

THE DISRUPTED

scp SARAH COLT PRODUCTIONS

What can a farmer,
an Uber driver,
and a factory worker
tell us about America?

A lot.

Sarah Colt
Documentary about the United States



THE DISRUPTED

“The Disrupted” dives deep inside the lives of three Americans working harder than ever, as their place in the middle class slips away. For a farmer, a factory worker, and an Uber driver, rising income inequality betrays the American Dream.

Electronic Press Kit



THE DISRUPTED

SYNOPSIS



What do a farmer in Kansas, a laid-off factory worker in Ohio, and an Uber driver in Florida have in common? All three are resourceful, positive thinkers who strive to adapt and thrive despite dehumanizing forces at play in the American economy. As the film's heroes face these roadblocks with courage, certain ideals remain sacred: family, love, and staying strong in the face of adversity. Lush cinematography galvanizes a sense of place and, as the narrative unfolds, the intimacy with the characters results in an emotionally rich observational drama. Ultimately, "The Disrupted" reveals a collective American experience of financial challenge, family resilience, and the quest for the purpose and dignity of work.



THE DISRUPTED

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In early 2017, as my ideas for “The Disrupted” began to germinate, I was finishing a commissioned film about the Gilded Age—a time in the late 1800s when the United States transformed from an agrarian society to an economic powerhouse, a transformation that created unprecedented divisions in wealth and opportunity. It isn’t difficult to draw parallels between that period and our own. In the past forty years a revolution in technology and globalization have re-shaped our economy. The stock market has reached historic highs and unemployment has been at record lows. Simultaneously, once-secure middle-class families feel abandoned, left behind in the dramatic wealth expansion of the last few decades. Their cries have rocked the political system. I wanted to better understand what was going on.

“The Disrupted” is a portrait of America woven from the lives of three workers upended by economic change—a fifth-generation farmer in Kansas whose 900 acres no longer support his family, a rideshare driver for whom Uber and Lyft were initially a decent substitute for the job she lost in the mortgage industry meltdown, and a laid-off factory worker with a felony record hoping to remake himself. When the film opens, each character stands at a crossroads. Their situation is untenable. What follows is an observational drama about their urgent efforts to overcome financial circumstances beyond their control. By turns, they reinvent themselves, they organize, and they go it alone. All three are ultimately tested by entirely different kinds of disruption: an alarming medical diagnosis; a freak accident; a child in crisis.

As we barrel towards the next presidential election, I believe “The Disrupted” has the potential to spark meaningful dialogue, and even unite disparate constituencies. The film demonstrates how thoroughly unsettled the middle class has become, dramatically underscoring that we have more in common than we realize. This is not an advocacy film—it’s an effort to bridge America’s tribal divisions and bring people together.

I’ve spent a decade directing films for PBS’s “American Experience” history series. This is my first independent feature documentary. I had the good fortune to work with seasoned vérité editor Lynn True, whose credits include the Peabody Award-winning “Summer Pasture” and Albert Maysles’ final film, “In Transit,” which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2015. “The Disrupted” was shot with great artistry by Tom Bergmann, who also shot Roger Ross Williams’ Oscar-nominated “Life Animated” and Steve James’ Oscar-nominated “Abacus: Small Enough to Jail.” The score was composed by the talented Troy Herion, whose work includes “306 Hollywood” and “The Hottest August.”

Thank you for your interest in the project. As the world is turned upside down by a global pandemic, the themes we explore in “The Disrupted” feel that much more urgent. I’ve worked to convey something I deeply believe in—and that I hope to continue to share with a broad audience.

—Sarah Colt



DONN

Donn is a fifth-generation farmer, struggling to hold on to 900 acres of Kansas prairie. His father and uncle made a full-time living raising crops and livestock. But in the last decade, corporate consolidation and free-falling commodity prices have made it impossible for small farms to achieve a profit. Donn desperately wants his farm to survive, but the thought of saddling his children with this burden haunts him. It's a conversation that Donn would rather put off for as long as possible. When Donn receives a cancer diagnosis, it breaks the silence.



CHERYL

Cheryl didn't plan on becoming a driver for Uber and Lyft. She spent years working her way up the ladder in the mortgage industry as a single mother raising three kids. But her career came to an abrupt halt in 2008 when the crash bankrupted her employer. Cheryl turned to driving as a stopgap. In the beginning, she made a good living. Fast-forward and Uber cut driver rates in half, with Lyft following close behind. While tech companies are valued in the billions, Cheryl rallies Tampa's drivers to join a series of protests, demanding rideshare companies raise rates. But the rate cuts keep coming. Frustrated and fed up, Cheryl sets her sights on a new business opportunity.



PETE

New beginnings aren't so easy to come by in Lorain, Ohio. The closure of the 3M sponge factory, where Pete held a union job for 12 years, is the latest chapter in the city's decades-long deindustrialization into the Rust Belt. Lorain was once a boomtown whose boom could be heard all the way in Puerto Rico, inspiring a wave of immigrants in search of a better life, Pete's parents among them. Today, Main Street is deserted, and an unprecedented drug epidemic drains the city's resources. This doesn't dent Pete's confidence. He has grand visions of reinvention.

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TEAM BIOS



SARAH

Sarah Colt is an award-winning documentary filmmaker whose work brings to life the figures and forces that have shaped America. Since founding Sarah Colt Productions a decade ago, she has directed and produced numerous films for PBS, including the Emmy-nominated and Peabody finalist “Walt Disney.” Most recently, Sarah’s independent short documentary “True Believer” followed an evangelical pastor’s grassroots campaign for Congress. “True Believer” screened at several major film festivals across the country and had its online premiere on The Atlantic.



JOSH

Josh Gleason is a documentary producer and director. He directed “True Believer,” a short which played at several festivals in 2019, including the Ashland Independent Film Festival and the Nantucket Film Festival. Josh has produced and directed several PBS programs and was a producer on the Showtime docuseries “The Circus.” He has also reported and produced stories for “This American Life” and other NPR shows.



LYNN

Lynn True is a documentary filmmaker and editor. Her films include “LUMO” (PBS/POV, 2007), about a young survivor of sexual violence in the DRC and “Summer Pasture” (PBS/Independent Lens, 2012), which follows a nomadic family in eastern Tibet. Called “enthraling” by The New York Times, “Summer Pasture” was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award and an IFF Gotham Award, and won a Peabody Award. Her most recent film, “In Transit,” an observational portrait of America shot aboard the country’s busiest long-distance train route, won the Special Jury Prize at the 2015 Tribeca Film Festival. Lynn graduated from Brown University with a joint degree in urban studies and architecture.

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Emily Schuman is an independent documentary producer and filmmaker. She was the co-producer on “True Believer,” which streamed on The Atlantic and played at film festivals across the country. Prior to working with Sarah Colt, Emily was an associate producer on the feature documentaries “The Witmans” and “Lift,” both directed by David Petersen. Emily is directing her first short documentary, “Michael’s Olga.” She is a member of Filmshop and the IATSE Local 600 Camera Assistants.



Troy Herion is a NYC-based composer for film, theater, dance, and experimental arts. His orchestral and electronic music have been performed at Carnegie Hall, broadcasted on MTV, and screened in major film festivals, including Sundance, Toronto, Tribeca, Full Frame, Hot Docs, and SXSW. Recent scores include “306 Hollywood” and “The Hottest August.” His concert works, called “marvelous” by New Yorker music critic Alex Ross, have been performed by the Grammy-winning Crossing Choir, the Pennsylvania Ballet Orchestra, the American Composers Orchestra, So Percussion, the JACK Quartet, Contemporaneous, and the Nash Ensemble of London. He studied composition as a PhD fellow at Princeton University, with a dissertation on visual-music.



Tom Bergmann is a cinematographer for documentary, narrative, and experimental films. Three of his recent projects have been nominated for Academy Awards, including “Life, Animated” and “Abacus: Small Enough to Jail.” Tom studied cinematography at the University of Film in Potsdam-Babelsberg, Germany, before studying art history in New York City. Some of the leading directors and producers within the field rely on his ability to translate ideas and scripts into emotionally strong, meaningful, and artistic images.

THE DISRUPTED

CREDITS



DIRECTED BY

Sarah Colt

CO-DIRECTED BY

Josh Gleason

PRODUCED BY

Sarah Colt & Josh Gleason

EDITOR

Lynn True

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Tom Bergmann

COMPOSER

Troy Herion

CO-PRODUCER

Emily Schuman

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ABOUT



Sarah Colt Productions creates visually striking, character-driven documentaries aimed to educate and inspire. The company has produced numerous films for PBS' award-winning history series, American Experience—including the Emmy and Peabody nominated "Walt Disney," "Henry Ford," "The Polio Crusade," "We Shall Remain," and "The Gilded Age." "The Disrupted" is Sarah Colt Productions' first independent feature documentary.



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