

INDIAN POINT

A film by Ivy Meeropol

93 min / English / 2015 / Color / USA / Digital



FIRST RUN FEATURES

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Short Synopsis

Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant looms just 35 miles from Times Square. With over 50 million people living in close proximity to the aging facility, its continued operation has the support of the plant's operators and the NRC — Nuclear Regulatory Commission — at the same time it has stoked a great deal of controversy in the surrounding community, including a vocal anti-nuclear contingent concerned that the kind of disaster that happened at Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant could happen here. In the brewing fight for clean energy and the catastrophic possibilities of government complacency on oversight, director Ivy Meeropol presents a balanced argument about the issues surrounding nuclear energy and offers a startling reality check for our uncertain nuclear future.

Long Synopsis

Indian Point takes an unblinking look at the dramatic debate over nuclear power by going inside the plant that is at the center of the most contentious relicensing process in the history of the industry.

Indian Point begins inside the plant with Brian Vangor, senior control room operator and 35-year veteran who says his job is mostly about making sure that “nothing goes wrong” inside the massive facility. Remarkable cinematic footage shot in the depths of the plant are woven together with verite scenes of the refueling process, moving fuel to dry cask storage and other fragile, painstaking procedures which illustrate the true nature of the nuclear process.

Marilyn Elie, a former elementary school librarian and longtime anti-Indian Point activist who lives a few miles from the plant stresses the impossibility of evacuating Westchester and NYC in the event of a disaster at Indian Point. Marilyn is a master gardener, soft and sweet, even grandmotherly, but when we see her at an NRC public hearing or at a protest outside the plant she is ferocious and outspoken.

We also meet Roger Witherspoon, Marilyn's husband, a science journalist with a grudging acceptance of her activist work. They share an interest in the subject of Indian Point and nuclear power in general but their approaches couldn't be more divergent. Roger explains that when Marilyn's “activist friends come for a meeting at the house” he makes a beeline for his office in the basement. They say there's a “firewall” between them.

Once we've been inside the plant and become acquainted with some of the film's main characters as well as others who have a stake in the relicensing of Indian Point, disaster strikes.

In Japan, an earthquake and tsunami cause a complete system blackout at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. As workers struggle to shut the plant down there are hydrogen explosions and massive radiation releases. The world looks on in horror as 50,000 people are evacuated from their homes because of contamination.

Here in the US, the Chairman of the NRC, Gregory Jaczko, is shaken by the news coming out of Japan. In an interview from that time, he describes the accident as one that no one thought could ever happen however he spoke of how the event changed how he views his job. He orders his staff to look at Fukushima for lessons that could be applied to plants in the US.

Meanwhile, Marilyn organizes a visit from a small group of women from Fukushima who huddle in the rain just miles from Indian Point along with local activists, trying to make themselves heard. “You are lucky so far”, says one woman, “you have not yet had an accident. Let us be a lesson to you.” Back in Washington DC, Jaczko finds that his efforts have enraged an industry already on the defensive due to public fears aroused by Fukushima. His fellow commissioners on the NRC are also unhappy with him and suddenly there are accusations that he is abusive to staff, and to women staffers in particular.

Jaczko is blindsided by these accusations and vehemently denies them but an Inspector General investigation is ordered and he’s called before both the House and the Senate in order to defend himself. He is in shock as his fellow commissioners report that he is difficult to work with and a tyrant with his staff. Ultimately, Jaczko announces his resignation, a full year before he was set to end his term as Chairman.

The NRC continues the process of reviewing the re-licensing application for the Indian Point reactors, and hearings are held before the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board. Many contentions are filed against the plant ranging from piping decay to measuring the impact of the plant on the Hudson River. Phillip Musegaas, the handsome lead attorney for Riverkeeper, is also working on another angle to try to shut the plant down.

The NY Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has for the first time denied Indian Point a water permit. The plant routinely sucks in 2.5 billion (yes, that’s billion not million) gallons of water a day and spits it back out 15 degrees hotter. In the process they kill fish and send a thermal plume out in the river that includes radioactive isotopes. At the plant we see where the river is pulled inside and travels through the plant, going through giant washers and passing through a trough intended to separate fish that have been caught up. The DEC has said if Indian Point will agree to build closed cycle cooling towers (which will greatly diminish the impact on the river) they’ll reinstate the water quality permit.

Entergy Corporation, the owner/operator of Indian Point, is fighting the DEC tooth and nail to avoid the added costs of a closed cycle cooling system and in the meantime the crucial historic fish populations in the Hudson River are on the decline.

Despite these concerns, the NRC indicates that they will relicense the plant based some very limited criteria. They only look at whether the plant is still operating safely as it was originally designed to do. With cinematic footage, we show areas of the plant that are in need of repair, pipes are shaking, equipment has been “tagged out” (meaning marked as needing to be fixed). In spite of this, the resident NRC inspector at Indian Point, Paul Cataldo, shows us around the plant and points out how they are implementing what they call the “Fukushima regulations”.

For former Chairman Greg Jaczko, this is too little too late. As he attempts to find a new position, he is told by friends and former colleagues that he is untouchable in the industry. “I was naive to think they’d let this go,” he admits, “but I couldn’t have done it any other way.”

The wide variance in points of view expressed by this cast of characters illustrate the complexity of this most essential issue of our time - how do we safely fuel our future?

Director's Statement

My goal with this film is to present a story of great complexity through the people who are most invested in this industry – the owners of the plant, the workers at the plant and the activists who want to shut it all down.

By focusing on one nuclear power plant during its dramatic struggle to remain viable, I believe we can gain a deeper understanding of the greater issues and questions that plague the world re: how to safely provide energy.

Going inside Indian Point was essential to me, it drove my curiosity and as a filmmaker I try to bring that curiosity to the screen believing that audiences too want to see inside, and know who works there and what they do there, all day, every day.

This is not a film about whether nuclear power is good or bad. As the repercussions of the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi disaster continue to unfold, the relevant questions to me are: do we continue operating aging plants, especially one like Indian Point which is situated in the middle of the largest population of any nuclear power plant in the nation, and if so, who or what organization will make sure these plants are run safely? This is a film that welcomes all perspectives, voices from all sides of the issue, especially those who work at the plant and who are often overlooked in this debate.

What is this grand bargain we've made with ourselves to power the world and how can we make sure it doesn't destroy us? It's a huge question and one best told through the lens of one plant and the handful of characters that care what happens to it.

– Ivy Meeropol

Filmmaker Biographies

Ivy Meeropol (Director/Producer) is a producer and director of an array of acclaimed documentary feature films and television series.

Meeropol recently directed and produced an hour-long episode for CNN's docuseries **Death Row Stories**, Executive Produced by Alex Gibney and Robert Redford. She has directed numerous short films for The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. In 2013 Meeropol was a Sundance Institute Fellow, and was awarded grants from the Sundance Documentary Fund, The NY State Council for the Arts, and The MacArthur Foundation.

Meeropol's documentary series **The Hill** premiered on The Sundance Channel and in 2007 and received an IDA (International Documentary Association) nomination for best series. In 2007, Meeropol also directed the feature length documentary **All About Abe**, the story of Abe Pollin – sports impresario extraordinaire - and in 2003, she produced and directed the documentary film **Heir to An Execution**, which explored the legacy of her grandparents, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. **Heir to An Execution** had its world premiere at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival, was shortlisted for an Academy Award, had its broadcast premiere on HBO and is presently in wide distribution on HBO Home Video/DVD.

Meeropol spent five years as a speechwriter and legislative aide for U.S. Congressman Harry Johnston before starting her career as a journalist, publishing articles in *The New York Times*, *O, The Oprah Magazine*, *Premiere*, *Nest*, *Paper*, *Black Book Magazine*, and *Provincetown Arts Magazine*, where she was also the Fiction Editor.

Ivy Meeropol lives in the Hudson Valley with her husband, production designer Thomas Ambrose, and their two children.

Julie Goldman (Producer) founded Motto Pictures in 2009. She is an Emmy Award-winning producer and executive producer of documentary feature films.

Julie is executive producer of two new films that premiered at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival, **3 ½ Minutes** and **Best of Enemies**. Both films received glowing reviews, secured distribution and **3 ½ Minutes** won a Special Jury Prize. She also executive produced **The Kill Team** and **Art and Craft**, both released by Oscilloscope and shortlisted for the Academy Award and **1971**, which will be released in 2015. Julie produced three films that premiered in the U.S. Documentary Competition at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival: **Gideon's Army**, **Manhunt**, and the Oscar shortlisted **God Loves Uganda**. She produced **The Great Invisible**, which won the SXSW Grand Jury Prize and was released by RADIUS TWC; **We Are The Giant**, which premiered at Sundance; **A Place at the Table**, which was released by Magnolia Pictures, and the Oscar shortlisted **Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry**. Julie produced **Buck**, winner of the Sundance Documentary Audience Award, shortlisted for an Academy Award and one of 2011's top five grossing documentaries. She consulted on the Academy Award winning **The Cove** and produced the Oscar shortlisted **Sergio**.

Some of Julie's earlier films include: **Easy Riders Raging Bulls**, **Cat Dancers**, **In The Shadow Of The Moon**, **Better The World**, **What Remains**, **Once In A Lifetime** and **Sketches of Frank Gehry**.

Subject Biographies

Marilyn Elie is a former elementary school librarian and Master Gardener, Marilyn is a leader of the anti-Indian Point group IPSEC (Indian Point Safe Energy Coalition).

Gregory Jaczko is the former Chairman of the NRC – Nuclear Regulatory Commission—where he served as a commissioner there for four years before taking the helm for another three. He was previously a key science advisor to Senator Harry Reid.

Attorney **Phillip Musegaas** was until recently the Hudson River Program Director at Riverkeeper in New York.

Brian Vangor's colleagues and friends call him “the most interesting Brian” because of his many hobbies and enthusiasms. Brian is a Senior Control Room Operator at Indian Point Energy Center where he has worked for over 35 years.

Roger Witherspoon is an environmental journalist who has worked for 40 years as an author, educator, journalist and public relations specialist. He is on the board of the Society of Environmental Journalists and his work can be found regularly on his website Energy Matters.

Selected Credits

Director

Ivy Meeropol

Producers

Ivy Meeropol
Julie Goldman

Executive Producers

Ruth Mutch
Anne O'Shea
Brian Quatrini

Co-Producers

Christopher Clements
Carolyn Hepburn

Editor

Stephen Heffner

Supervising Editor

Toby Shimin

Cinematography By

Daniel B. Gold
Brett Wiley
Rob Featherstone

Original Music By

Nathan Halpern & Chris Ruggiero

Additional Cinematography

Rudolf Van Dommele
Brian Vangor
Ivy Meeropol
Christopher Clements
Mia Barker
Carlos Barbot

Assistant Camera

Htat Lin Htut
Jason Latorre
Ethan Harrison