

**ACTION in THREE ACTS**  
**Camden International Film Festival Remarks by Carrie Lozano**

*The below text represents Carrie Lozano's prepared remarks for a Town Hall convening organized by the Shorenstein Center's Documentary Film in the Public Interest Initiative, Points North Institute, International Documentary Association, and Doc Society for the 2023 Camden International Film Festival. The convening was formally canceled due to a hurricane, but Carrie's remarks were shared in smaller groups at different sites who gathered at the festival during the storm.*

**"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."**

—

**James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street***

Good afternoon! I'm so sorry I can't be there in person. You may have heard that I have a new job at ITVS, and duty calls! ITVS is a major Indie co-producer for public media, which is an essential outlet for nonfiction. I have a long history with ITVS, which co-produced my first film *The Weather Underground* in 2000. And I've been involved in a number of ITVS films over the years, so when I began contemplating this role, I knew a lot about the organization. But, like any good journalist, I wasn't stepping in without doing my research.

And it's kind of like developing a film, where you dig in, do a bunch of background interviews and reading and discover obscure nuggets, plot points and characters, and your story starts taking shape.

Through this process, and from my new chair, I'm seeing ITVS and its history in a new light, especially through the lens of the societal, technological, and political upheaval we're experiencing. A time when I think we're all asking ourselves and each other: is the future that we want for our field even possible? I'm here to tell you that I think it is.

In the New York Times, I found a 1984 article that could be from today: **"Leaner Times for Documentary."** If you read it, you see a familiar story of a difficult funding world, with arguments about balance and art and free expression and the role of public funding, which was being scrutinized, scaled back, and consolidated.

These are the early Reagan years in the midst of the Cold War, a long recession, and ugly culture wars, when Congress came within a whisker of defunding the Corporation for Public

Broadcasting and the National Endowment for the Arts. All of this tumult leads to this headline four years later in The Los Angeles Times:

**“Fight Over Public TV Pie: Independent Producers Want a Bigger Slice.”** (slide)

The fight they refer to is the one that leads to the creation of ITVS. But what’s interesting about it, is that some of the key people who led the fight were not filmmakers.

On paper, they were a motley crew. They were fewer than 20 people and called themselves “The Working Group for Public Broadcasters.” There was the former CPB insider turned professor. A co-founder of California Newsreel. The head of the legendary Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers. And a former director of communications for the United Church of Christ. There were filmmakers too, but the main movers worked in politics, built organizations, rallied communities, and knew how to win the narrative. They understood the levers of law making and power. And they understood that when things get out of balance, pushed too far in one direction, that’s the moment for meaningful action.

Their action was grounded in the fact that independent filmmakers cared a lot about public media. Cable’s dominance was on the horizon, but public media was still the holy grail. And the Working Group had a strong case that it was not living up to its mandate of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967: which was “to encourage the development of programming that involves creative risks and that addresses the needs of unserved and underserved audiences.”

Nor was it living up to the 1978 followup: the Public Telecommunications Financing Act that mandated that the Corporation for Public Broadcasting “make grants and contracts for production of public television or radio programs by independent production entities.”

These are mere sentences in lengthy Acts.

Yet the working group developed a three-year strategic plan and PR campaign aimed at Congress built on these sentences.

And within one year, not three, the **Public Telecommunications Act of 1988** mandated CPB to provide funds for an “independent production service, separate from the CPB” to contract with independent producers and production companies.

A year after the Act became law, the Independent Television Service, aka ITVS, was born.

And get this: ITVS incorporated to encourage the development of programming that involves creative risk, that addresses the needs of unserved and underserved audiences, insulated from political influence and marketplace forces, to promote and advance the goals of diversity, innovation, excellence and artistic and editorial integrity in public broadcasting. It was radical.

So I'm wondering: where are we in the cycle of action and reaction, or despair and repair? Compared to 1984? Or '88? Or '67? Change doesn't always take an army—sometimes a small phalanx of oddballs with different skills, different connections, can come together in common cause at the right time to make things happen that last decades. Is this the right time for such a cabal?

I've seen it happen before.

I think about my time in journalism, when collaboration was unheard of, but a group of big thinkers, risk takers decided to do it anyway—and now journalism collaborations are everywhere, backed by major civil society investments, in the face of existential threats.

I think about the early 2000s, when The Weather Underground was funded by ITVS, and the forces in those days led to the formation of the Documentary Branch of the Academy.

My question, to all of you, is what opportunity might be in reach, in a reaction to the existential threats we face? What unlikely bedfellows might we fight with, shoulder-to-shoulder, to launch our future path, connecting our stories to the audiences who need them most?

My question is: What's the next Act?