

# [***Opinion: Stormy Daniels has the last word on Trump***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BKY-RS71-JBSS-S04M-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Stormy Daniels is the kind of woman who should scare former President Donald Trump the most: a woman who's frightened but willing to tell the truth anyway.

"Stormy," a new documentary from NBC's Peacock streaming service, tracks Daniels' journey from successful and self-possessed adult filmmaker (she jumped from "star" to director/producer early in her career) to a battle-scarred yet impressively resilient name in national ***politics***.

Viewers might follow an arc of their own as they take in her story. Before watching, my thoughts were probably typical of many on the left: sympathetic, to be sure, but maybe a little judgmental of her reluctance to be a part of the "resistance" and her seeming willingness to profit off being dragooned into the anti-Trump army.

But in that sense, how different is Daniels from the founders of the Lincoln Project or the array of Never Trump conservatives who also made out with lucrative speaking tours and quickie best-sellers? She says in the documentary, "If you drive an ice cream truck and the city has a heat wave, you'd be an idiot not to drive your ice cream truck."

True, she was made her living in front of a camera and not in front of a lectern; that just made her more entertaining and fun to watch than Bill Kristol or Rick Wilson. She is just as rousing. What's more, Kristol, Wilson and the other anti-Trump conservatives who populate cable news haven't faced the same obstacles as Daniels in getting their stories out. It's Daniels who found herself wrongly arrested by police officers who Daniels alleged were politically motivated arrest and who the city of Columbus [*later found violated department rules*](https://abcnews.go.com/US/vice-police-officers-disciplined-improper-stormy-daniels-arrest/story?id=68504128), [*settling her subsequent lawsuit alleging civil rights violations*](https://www.cnn.com/2019/09/27/politics/stormy-daniels-settlement-columbus/index.html).

Additionally, Daniels' experience speaks to arguably more intimate betrayal and abuse than anything endured by any other Trump critic who has [*left the Republican Party behind (Daniels has identified as a registered Republican*](https://people.com/where-is-stormy-daniels-now-8609287#:~:text=The%20film%20follows%20her%20professional,registered%20Republican%2C%20said%20in%20Stormy.)). Her encounter and its aftermath - a sexual assault, as she alleges in the documentary, followed by relentless attacks on her character and [*threats to her safety*](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2023/04/03/stormy-daniels-getting-death-threats-since-trump-indictment-she-says/11593649002/) - speak to what countless women go through every day at the urging of far less powerful men than the former president.

Daniels, 45, was [*raised by her mother in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.*](https://www.biography.com/political-figures/stormy-daniels) She began her career as a stripper at the age of 17, acted in her first adult film in 2002 and soon branched into writing and directing. In July 2006, she met Trump at a celebrity golf tournament and says that the two had sex that weekend. Trump has denied [*being sexually involved with Daniels*](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-64920037).

The documentary focuses on the fallout from Daniels' interaction with Trump more than the alleged incident itself, though her evolving interpretation signifies just how deeply its repercussions have changed her. Her initial retelling, you might recall, was almost breezy and brazenly defiant. Describing her thinking at the time of the interaction, she told Anderson Cooper, "[*Well, you put yourself in a bad situation and bad things happen, so you deserve this*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/mar/26/stormy-daniels-interviewed-anderson-cooper-the-full-transcript)." She told Cooper that sex with Trump was consensual, and told multiple outlets, "[*I'm not a victim*](https://www.thecut.com/2018/10/women-and-power-stormy-daniels.html)."

To admit that you've been taken advantage of and to be clear that your safety and personhood were violated can itself be empowering. In the documentary, Daniels talks about how she now understands her compliance to Trump "humping away" at her as being a product of her Southern upbringing. "I was taught to respect and obey ... elders" (a term that would surely and satisfyingly infuriate Trump), she says.

Daniels has come to appreciate that - however unwillingly - she became a leader and hero to Americans who needed one. "I feel like I better do something that's worthy of what they're giving me," she says. She now characterizes her encounter with Trump as an assault and regrets not doing so sooner. "If someone gets away with something so brazen ... the worst part is that I am partially responsible for every woman that could have come after me," she says. I think the blame should always be on the perpetrator, but I also think she's right about how speaking out can be something we survivors can do for other women as well as ourselves.

However much power Daniels has recovered for herself, the violations continue. On one level, she's already lost her life - the life she used to have. Contrary to the popular narrative, she has not profited greatly from this ordeal. Erstwhile resistance champion Michael Avenatti (remember him???) [*appropriated much of the money he negotiated for her*](https://www.reuters.com/legal/court-upholds-michael-avenatti-conviction-defrauding-stormy-daniels-2024-03-06/) through book deals. His rush to sue Trump for defamation on her behalf ([*without her approval*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/stormy-daniels-says-michael-avenatti-filed-defamation-suit-against-her-wishes/2018/11/28/6dd31dac-f358-11e8-bc79-68604ed88993_story.html)) wound up [*costing her hundreds of thousands of dollars*](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/stormy-daniels-must-pay-300k-donald-trump-losing-defamation-case-appea-rcna21002) in legal fees. Her marriage crumbled and she was forced into an ugly fight for joint custody of her daughter as she tried to salvage something from her notoriety. And she's still mocked and derided constantly.

The documentary returns again and again to how Daniels has gone through periods of fearing for her life. Daniels says that she accepted the $130,000 hush money payment before the 2016 presidential election in part because "there would be a paper trail and money trail linking me to Donald Trump so that he could not have me killed." These fears are understandable. Trump's violent rhetoric can't be dismissed as figurative, whatever word salad he mixes it into. His [*promise last weekend of a "bloodbath"*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/16/politics/trump-bloodbath-auto-industry-election/index.html) for the country if he loses the 2024 election might have, in the moment, started as a remark about the economics of the auto industry, but context is meaningless in Trumpland. He barely offers context when he speaks, and more importantly, many of his fans hear the words he uses and invent narratives on their own. Any time he points them toward an enemy, the person being pointed at \*should\* worry. I've been in the press pool at his rallies and had a crowd's anger aimed at me - it's a viscerally terrifying moment and it doesn't matter how realistic the threat actually is.

Trump's treatment of Stormy Daniels, of the young women that he [*walked in on as they changed*](https://www.cnn.com/2016/10/08/politics/trump-on-howard-stern/index.html) backstage during his beauty pageants, the other women he's [*accused of assaulting*](https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/graphics/2023/05/09/trump-carroll-sexual-assault-similar-patterns-19-women/70197377007/) - they're all a product of his general attitude toward women: slightly less than human, playthings and objects. Trump denies that he has [*pressured any women*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/13/politics/trump-unsealed-deposition-e-jean-carroll/index.html) to have sex with him.

As an adult filmmaker, Daniels probably understands objectification better than most and she's used every tool at her disposal to move from object to subject in this scenario. This is a story about her, and not what Trump did to her. Daniels' greatest contribution to the movement against Trump is her commitment to her own humanity. In the face of dehumanization, staying true to ourselves is the most powerful statement in the world.

Opinion by Ana Marie Cox

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