



## ***The Kingmaker***



**Directed by Lauren Greenfield  
Total Run Time: 100 minutes**

***Photos are available at:***  
**<https://www.cbspressexpress.com/showtime/shows>**

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## **Synopsis**

Centered on the indomitable character of Imelda Marcos, *The Kingmaker* examines, with intimate access, the Marcos family's improbable return to power in the Philippines. The film explores the disturbing legacy of the Marcos regime and chronicles Imelda's present-day push to help her son, Bongbong, win the vice presidency. To this end, Imelda confidently rewrites her family's history of corruption, replacing it with a narrative of a matriarch's extravagant love for her country. In an age when fake news manipulates elections, Imelda's comeback story serves as a dark fairy tale.

## **Artist Statement**

by Lauren Greenfield

During my long-term investigations of wealth as a photographer and filmmaker, Imelda Marcos, the former First Lady of the Philippines, has been a reference point as a global icon of excess. I was astonished when I learned that, after she and her husband, Ferdinand Marcos, were ousted by a popular uprising and fled into exile, she had somehow managed to return to the Philippines and reenter politics as a congresswoman. My fascination with her grew when I read an article by Bloomberg reporter Bill Mellor about a little-known footnote of her legacy: In 1976, she and President Marcos set out to create a safari park by evicting the population of the island of Calauit and importing 104 African animals. Since the fall of the Marcos regime, the animals have survived on the island without the Marcoses' patronage in a warped and neglected ecosystem plagued by four generations of inbreeding.

I began filming Imelda in 2014, expecting to make a movie about this singular episode of extravagance: a deposed queen and her pet project, two parallel tales of survival against the odds. I thought that, at the advanced age of 85, Imelda might reflect on her unique brand of female power—as half of what was famously called a “conjugal dictatorship.” I even thought that the film might become a redemption story about an extraordinary woman who seemed kind, generous, and charismatic, still adored by her fans despite the fact that she and her husband had been accused by authorities of stealing as much as \$10 billion from the Philippine people.

As I interviewed Imelda, however, I came to realize that not only her account of the safari park facts, but also her broader narrative of her family's benevolent leadership contradicted historians' accounts and testimonials from victims of the Marcos regime's abuses. I delved further into the conflicting accounts and discovered that, as she and her family pursued a return to power, Imelda was successfully rewriting history. Her version of reality, which to any critical eye seemed to be a rose-tinted fantasy, was actually gaining traction with the public, particularly among the young, who had no memory of the Marcoses' corruption and human-rights abuses.

Increasingly I saw that Imelda remained a skilled “political animal,” as her son Bongbong described her, with ambitions of a second act for the Marcos family.

When I began this journey, Bongbong's bid to become vice president seemed a long shot. As it became clear that Imelda's efforts to clear his path to the presidential palace seemed only too likely to succeed, I found myself following an improbable comeback story fueled by Imelda's unquenchable will to power. Along the way I learned a lot about the fragile nature of democracy and the terrifying ease with which a country can return to authoritarianism.

## **Lauren Greenfield Biography**

Named by the *New York Times* as “America’s foremost visual chronicler of the plutocracy,” Emmy Award–winning filmmaker/photographer Lauren Greenfield has produced groundbreaking work on consumerism, youth culture and gender for the last 25 years. Her films *Generation Wealth*, *The Queen of Versailles* and *Thin* and photography books *Generation Wealth*, *Fast Forward* and *Girl Culture* have provoked international dialogue about some of the most important issues of our time. *The Queen of Versailles* was the opening night film of the 2012 Sundance Film Festival, where it won the Best Documentary Director Award and was named by *Vogue* as one of the top documentaries of all time. Her record-breaking Super Bowl ad *#LikeAGirl* (250+ million views) earned her 14 Cannes Lions and the Most Awarded Director by *Ad Age*, making her the first woman to top this list.

*Generation Wealth* (Amazon Studios) opened the 2018 Sundance Film Festival, screened at Berlinale and received a Writers Guild nomination. The companion exhibition received The Paris Photography prize, has traveled around the world and opens at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (Copenhagen) in Fall 2019. In 2019, Greenfield launched *Girl Culture Films* to address the lack of diversity of directors in the advertising industry.

## **Backgrounder on Imelda Marcos, The Kingmaker**

When husband-and-wife dictators Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos fled the Philippines in 1986 after a popular uprising against their brutal two-decade rule, most Filipinos hoped they had seen the last of a ruling family that stood accused of murdering and torturing thousands of political opponents and embezzling as much as \$10 billion from the coffers of their impoverished Southeast Asian nation.

For several years, the Marcoses did indeed appear to have been consigned to history. Ex-President Ferdinand Marcos died in exile in Hawaii in 1989. The following year, 1990, former First Lady Imelda went on trial in New York, charged with misappropriating \$222 million from the Filipino treasury and spending it on jewelry, art and prime Manhattan real estate.

The racketeering and fraud charges could have carried a 50-year jail term, but to the embarrassment of U.S. prosecutors, a jury found Imelda not guilty on all counts, and in 1991 she was permitted to return to the Philippines. Parodied as a world-class spender best remembered for a wardrobe containing 3,000 pairs of shoes and a bullet-proof bra, the still-glamorous Imelda happily played along with the image. “There are no skeletons in Imelda’s closet,” she frequently joked. “Only beautiful shoes.”

Today, no one who suffered under the Marcoses finds that at all funny. During Ferdinand and Imelda’s so-called conjugal dictatorship, some 70,000 democracy activists were imprisoned, 35,000 tortured and more than 3,200 murdered. Yet despite that toll, 33 years after fleeing Manila’s presidential palace in a U.S. helicopter, an unrepentant and seemingly indestructible Imelda, at the age of 90, may be on the brink of restoring the Marcos dynasty to power.

While her husband held the presidency between 1965 and 1986, Imelda was widely seen as the power behind the throne – especially during the ailing Ferdinand’s later years. Now, as death squads again stalk Manila’s squalid slums, she is once more playing the role of kingmaker, promoting the presidential ambitions of her son, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., as well as the political careers of eldest daughter Senator Imee Marcos, grandson Governor Matthew Manotoc, various nephews, nieces and more distant relatives.

What’s more, the Marcoses appear to be funding their resurgence with much of the vast ill-gotten fortune they accumulated during their years in power.

Emmy Award-winning U.S. documentary filmmaker Lauren Greenfield was first alerted to Imelda Marcos’s enduring ambition when she read an article about one of the family’s least-known but most bizarre excesses. In 1976, at the height of their powers, Ferdinand and Imelda evicted more than 1,000 poor inhabitants of a Philippine island and replaced them with a menagerie of African animals shipped 6,000 miles from Kenya in a latter-day Noah’s Ark.

Calauit Island was supposed to be the Marcos family’s private hunting ground, but after Ferdinand and Imelda were overthrown, it was all but abandoned, becoming a Jurassic Park of inbred giraffes, zebra and other exotic beasts that still survive today.

Investigating the untold story of a dictator’s forgotten safari park, Greenfield gained unprecedented access to Imelda and other members of the secretive Marcos clan, filming in Imelda’s extravagantly furnished city apartment and the family mansions in Manila and the provincial fiefdoms of Ilocos

Norte and Leyte provinces. Soon, Greenfield realized she was onto an unfolding story that would be as topical as today's headlines.

In making *The Kingmaker*, Greenfield discovered that in their quest to once more occupy the presidential palace, Imelda and her family have enlisted the most powerful ally possible – the Philippines' current strongman president, Rodrigo Duterte.

A Donald Trump-like populist, Duterte has earned international notoriety for his so-called "War on Drugs," in which police and vigilante death squads have gunned down thousands of mainly poor slum dwellers.

The Philippines government in July put the death toll at 5,526. Some human rights activists claim it is closer to 30,000. Either way, the bodies aren't hard to find. Greenfield and her crew repeatedly went out at night into the shantytowns to film them and interview the bereaved wives, mothers and newly orphaned children.

Less well known outside the Philippines is Duterte's alliance with the Marcos family. After winning the presidency in 2016, Duterte outraged surviving victims of the Marcos years by giving the go-ahead for Ferdinand Marcos's body, which had lain for 23 years in a glass case in a family mausoleum in far-off Ilocos Norte, to be given a hero's burial in Manila's equivalent of the Arlington National Cemetery.

Duterte also acknowledged having received campaign contributions from Imee Marcos. But perhaps most significantly, he has expressed a desire for Ferdinand Marcos Jr. – who goes by the nickname "Bongbong" – to become his vice president and eventual successor. That is despite Bongbong Marcos losing the 2016 vice-presidential election to an unpretentious widowed human rights lawyer, Leni Robredo. Marcos is challenging the result in the Supreme Court, whose chief justice was last year replaced, after pressure from Duterte, with a pro-Marcos judge.

Greenfield's cameras followed the gaudily choreographed and lavishly funded Marcos vice-presidential campaign from its launch in 2015 through to the election night drama and aftermath. During this time, Greenfield conducted moving interviews with victims of the Marcos years, ranging from courageous women activists who had been raped and tortured to an elderly Calauit islander who had been evicted from her home to make way for the Marcos' menagerie.

Greenfield also uses historical footage to chart the rise of the Marcoses. A Spanish colony for more than 300 years, the 7,600-island Philippine archipelago had been ceded to the U.S. in 1898 after the Spanish-American War, and was still under American rule when Ferdinand Marcos and Imelda Romualdez were born in 1917 and 1929 respectively.

Marcos was from a powerful clan in the northernmost Ilocos Norte province. Imelda's family was politically influential around Leyte in the center of the country. In 1946, the Philippines achieved independence, and in 1949 Marcos was elected to Congress.

Five years later, in 1954, Marcos met the tall and glamorous beauty queen Imelda. After an 11-day courtship, the couple married. Marcos' political career took off. In 1959, he was elected to the Senate

and in 1965, aged 48, successfully ran for president, with the bejeweled, designer-clad 36-year-old Imelda at his side.

In 1969, Marcos was re-elected for what should have been his second and final four-year term. But in 1972, he abolished all democratic institutions and declared martial law. From then on, Marcos and Imelda ruled in what became known as a conjugal dictatorship. He made her governor of Metro Manila, the country's biggest conurbation, and also his roving envoy, traveling the world meeting the likes of Mao Zedong, Saddam Hussein, Muammar Gaddafi, Fidel Castro and a succession of U.S. presidents.

One of the first political opponents the Marcoses jailed after declaring martial law was a charismatic senator named Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr., who remained behind bars for seven years before being allowed to travel to the U.S. in 1980 for heart surgery. In 1983, after three years of self-imposed exile, Aquino decided to return to the Philippines to resume his political campaign. But after being led off the plane at Manila International Airport, he was promptly gunned down on the tarmac by an unknown assassin.

At the time, Marcos was undergoing medical treatment for failing kidneys and Imelda was said to be running the country. Suspicion immediately fell on the First Lady. In *The Kingmaker*, Greenfield uses newsreel footage to reconstruct Aquino's fateful journey up to the fatal shot and asks Imelda outright whether she ordered the killing.

Outraged at Aquino's assassination, democracy activists rallied behind his widow, Corazon. Though a self-described housewife, Cory Aquino rose to the challenge, and when Marcos called a snap election in 1986, Aquino announced her candidacy.

Amid allegations of massive vote rigging, Marcos declared himself the winner. Unarmed Filipinos then took to the streets, confronting soldiers in a protest that coined the term "People Power." As the crowds converged on Malacanang Palace, the Marcoses escaped in a U.S. army helicopter before being flown to Hawaii. Corazon Aquino was sworn in as president, and one of her first acts was to set up the Presidential Commission on Good Government to recover the Marcos' ill-gotten wealth. As its former head, Andy Bautista, says in *The Kingmaker*, only a relatively small portion of that fortune has ever been recovered.

After Ferdinand Marcos' death in 1989, the rehabilitation of the Marcoses began slowly. In 1991, Imelda and her family were allowed to return to the Philippines, but without Ferdinand's body. The following year, she contested presidential elections, but finished fifth out of seven candidates. However, that same year, Bongbong was elected to Congress in Ilocos Norte. In 1993, Ferdinand's remains were allowed to be returned to his home province, and in 1995 Imelda won a congressional seat in her family bailiwick of Leyte. Gradually, Marcos family members began once again to assume ever more important seats of power. And whatever the outcome of Bongbong's attempt to win the vice presidency through the courts, analysts have little doubt that he will challenge for the presidency in 2022.

## **THE KINGMAKER TIMELINE**

**1565:** First permanent Spanish settlement in the Philippines, heralding 333 years of Spanish colonial rule.

**1898:** Philippines ceded to the U.S. after Spanish-American war, the start of 48 years of American colonial rule.

**1917:** Ferdinand Marcos born into a politically powerful family in Ilocos Norte, in the far north of the Philippines.

**1929:** Imelda Romualdez born in Manila to a politically powerful family from central Leyte province.

**1942-45:** Japan occupies the Philippines; Ferdinand Marcos claims to have been a war hero.

**1946:** The Philippines granted full independence from the U.S.

**1949:** Ferdinand Marcos elected to the Philippines House of Representatives.

**1953:** Imelda is controversially awarded the Miss Manila beauty title despite initially losing the contest.

**1954:** Imelda and Ferdinand marry after an 11-day courtship.

**1959:** Ferdinand Marcos elected to the Philippines Senate.

**1965:** Marcos elected President of the Philippines; re-elected in 1969.

**1972:** Marcos declares Martial Law; arrests opposition figure Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino Jr.

**1976:** The Marcoses, having taken a safari in Kenya, return home to evict the population of Calauit Island and replace them with 104 African animals.

**1980:** Ninoy Aquino allowed to travel to the U.S. for medical treatment.

**1981:** Martial Law officially lifted, but the Marcos’ dictatorial rule continues.

**1983:** Ninoy Aquino murdered at Manila International Airport on his return from the U.S.; Imelda Marcos denies ordering the killing while Ferdinand was incapacitated.

**1986:** Marcos holds a snap election. Ninoy Aquino’s widow, Corazon, runs against him. Marcos declares himself the winner, but he and Imelda flee after massive People Power protests. Corazon Aquino recognized by the U.S. as the new President.

**1989:** Marcos dies in exile in Hawaii.

**1990:** Imelda Marcos acquitted on all charges in New York racketeering trial.



**1991:** Cory Aquino allows Imelda and family to return to the Philippines, but not Marcos's body.

**1992:** Imelda Marcos runs in Presidential election; finishes fifth out of seven candidates behind eventual winner Fidel Ramos.

**1992:** Imelda and Ferdinand's son, Bongbong Marcos, elected Congressman for Ilocos Norte, the family fiefdom.

**1993:** Marcos' body allowed to be flown back to Ilocos Norte, where it is put on display in a glass case in a mausoleum in the family mansion.

**1995:** Imelda elected Congresswoman for Leyte, home province of her Romualdez clan.

**1998:** Imelda and Ferdinand's eldest daughter, Imee Marcos, elected Congresswoman for Ilocos Norte.

**1998-2006:** Bongbong Marcos serves as Governor of Ilocos Norte.

**2007-2010:** Bongbong serves as Congressman for Ilocos Norte.

**2010-2016:** Bongbong elected to the Philippines Senate.

**2010-2019:** Imelda succeeds Bongbong as Congresswoman for Ilocos Norte.

**2010-2019:** Imee Marcos serves as Governor of Ilocos Norte, succeeding her brother.

**2010:** Benigno ("Noynoy") Aquino III, son of Cory Aquino and the murdered Ninoy, is elected Philippines president and serves a full six-year term.

**2016 (May):** Bongbong Marcos is narrowly defeated by human rights lawyer Leni Robredo in vice-presidential election. Bongbong protests to Supreme Court, demanding the result be overturned. Duterte elected President, declares his War on Drugs despite opposition from the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Maria Lourdes Sereno.

**2016 (October):** Duterte says publicly that he received campaign funding from Imee Marcos.

**2016 (November):** Duterte allows Ferdinand Marcos Sr. to be secretly buried in Libingan ng mga Bayani, the heroes' cemetery, despite furious opposition, including from Chief Justice Sereno.

**2018:** Chief Justice Sereno removed from the Supreme Court following pressure by Duterte; she is replaced by a pro-Marcos judge.

**2019 (May):** Imee Marcos elected to the Senate. Her son, Matthew Manotoc (Imelda and Ferdinand's grandson), replaces her as Governor of Ilocos Norte.

**2019 (July):** Vice President Leni Robredo charged with sedition along with 35 other opposition figures, including four Catholic bishops.

**Today and ongoing:** Bongbong Marcos's bid to overturn the election result and be declared vice president continues.

**2022:** Bongbong Marcos tipped to run for president.

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*'Ninoy Aquino Speech Feb. 15, 1981'/ Ninoy & Cory Aquino Foundation*  
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