling," and he then cut to a picture of a young woman treating her baby very well, and then cut back to Gary or Carey and he's smiling, same shot of Carey, and then instead you cut to a nanny abusing the baby and doing all sorts of terrible things. You cut back to Gary smiling. All of a sudden you've got a villain. That's the kind of thing you're talking about. The way you get reaction shots and the way you build a scene with that editing, I don't think people are really conscious.

Michael Pack ([42:47](#)):

That's right. So there are a lot of manipulative techniques in film and in documentaries, editing, music, where the audience doesn't know that they're being led, where they do with very sententious, over the top narration. I mean, that's the crudest way to lead people, but yes, there are ways to do that. I mean, in editing, you want to move the story, but you have to also be ... In documentaries, you have to be true to the reality. I mean, if Carey Grant really like this baby, it wouldn't be fair to do the cut where he's smiling and-

Bill Walton ([43:27](#)):

It was Alfred Hitchcock's story, not mine.

Michael Pack ([43:29](#)):

Sure, sure, but he doesn't-

Bill Walton ([43:30](#)):

He cast him in six films. So he-

Michael Pack ([43:34](#)):

He's great in those Hitchcock films, but I mean, he, Hitchcock, can say whatever he wants about a Carey Grant character. He isn't limited by reality, but we-

Bill Walton ([43:45](#)):

But you are.

Michael Pack ([43:45](#)):

... documentary makers are.

Bill Walton ([43:47](#)):

So I hope everybody finds this as interesting as I do, but very rarely do you get to talk to an artist about how they actually make their craft. I think that's one of the things that's missing. When you go to a museum, for example, you see a great painting and I don't really want to know the story of the person who made the painting. I want to know how they made it. That's, I think, interesting. So the incubator you're starting will be a place where people can learn the deeper aspects of making this.

Michael Pack ([44:15](#)):

That's correct. That's right.

Bill Walton ([44:15](#)):

It's unappreciated. The thing I want to emphasize is let's forget about art, although let's not. Let's forget about politics, although let's not. There's a lot of money in this business if you do it right.

Michael Pack ([44:29](#)):

That's true.

Bill Walton ([44:29](#)):

There are billions of dollars are going into this. Silver Lake Partners is one of the big private equity firms. They just put 500 million dollars with Shadow Box Studios to build sound stages and they're building ... I don't know how many of them. I think they've got 40, 65 sound stages they're building around the country, and it's not just in Hollywood, it's in Atlanta. All these states have got some film production incentives. So the ability to take advantage of a more professional setting with all the equipment and the talent that comes with that, it's growing.

Michael Pack ([45:09](#)):

It is growing, and it is definitely getting more dispersed around the country too, absolutely. A lot of creatives, even in Hollywood are fleeing California for obvious reasons for one thing.

Bill Walton ([45:23](#)):

So where would the new Hollywood be? We've already got New York, Toronto, Atlanta.

Michael Pack ([45:28](#)):

I don't know. I mean, there's Nashville, there's Texas, there's Florida. I mean-

Bill Walton ([45:35](#)):

The larger point, this is not something you got to go to Los Angeles to do. You can do it from a lot of other places.

Michael Pack ([45:41](#)):

That's true. The thing that I think progressives have in Los Angeles is a community of similarly thinking people, which is a great asset if you're already woke and progressive. There is no such thing on the right, but not all artistic-

Bill Walton ([45:59](#)):

So there's our opportunity. We need to figure out a place where we can develop a critical mass of like-minded filmmakers.

Michael Pack ([46:06](#)):

Indeed. That's right. I think that it would be a potential magnet to them. That is really true.

Bill Walton ([46:11](#)):

Of course, you live in Chevy Chase. I don't quite see that happening in a Chevy Chase.

Michael Pack ([46:15](#)):

I don't either. I do not either. We stand out in Chevy Chase.

Bill Walton ([46:20](#)):

So I've wandered us into the weeds on this. Help me out. Let's get into the big picture of that Michael Pack and what you're doing now and what we ought to do next to see really high quality stories being told as documentaries.

Michael Pack ([46:34](#)):

Well, we are continuing to make these long form documentaries and we have the incubator. We hope to do the re-release or release The Last 600 Meters, but I think the big picture is I would like to see people who share our values be more engaged in culture. As you said in the introduction, I think it's true and we said earlier, it's a winnable battle.

Bill Walton ([46:59](#)):

It is.

Michael Pack ([47:00](#)):

As you say, it's a fun battle, but it's winnable, but it isn't winnable if you don't put the time, money, energy, and creativity in it. I've gone to so many conservative events where they talk only about politics and business. I went to one where I said, "Well, why don't you do something on culture?" and this group well known to all of us said, "Well, we did that five years ago, so we took care of it," but-

Bill Walton ([47:22](#)):

We did a panel on that, 1953.

Michael Pack ([47:22](#)):

Yeah, we had a panel on that. We have to take it seriously. We have to celebrate the creatives on our side, which we don't do very much. Left does that endlessly to their credit. I mean, a lot of it really is simply doing what the left does on our side, and I'm not saying there's anything wrong with what they're doing. It's a free market and they're utilizing it for their beliefs as they should. We need to take a page from them in many, many of these areas. I think if there is more of a group, a concerted effort, it's easier to do things. It's very hard to do one film at a time as you, your own story-

Bill Walton ([48:04](#)):

Oh, it's very tough.

Michael Pack ([48:05](#)):

If you have a whole ecosystem with distributors and specialty distributors and exhibitors and talent agencies and distribution companies and production companies, if there's an entire network of them, it's easier. Then if you have a distributor who's representing 12 excellent films that are of a conservative sort, it's a lot easier than selling one at a time. It's crazy to sell one at a time. It's very hard. So we would benefit from bigger effort. I mean, it would grow, it would snowball. It would not be linear.

[\(48:43\)](#):

As we just said a few minutes ago, even just a community of like thinking people would help that would feed off each other. We really need, as a movement, even though it's a very loose and contentious movement, but as a movement, we need to be engaged in culture as we are in politics, as we are in business, as we are in economics, as we are in law. We need to do it in culture and we need to do it in a big enough way, not on a ... Look, I do what I can do, but I'm only a small company. We need to do it in a way bigger way to scale.

Bill Walton ([49:23](#)):

This has been The Bill Walton Show and I thank you for indulging me in my fascination with the movie business, talking with the great, great filmmaker Michael Pack, who's also got a long biography of other things like actually being president of the Claremont Institute and a few other things like that along the way, but I hope you've enjoyed this conversation with Michael because we do really need to think about culture and we need to think about getting to scale and we need to think about telling stories and it's totally within our grasp.

([49:55](#)):

Maybe the most important takeaway ought to be having been involved in this a little bit, it's a lot of fun, storytelling, interesting people, interesting things. It's right up anyone's alley who's got a bent for it. So if you're so inclined, Michael, where will we find you?

Michael Pack ([50:10](#)):

Well, you can go to palladiumpictures.com, which is our website, still under construction. For our older films, you can go to manifoldproductions.com, [M-A-N-I-F-O-L-D productions dot com](http://M-A-N-I-F-O-L-D-productions.com), and my Twitter feed to see my various articles on this is [MichaelPack_](#) or [@MichaelPack_](#).

Bill Walton ([50:30](#)):

Okay. Well, thanks for joining, and as always, you can find us in all the major podcasts and other platforms, Rumble, YouTube. We're on Substack and we're on CPAC now on Monday nights and we'll be adding some other platforms for distribution. So send us your ideas about stories you'd like to hear us tell or people you'd like us to chat with, and we'll work on those. So thanks. This has been The Bill Walton Show, and see you soon.

([50:57](#)):

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