



**FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE**

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**NEW DOCUSERIES
“A TOWN CALLED VICTORIA”
EXPLORES THE
IMPLICATIONS OF
ISLAMOPHOBIA HIDDEN
BENEATH THE CHARMS
OF SMALL TOWN AMERICA,
PREMIERING
NOVEMBER 13, 2023**

September 18, 2023

The Three-Part Docuseries from Reel South and Independent Lens Offers a Vivid Portrait of a Small Texas Town, Its Seemingly Tight-Knit Community, and the Interfaith Coalition That United Against Hate

(San Francisco, CA) September 18, 2023 — On January 28, 2017, leaders of the Victoria, Texas, Muslim community, Abe Ajrami, Omar Rachid, and Dr. Shahid Hashmi, watched as their mosque burned to the ground. A Reel South and INDEPENDENT LENS original series, “A Town Called Victoria” follows the aftermath and investigations into the fire to answer the question of how a multifaith community can come together to turn against hate.

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The three-part docuseries will debut on November 13, 2023, at 9 p.m. ET on PBS and the PBS App (check local listings). PBS Passport Members can stream all episodes of the series a month early on the PBS App beginning Oct 14. “A Town Called Victoria” will also be accessible via PBS’s flagship YouTube channel beginning November 14.

From award-winning filmmaker Li Lu, “A Town Called Victoria” follows the stories of Ajrami, Rachid, and Hashmi as they reckon with the incident and seek to restore their sacred space, while reflecting on the journeys they took to find acceptance as Muslim Americans in a conservative Christian small town. The day after the fire, as the leaders survey the site of the destroyed mosque, over 500 Victorians gather to stage a peace rally and express their support. Within a week, a GoFundMe campaign created by Rachid to rebuild the mosque goes viral and raises more than \$1 million, and the story of Victoria makes headlines around the world as a parable of togetherness in dark times.

Eventually, the camera crews leave and Victoria fades from the national spotlight, and the south Texas town starts to face difficult questions about its own identity, particularly when a local resident is arrested for burning the mosque. Members of its tight-knit community—activists, preachers, worshippers, students, teachers, and leaders—gather to grapple with the town’s deep-seated religious, political, racial, and economic rifts, seeking a collective way forward.

“The story of the people of Victoria is one of resilience and commitment to community in the face of hate,” said director Li Lu. “As a Texan and an immigrant myself, I felt so drawn to capture and share this story because I deeply understand the push and pull you feel between love of your home and the complexity of the minority experience. In this series, we wanted to be as kaleidoscopic as we could while never losing sight of that human element. The story touches so many expansive themes of American life—religion, patriotism, masculinity, race, history, politics, hate, hope—it felt like a microcosm of our times. I hope the series provokes viewers to reflect on the power and potential we all have in our communities to come together, work through hardship, advocate for the marginalized, and pursue collective healing.”

The series weaves together community member interviews and newscast reportings of the incident, as well as animated sequences based on official

transcripts, trial sketches, and eyewitness accounts, to paint a picture of the harrowing events that took place in Victoria, and how its people came together afterward. “A Town Called Victoria” offers viewers an intimate, real-time look at the raw emotions of those involved as events unfold.

“It’s unsettling to think a hate crime might strike close to home. Unfortunately, what happened in Victoria will feel relevant to communities large and small, all across the country,” said Rachel Raney, executive producer of Reel South. “With this docuseries, we go beyond the headlines, to witness how one American town moved forward in the difficult days and weeks after hate landed on their doorstep.”

“A Town Called Victoria” is co-produced by the Center for Asian American Media and is a part of the INDEPENDENT LENS Stories for Justice initiative, which aims to spotlight films and series that foster further dialogue and reform around criminal justice in the United States.

“A Town Called Victoria” is also a part of The WNET Group's reporting initiative, "Exploring Hate: Antisemitism, Racism, and Extremism" For more information visit pbs.org/exploringhate
Facebook/Twitter/Instagram @exploringhate

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS:

Li Lu, Director/Producer

Li Lu was born in Suzhou, China, and raised in Sugar Land, Texas. Her narrative and documentary work has been supported by Sundance, Firelight Media, Ford Foundation, Austin Film Society, Gotham, and others. A lover of storytelling, Li strives to create bold and fearless projects spanning genre and form.

Anthony Pedone, Producer

Anthony Pedone is an independent filmmaker who dedicates his time to creating content that cultivates inclusion, community building, and collaboration. His work has premiered at Sundance, Tribeca, Slamdance, and Locarno, and can be streamed on Max, Amazon, Hulu, and Peacock.

CREDITS

Director/Producer	Li Lu
Producer	Li Lu Anthony Pedone
Executive Producer	Rachel Raney Lois Vossen Royd Chung Donald Young Stephen Gong Deniese Davis Hunter Arnold

About Reel South:

REEL SOUTH reveals the South's proud yet complicated heritage, as told by a diversity of voices and perspectives, through the curation and distribution of feature-length and short documentaries. Reel South is a PBS documentary series co-produced by PBS North Carolina, South Carolina ETV, and Louisiana Public Broadcasting, and produced in association with Alabama Public Television, Arkansas PBS, Texas PBS, Tennessee Public Television Council, and VPM. Reel South is a platform for and a service to nonfiction filmmakers in the American South. For more information

visit reelsouth.org Facebook/Twitter/Instagram @reelsouthdocs

About INDEPENDENT LENS:

INDEPENDENT LENS is an Emmy® Award-winning PBS documentary series. With founding executive producer Lois Vossen, the series has been honored with 10 Academy Award nominations and features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, INDEPENDENT LENS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Acton Family Giving, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and National Endowment for the Arts. Stream anytime on the PBS App. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens

About ITVS:

Independent Television Services (ITVS) is the largest co-producer of independent documentaries in the United States. For more than 30 years the San Francisco nonprofit has funded and partnered with documentary filmmakers to produce and distribute untold stories. ITVS incubates and co-produces these award-winning titles and premieres them on our Emmy Award-winning PBS series, INDEPENDENT LENS. ITVS titles appear on PBS, WORLD, NETA, and can be streamed on various digital platforms including the PBS App. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Acton Family Giving, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Wyncote Foundation. For more information, visit itvs.org

About WNET

[The WNET Group](#) creates inspiring media content and meaningful experiences for diverse audiences nationwide. It is the community-supported home of New York's [THIRTEEN](#)—America's flagship PBS station—[WLIW21](#), THIRTEEN PBSKids, WLIW WORLD and CREATE; [NJ PBS](#), New Jersey's statewide public television network; Long Island's only NPR station WLIW-FM; [ALL ARTS](#), the arts and culture media provider; newsroom [NJ Spotlight News](#); and FAST channel PBS NATURE. Through these channels and streaming platforms, The WNET Group brings arts, culture, education, news, documentary, entertainment, and DIY programming to more than five million viewers each month. The WNET Group's award-winning productions include signature PBS series NATURE, GREAT PERFORMANCES, AMERICAN MASTERS, and AMANPOUR AND COMPANY, and trusted local news programs METROFOCUS and NJ SPOTLIGHT NEWS WITH BRIANA VANNOZZI. Inspiring curiosity and nurturing dreams, The WNET Group's award-winning Kids' Media and Education team produces the PBS KIDS series CYBERCHASE, interactive MISSION US history games, and resources for families, teachers, and caregivers. A leading nonprofit public media producer for more than 60 years, The WNET Group presents and distributes content that fosters lifelong learning, including multiplatform initiatives addressing poverty, jobs, economic opportunity, social justice, understanding, and the environment. Through Passport, station members can stream new and archival programming anytime, anywhere. The WNET Group represents the best in public media. Join us.

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