

JANE ELLIOTT AGAINST THE WORLD

Sundance AP Style Logline

Jane Elliott Against the World / U.S.A. (Director and Producer: Judd Ehrlich, Producers: Max Powers, Elena Gaby) — A rural Iowa schoolteacher becomes a national voice against racism after leading a controversial 1968 lesson in discrimination with her all-white third-grade class. Now nearly 90, she refuses to hold back amid today's fights about race, history, and power after a lifetime of speaking out. World Premiere. Documentary. Available online for Public.

350 character version

In *Jane Elliott Against the World*, a rural Iowa, USA schoolteacher becomes a national voice against racism after leading a controversial 1968 lesson in discrimination with her all-white third-grade class. Now nearly 90, she refuses to hold back amid today's fights about race, history, and power after a lifetime of speaking out.

Synopsis

For more than fifty-five years, Jane Elliott has forced white America to confront truths it still tries to deny. She does not want your admiration. She wants your courage.

Best known for the Blue Eyes Brown Eyes lesson in discrimination she led the day after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, Elliott has never stopped exposing how power divides, how silence sustains it and how easily “good people” look away. Raised poor in a small Iowa farming town, she became a lightning rod, a white woman speaking directly to other white people about racism, power and responsibility.

Approaching 90, Elliott remains as sharp, candid and relentless as ever. She is banned from schools across the country, yet her influence and her warnings are impossible to erase. Today she is on the front lines of the culture wars in Temecula, California, where her great-grandchild attends school and a board seized by white Christian nationalists is banning books, erasing history and fueling a wave of censorship that includes her own lessons. The battles she warned about decades ago are now playing out in real time.

The film features students who lived through her early classroom exercise and appeared in seminal documentaries, reflecting on the lasting impact and controversy of her methods. Alongside them, voices like Killer Mike and Ibram X. Kendi examine what Elliott's work reveals about power, complicity and the urgency of this moment.

With unprecedented access to her life, family and archives, JANE ELLIOTT AGAINST THE WORLD follows her journey from a third-grade classroom to the heart of a national crisis. This is not a historical portrait. It is a challenge. Elliott knows she will not be here forever. She has lived long enough to see the past repeat and to ask who will carry the fight forward.

1000 Character Version

For more than fifty-five years, Jane Elliott has forced white America to confront truths it still tries to deny. Best known for the Blue Eyes Brown Eyes lesson in discrimination she led in rural Iowa the day after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, Elliott has never stopped exposing how power divides, how silence sustains it and how easily “good people” look away.

Approaching 90, Elliott remains as relentless as ever. Today she is on the front lines of the culture wars in Temecula, California, where her grandchildren attended school and a board seized by white Christian nationalists is banning books and fueling a wave of censorship that includes banning her own lessons.

With unprecedented access to her life, family and archives, JANE ELLIOTT AGAINST THE WORLD follows her journey from a third-grade classroom to the heart of a national crisis. Elliott has lived long enough to see the past repeat and to ask who will carry the fight forward.

Director's Statement

I first saw Jane Elliott as a teenager, watching The Oprah Winfrey Show from my childhood home in Lower Manhattan. I had never seen a white person speak so directly to other white people about racism. Later, in a college psychology class, I studied her Blue Eyes Brown Eyes exercise and began to understand its impact in a different way. When she went viral again in 2020, after the murder of George Floyd, something clicked. I reached out, not expecting a reply. She responded right away.

Over the past several years, I have sat across from Jane in her living room, traveled with her and witnessed her fire up close. She is exactly who she appears to be, sharp, uncompromising and completely uninterested in being liked. She is also funny, generous and deeply human. She trusted me with her story, her family and her personal archive. I have tried to honor that trust by making a film that does not look away.

As a Jewish filmmaker drawn to stories that confront injustice, I was struck by Jane's clarity. Born in 1933, the year Hitler came to power, she grew up hearing her father condemn the Nazis while holding racist beliefs at home. This contradiction stayed with her. She saw early on how easily people can be manipulated through fear and propaganda and how quickly a community can turn against “the other” based on something as arbitrary as eye color. She built her life's work on that realization.

This film is not just about where Jane has been. It is about where she still is. She is banned from schools across America, yet refuses to retreat. She stands on the front lines of school board fights, including in Temecula, California, where white Christian nationalists are erasing history in the very district where her grandchildren went to school and where her great-grandchild now sits in the classroom. For Jane, these battles are deeply personal. She challenges young activists, calls out liberal complacency and demands clarity in a moment shaped by backlash.

The film also captures a woman reckoning with time. Jane knows she will not be here forever. Confronted with her own mortality and the bonds of family, she continues to provoke, inspire and demand more from all of us. She remains a singular voice, blunt, polarizing and fearless.

Jane does not want to be celebrated. She wants people to act. This film calls for nothing less.

CREW BIOS

Judd Ehrlich, Director and Producer

Judd Ehrlich is a Grand Clio, Cannes Lion, and Emmy Award-winning filmmaker praised by The New York Times as a director who “clearly knows his craft” and by AOL for having “mastered the art of exposing compelling and honest stories.” Born and raised in New York City, Ehrlich worked as a caseworker before turning to filmmaking.

Ehrlich is known for intimate, character-driven documentaries that sit at the intersection of social impact and cinematic storytelling. His process is grounded in trust and proximity: he earns access, stays close to his subjects, and shapes stories with urgency and emotional precision. His work is part of the U.S. Department of State’s American Film Showcase, using documentary as a tool for cross-cultural dialogue around the world.

His latest feature documentary, JANE ELLIOTT AGAINST THE WORLD, will have its world premiere at the 2026 Sundance Film Festival. With rare access, the film follows legendary educator Jane Elliott as she remains relentless in her fight against racism while America’s battles over truth, history, and power escalate.

Ehrlich’s films have screened at major festivals and reached wide audiences across broadcast and streaming. THE PRICE OF FREEDOM premiered at Tribeca and launched as a nationwide cinema event in 350-plus theaters. KEEPERS OF THE GAME earned Emmy and Critics Choice nominations and won a Cannes Lion. WE COULD BE KING won the Emmy Award for Outstanding Sports Documentary, as well as a Grand Clio. His films and series have aired on HBO, PBS, ABC, CNN, ESPN, Paramount+, and The CW, among other outlets.

Ehrlich produced REMAINING NATIVE, a Sundance Institute-supported film and a Special Jury Award and Audience Award winner at SXSW. He recently executive produced Paul Schrader’s OH, CANADA, which premiered at Cannes, and Takeshi Fukunaga’s AINU MOSIR, an award-winner at Tribeca, distributed by Ava DuVernay’s ARRAY. Ehrlich leads Flatbush Pictures, the production company he co-founded with the late cinematographer Ryo Murakami, and lives with his family in Brooklyn, New York.

Max Powers, Producer and Editor

Max Powers is a director, producer, and editor specializing in documentary filmmaking. His latest feature, *JANE ELLIOTT AGAINST THE WORLD*, which he produced and edited, will have its world premiere at the 2026 Sundance Film Festival. Previously, he directed the feature documentary *DON'T BE NICE*, which follows a team of New York City slam poets as they compete for a national championship. His editing credits include *THE PRICE OF FREEDOM* (CNN Films), which premiered at Tribeca in 2021 and examines the NRA's rise as a political force, as well as *SET APART: THE JIM ABBOTT STORY*, among others. With a background rooted in editing, Powers is known for shaping character-driven stories with clarity, momentum, and emotional precision. He is a graduate of Vassar College and resides in Santa Monica, California.

Elena Gaby, Producer

Elena Gaby is a Peabody Award-winning documentary filmmaker and proud toddler mom. Her latest documentary feature, *JANE ELLIOTT AGAINST THE WORLD*, will have its world premiere at the 2026 Sundance Film Festival and marks her second collaboration with director and producer Judd Ehrlich, following *THE PRICE OF FREEDOM* (CNN Films), which chronicled the NRA's evolution into a political force.

Previously, Gaby traveled the world producing for the Emmy and Peabody Award-winning National Geographic series *PHOTOGRAPHER*, created by Academy Award winners Jimmy Chin and Chai Vasarhelyi and showrunner Pagan Harleman.

As a director, her first short film, made while she was a student at Vassar College, explored undocumented students seeking higher education and went on to the Cannes Film Festival, where it won Best Student Documentary at the American Pavilion. Her feature directorial debut, *I AM HUMAN* (co-directed with Taryn Southern), premiered at Tribeca and won multiple awards internationally, including Best Director at the Oslo Film Festival. A trilingual Brazilian American New Yorker, Gaby has spoken twice at the Conference on World Affairs in Boulder, Colorado. In 2024, after becoming a mother, she began sharing short personal videos online (@elenagaby_), an exploration of new mediums that led to her role as video producer for Humans of New York's artistic takeover of Grand Central Terminal in 2025. The videos garnered millions of views in just a few days.

Khari Mateen, Composer

Khari Mateen is a composer, producer, and multi-instrumentalist whose work spans film, television, and recorded music, often at the intersection of culture, social impact, and storytelling. Originally from Bakersfield, California, Mateen moved to Philadelphia at 17, where he began his professional career immersed in a close-knit creative community. His early music credits include work on The Roots' *GAME THEORY* (Grammy-nominated), followed by *RISING DOWN* and the Grammy-nominated *UNDUN*. He has since collaborated with artists including Jill Scott, James Poyser, J*Davey, Son Little, and many more.

A versatile performer, Mateen sings and plays cello, bass, guitar, and drums. He has toured internationally as a band member and musical director, including serving as musical director for Cody Simpson. Alongside his work for film and television, he has released four solo albums and a collaborative album with Atlanta rapper STS.

Mateen began composing for film and television in 2008 with his first feature, EXPLICIT ILLS, and went on to collaborate with Emmy-winning producer Marc Levin on the Peabody Award-winning Sundance TV series BRICK CITY. Since then, he has scored films and series for major networks and platforms including ESPN, HBO, Showtime, Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV+, CNN, and YouTube Originals.

His most recent project is the feature documentary JANE ELLIOTT AGAINST THE WORLD, which will have its world premiere at the 2026 Sundance Film Festival.

Peter Eliot Buntaine, Cinematographer

Cinematographer Peter Eliot Buntaine's award-winning film and advertising work has earned the Emmy, Cannes Lion, and Grand Clio, among other prizes and nominations. His films have played in theaters and at festivals around the world, including Sundance and Directors' Fortnight at Cannes. He has conducted cinematography workshops at institutions including the Tribeca Film Fellowship, New York University, and The New School. He also curates screenings of avant-garde and documentary cinema.

Sean Hanley, Cinematographer

Sean Hanley is a documentary cinematographer whose recent credits include Debra Granik's forthcoming series CONBODY VS. EVERYBODY (2024, Sundance) and Jay Arthur Sterrenberg and Kelly Anderson's EMERGENT CITY (2024, Tribeca, PBS). His work has premiered at the Museum of Modern Art, BAMcinemaFest, and the Camden International Film Festival, among others. It can be seen online through The New York Times Op-Docs, The Criterion Channel, and MUBI. He serves on the Membership Committee of the Documentary Cinematographers Alliance.

Leah Goudsmit, Editor

Leah Goudsmit is a documentary editor known for blending social themes with a commercial visual style, with a strong focus on structure and story. Her recent work includes INFINITE CANVAS (2020), a feature on augmented reality artists produced by Apple; THE PRICE OF FREEDOM (2021), a documentary on the NRA that premiered at Tribeca and aired on CNN and HBO Max; and LUCHA: A WRESTLING TALE (2023), which won the Metropolis competition at DOC NYC. In 2024, she edited XCLD: THE STORY OF CANCEL CULTURE, directed by Ferne Pearlstein and produced by Trevor Noah, which aired on MSNBC. Her latest feature documentary, ASK E. JEAN, premiered at the Telluride Film Festival and won Best

Documentary at the Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival. Her most recent docuseries work includes HIGH HORSE: THE BLACK COWBOY, produced by Jordan Peele, now streaming on Peacock.

Albin Pepe, Editor

Albin Pepe is a Paraguayan-born, Long Island-raised, New York-based film director, photographer, and musician. He has edited films for Flatbush Pictures, HBO Max, Tribeca Studios, Uninterrupted, New Balance, The CW, and The Atlantic Philanthropies. His creative work has been highlighted by The Alston Pudding, Post-Trash, and The Noise. In 2023, he wrote, crowdfunded, and directed his short film CHESSBOXER, which won Best Georgia Short at the Athens Film Festival and was a semifinalist at the Rhode Island International Film Festival. He holds a BA from Vassar College and an MFA from the University of Georgia, where he also taught screenwriting.

Frauke Levin, Archival Producer

Frauke Levin is an Emmy-nominated documentary researcher and producer. A German native, she has worked on films focused on US and German history, politics, and science for PBS, HBO, National Geographic, and others for more than 15 years. Since 2015, she has worked as an archival producer on numerous documentary productions for PBS, HBO Max, CNN, and independent films, including THE PRICE OF FREEDOM (Tribeca 2021), a film about the history of the NRA; AGAINST ALL ENEMIES (Tribeca 2023), a documentary about the involvement of former military members in recent and past insurrection efforts in the US; and DROP DEAD CITY (DOC NYC 2024), which tells the inside story of New York City's near-bankruptcy in the 1970s. Most recently, she was the archival producer on the Taylor Swift documentary series THE END OF AN ERA, streaming on Disney+. She lives with her family in Philadelphia.