To make a new life in America,
a woman must first make history.

Under Ground

A five-part limited television series

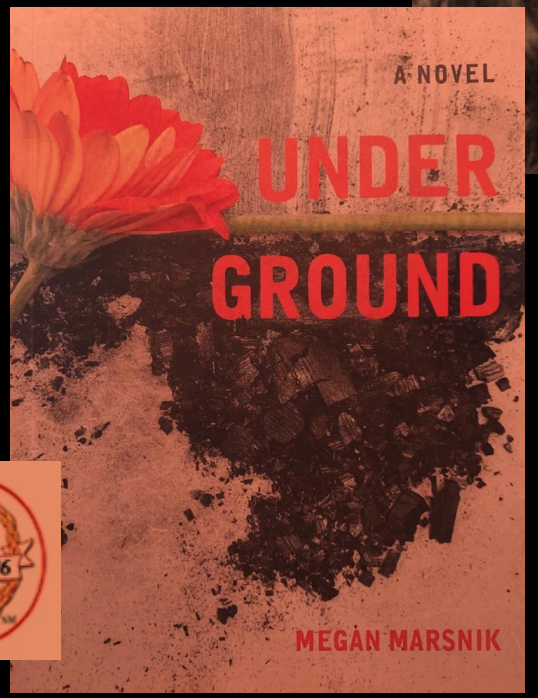


Created by Mark Bradley and Megan Marsnik
Based on the award-winning novel by Megan Marsnik

MEGAN'S NOVEL.

Megan Marsnik was born and raised in Biwabik, Minnesota and her novel is based not only on extensive research but also on her family's immigrant experiences. The book came out in 2019 and had been previously serialized in the *Minnesota Star-Tribune.* In 2021, *Under Ground* won the Slovenian Literary Award.





What happens when immigrants are dehumanized and vilified?

What happens when workers' rights are stripped away?

The people organize.

They fight back.

LOGLINE.

Inspired by true events, *Under Ground* is the story of Katka Kovich, a young Slovenian woman who emigrates to a rough-and-tumble community on Minnesota's Iron Range in 1915, where the workers have been brutally exploited and are on the brink of revolution. Working for her aunt's secret newspaper, Katka chronicles shootouts at labor rallies, murders in the mines, police corruption, and false imprisonment. When the strikers are forbidden to assemble, she joins a heroic group of women who take over the strike, risking rape and murder to oppose corrupt lawmen and strikebreaking thugs.

THEME & PURPOSE.

"History doesn't repeat itself. But sometimes it rhymes."

In the early 1900s, thousands came to America to escape intolerable conditions in their homelands. They found work in the iron mines, but they faced bigotry and xenophobia. When the men tried to organize into unions, the bosses rolled giant boulders down the mine shafts, killing or maiming entire crews. This did not stop them. These new Americans staged one of the most significant labor uprisings in American history.

But the men did not do it alone. There were women.

Brave, intelligent women who worked as union spies and organizers.

When lawmen were ordered to stop the uprising “by any means necessary,” including sexually assaulting the strikers’ wives and daughters, the women did what women have always done -- they persisted.

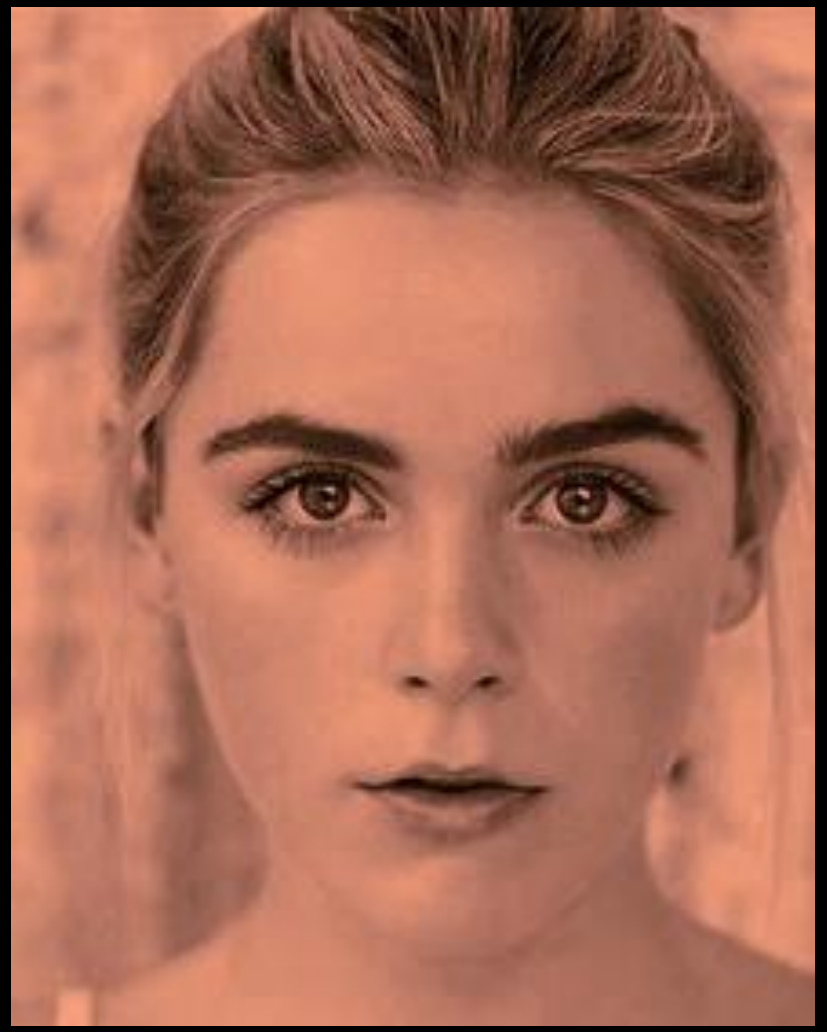
This is the story of those women.



"Red Girls," 1916

MAIN CHARACTERS.

KATKA KOVICH, 17, is a Slovenian teenager who overcomes her anxieties to make the arduous journey to Minnesota, falling in love along the way. Courageous and smart as a whip, she becomes an intrepid journalist and a deadeye shot, and uses both skills in the course of the strike.



Kiernan Shipka *(Mad Men)* would be great as Katka



Stock period photo

MAIN CHARACTERS.

PAUL SCHMIDT, 25, is a union organizer with a price on his head. Handsome and enigmatic, he and Katka fall in love during the journey to America. He is arrested at Ellis Island but finds his way to the Iron Range to help lead the strike and reunite with his love.

MAIN CHARACTERS.

ANTON KOVICH, 35, is Katka's uncle. Quietly committed to the union movement, he is lovable, talkative, and generous. With his wife Lily, he operates the "Slovenski Dom" (Slovenian Home), a boarding house for miners that becomes an epicenter for organizing.



Stock period photo



Lily Rains *(Animal Kingdon, Chicago Fire)* is interested in the role of Lily

MAIN CHARACTERS.

LILY KOVICH, 27, is Anton's wife. She is fiercely dedicated to justice for the mine workers and especially for the women of the Iron Range. She starts the underground newspaper which fuels the unrest that leads to the strike. Feisty and jovial, she is an indomitable spirit.

MAIN CHARACTERS.

MILO BLATNIK, 19, is a Slovenian immigrant who loves music and wants to buy an encyclopedia. The brutal conditions in the mines shatter his naivete but not his idealism. In spite of his youth, he leads a walkout at his mine, which grows into a strike by 20,000 workers.



Would love to have Timothee Chalamet as Milo

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS: The Women

ELIZABETH GURLEY FLYNN, 26, is a historical figure (1890-1964). A labor leader, activist, and feminist, she inspired the Joe Hill song, "Rebel Girl." In our story, she meets with Paul at Ellis Island and later helps lead the strike and negotiates with the authorities for the release of those arrested.

HELEN CERKVENIK, 42, runs Cerkvenik's Mercantile. Friendly and garrulous, she's known as the town gossip but is also a conduit for secret information.

MRS. ADELINE SHEREK, 46, is the town midwife and probably has more practical medical knowledge than the doctor. A member of the secret strike council, she leads the women when they take over.

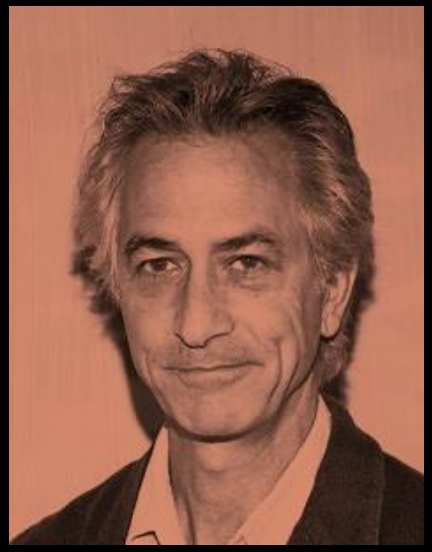
SUPPORTING CHARACTERS: The Villains

SHERIFF ARCHIBALD TURNER, 45, is the corrupt and sadistic head of law enforcement. He springs convicts from prison and deputizes them, standing by as they beat and murder mine workers and rape their wives.

MOOSE JACKSON, 30, is the enormous (6'-8", 350 lb.) bouncer at Torelli's Saloon and Boardinghouse. When we first see him, he kills a man with his bare hands, but meets his end while trying to rape Lily.

AUGUSTINE STONE, 60, is one of the owners of the Oliver Mining Company. An anti-immigrant bigot, he refuses to negotiate with the strikers and turns his thugs loose on them.

KEY PEOPLE:



DAVID STRATHAIRN (Actor) Oscar nomination, *Good Night and Good Luck; Nomadland* (Best Picture, 2022), *Where the Crawdads Sing*, 2023. Interested in role of Old Joe, grandfatherly companion to Katka.

GORDON CLAPP (Actor) Emmy winner, *NYPD Blue*, Tony nomination, *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Interested in the role of Augustine Stone.



STORY ARC: *(Scripts are written for all episodes)*

Episode I.

In the old country, Katka is orphaned and penniless. A mysterious stranger brings a letter from Katka's uncle, inviting her to emigrate to Minnesota. During the harrowing sea voyage, Katka falls in love with Paul, not knowing that he is wanted by the authorities. Paul is arrested at Ellis Island and Katka travels alone to Duluth. Her uncle Anton drives her to the lawless town of Biwabik. Katka meets Lily, who is seven months pregnant, and the miners who live at their boarding house, including Milo Blatnik. Lily recruits Katka to work on her women's newspaper, which will give voice to the voiceless.



Biwabik Main Street, 1910s

STORY ARC:

Episode II.

In a flashback, we learn how Milo became committed to justice for the miners. After Lily loses her baby, she and Katka publish increasingly provocative articles. The boarding house becomes an epicenter of organizing. One night, the Sheriff and his deputies raid a meeting and murder a man in cold blood. Days later, the accident whistle blows at the mine. Two dead miners are carried out as the crowd chants, “Murder, murder!” Deputies fire into the crowd, killing one man. The miners reluctantly return to work.

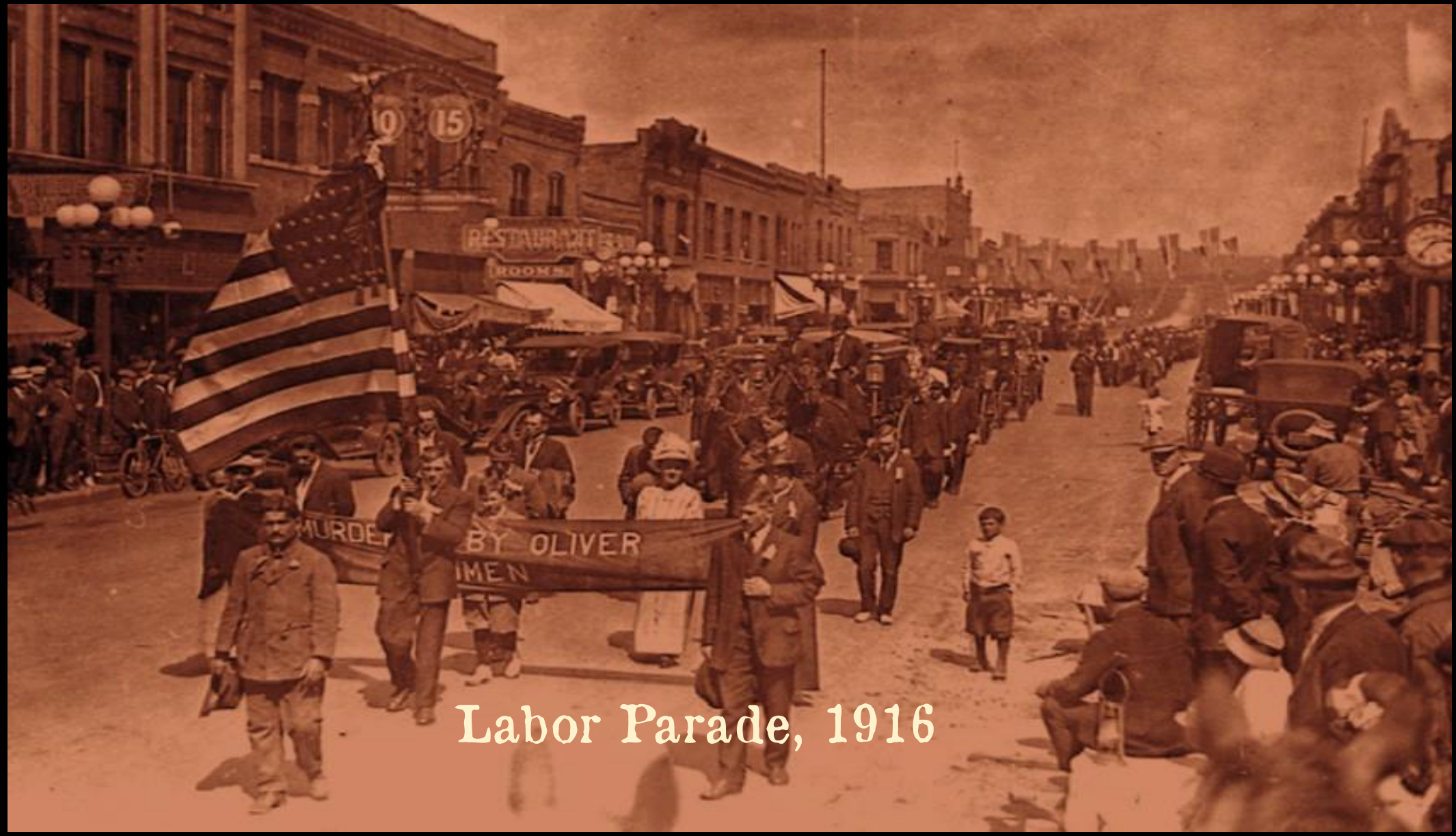


TAKING THE OATH OF SOLIDARITY AT THE GRAVE OF THEIR MURDERED COMRADE ALLAR

STORY ARC:

Episode III.

The next spring, Lily is pregnant again. Milo teaches Katka to shoot, and she's a natural. He tries to romance her, to no avail. One evening, Katka finds Paul wounded and hiding out in the cellar. He reveals that he is a union organizer but fears his love for her might be his Achilles heel. They make love in the sauna. About a week later, the accident whistle sounds, but there has been no accident. The miners are walking out, led by Milo. There is a tense confrontation with deputies. Lily's baby boy is born healthy that same day, and the boarders sing "Solidarity Forever" as a lullaby.



Labor Parade, 1916

STORY ARC:

Episode IV.

Paul recruits Katka to join the strike council. They produce a list of eleven demands, three from the women. There is an enormous march, and Katka comments, "This is what dawn feels like." The Sheriff releases convicts from prison and gives them guns and badges. Strikers are forbidden to gather in groups larger than three. Milo is fatally shot at a rally, and his funeral is attended by thousands, inspiring solidarity strikes across the country. Milo's dying wish is that his encyclopedia savings be given to a young prostitute who had helped him when he was badly beaten.



THE FAMOUS RED BANNER THEY CARRIED

STORY ARC:

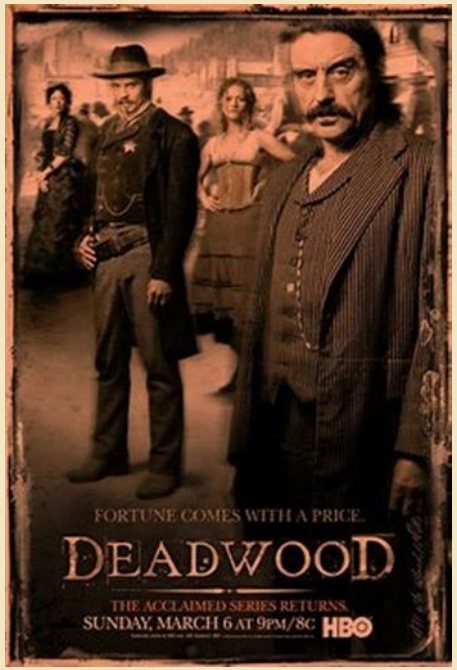
Episode V.

Since the women are not union members and can assemble, they take over the strike. The women and their children sing as they march. Violence increases: the wife of a striker is raped in front of her children. Deputies arrive at Anton's, and Moose starts to rape Lily. Katka sneaks in and fires her rifle, castrating him. More shots are fired and Moose is killed by a stray bullet from another deputy. A second man is killed. Anton and two boarders are charged with manslaughter. The story ends with some surprising twists.

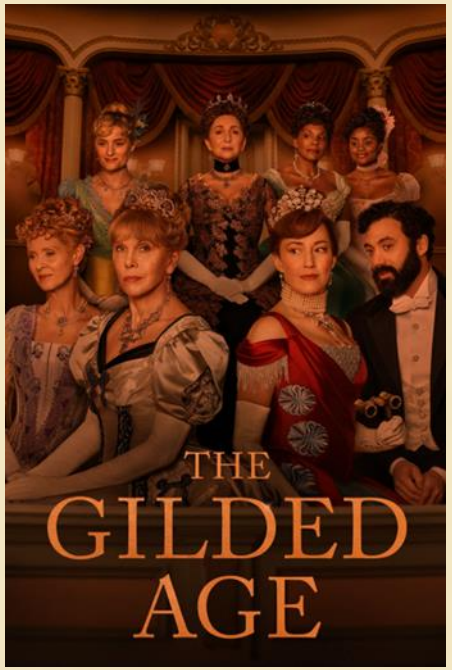


Women & children leading union march, 1916

COMPARABLES:



Historical Drama
HBO, 2004-06



Historical Drama
HBO/MAX, 2022-25



Historical Drama
Musical Film, 2019

MUSIC:

Music is an essential part of this show. There will be folk music and popular songs of the day, but labor protest songs are an integral part of the story. All protest movements have used songs, but in the early 20th Century, labor was very much a "singing" movement. The songs energized the workers and also helped immigrants to learn English. The women sing Joe Hill's "Rebel Girl" it when they take over the picket lines. Other songs in the show will include "Pie in the Sky," "There Is Power in a Union," "We Shall Not Be Moved," "Bread and Roses," and labor's anthem, "Solidarity Forever."

WHY TELL THIS STORY?

Under Ground is set in 1916, but our story resonates to this day. This is a story of immigrants. In the early 20th Century, thousands of people fled disease, tyranny, and poverty in their home countries to make a better life in America. The work they found on the Iron Range was dangerous and back-breaking, and they also faced exploitation and violent intimidation from the mine owners. Overcoming differences in language and culture, they learned to unite in a common cause.

We should know their story.

WHY TELL THIS STORY?

This is also a story about the rise of the labor movement. Stories about the struggle for the rights of labor, about dignity for the workers and respect for the work they do, can never be told too often. Although there has been an occasional movie, scripted television almost never deals with labor in a serious or realistic way. Told from the perspective of a strong young woman, this series shows workers battling overwhelming odds to make their lives better.

We should know their story.

WHY TELL THIS STORY?

This is also a story of the women. When people think about strikes, most think of the men involved. But in every desperate situation, there have been women working, too. Women who had to explain to their children why there was no food. Women who took to the dangerous picket lines when the men were forbidden. Women who were willing to sacrifice nearly anything to ensure that their children would have a better future. These women were real. They still exist. They "hold up three corners of the house."

We should know their story.

ESTIMATED BUDGET:

$2.1-2.9 million per episode
$11.3 million overall

$12 million with star salaries

AUDIENCE:

Although the protagonist is a young woman, this is not a "women's" story. Adults of all ages and genders will enjoy this story for its powerful drama and its message of justice.

The story does include strong language, violence, and sexual content.

THE MARKET:

Under Ground, despite its broad appeal, may well fall into a "niche" category, especially since there aren't as many miniseries currently being produced. It could be seen as a "prestige" project, representing voices not often heard, and we think it has strong award potential.


CATALYST
OFFICIAL
SELECTION
2021

This project can be shot entirely in St. Louis County, Minnesota. The State of Minnesota, St. Louis County, and the Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation Board all offer generous production incentives.

SUPPORT THIS PROJECT!

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Under Ground



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