



A SWELL CINEMA PRODUCTION. CO-PRODUCED BY LAURA HARRISON & CHARLOTTE LAGARDE

oting in **America**

**9 short documentaries about why some people don't vote
and how others are trying to change their minds**

NOW, AVAILABLE ON DVD!

WHAT PEOPLE SAY...

"Truly engaging. Real feelings, real people, anecdotal and not preachy.
The featured people were able to communicate succinctly about voting,
and always in a culturally relevant way."
Jennifer Bonardi, Democracy Matters

"Powerful! They demonstrated how far advocates and activists must reach
in order to really make change."
Lisa Prosienski, Common Cause

"A very good example of how the electoral system in this country is not
as democratic as people think."
Laura Mullins, ACORN

"It will inspire voters to vote and motivate citizens to volunteer for
get out the vote efforts"
Dean Liscum, Get Out The Vote coordinator for Ft. Bend County

For more information and photos, check: www.votinginamerica.org



ABOUT THE PROJECT...

Why aren't Americans voting? And what is the fate of our democracy if we can't even convince a majority of citizens to participate in one of the most important, defining acts of a democratic society? *Voting in America* is a provocative collection of nine short films that aim to increase voter participation in local and national elections - particularly among historically marginalized constituencies like communities of color, formerly incarcerated individuals, single mothers and youth.

The project was designed to be used for both outreach and education. As an outreach tool, Voting in America is useful to a wide range of communities, activist organizations and democracy advocacy groups, providing a variety of compelling human stories that provoke discussion about voting. As an educational tool, the films provide students with real-life examples of historical, social and economic situations that profoundly affect participation in a democratic system.

Collaboration and the emphasis on diversity make Voting in America unique: the film involves the participation of talented filmmakers from many different regions and cultural/ethnic backgrounds, each of whom has chosen to work in a distinct visual style that best expresses his/her community or perspective.

Out in the field, grassroots organizers are fighting against a legacy of exclusion and disenfranchisement, a deepening cynicism and a pervasive lack of education about voting. As filmmakers, we are particularly cognizant of the power of intelligent, *independent* media to educate, inspire and ultimately effect change. Our hope is that greater understanding will ultimately lead to greater participation in our electoral system.

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ABOUT THE FILMS...

Synopsis:

A provocative collection of nine short films about why some people don't vote and how others are trying to change their minds, "Voting in America" takes you from an animated history of voting to voter registration in the Philadelphia jail system and a Navajo punk band's struggle to get out the vote.

The films:

1. *A Brief History of Voting*, by Francesca Talenti uses a cast of non-partisan animal characters to recount from early Greek democracy to present-day US how people have implemented new ways to vote – and cheat. [04:34]
2. *Still Struggling*, by Johnny Symons, explores one reality behind voter apathy: the constant daily struggles of single moms like Darnita Goodman that most politicians claim to care about but do very little to change. [05:30]
3. *Voting in the District*, by Charlene Gilbert, is set against the backdrop of the filmmaker's recent move to Washington D.C., where she must confront her status as a disenfranchised voter against the legacy of the African-American struggle to gain the right to vote. [08:26]
4. In *Blackfire*, by Aiyana Elliott and Dick Dahl, a Navajo punk rock band devoted to Native American empowerment faces widespread apathy in their struggle to get out the vote on the reservation. [07:08]
5. Christiane Badgley's *Choose to Choose* takes us inside the Philadelphia jail system, where a highly unusual voter registration and education campaign is attempting to rectify one significant reason for low voter turnout-the disenfranchisement of 4.6 million Americans with felony convictions. [11:45]
6. *Long Division-The Next Big Threat To Democracy*, by Josh Kurz & Chris Metzler. For many years, economists have thought about the logic of voting and many have concluded, why bother? At the heart of this story is one of the world's greatest living economists, Public Choice theorist, Gordon Tullock. [07:00]
7. *Texas: Majority, Minority*, by Heather Courtney, Anne Lewis and Laura Varela. Despite years of disenfranchisement, the Latin and African American communities in Lockhart, Texas are fighting back – registering voters, running for local office, organizing the first ever Martin Luther King Day march in their community. [10:44]
8. *17*, by Lily Ng and Lee Gardner seeks to dispel some of the stereotypes surrounding youth voters by focusing on a politically active teen who was a key player in recent challenges to the 26th Amendment: the right of citizens to vote upon reaching the age of 18. [04:32]
9. Over 5% of the voting population in the U.S. identifies as gay or lesbian. *Out of the Closet, Into the Booth: The Gay Vote in America*, by Tom Shepard, explores how the gay community has galvanized itself into a viable voting bloc and what the implications are for the 2004 presidential elections. [11:23]



ABOUT THE PRODUCERS...

The VOTING IN AMERICA project is co-produced by Laura Harrison & Charlotte Lagarde.

Laura Harrison

Laura Harrison's award winning documentary *Secret People* (1999) - a chronicle of the past and present of leprosy in America - was broadcast nationally on PBS and won a silver medal for Best Feature Documentary at the SXSW Film Festival. *Thurmond, W. Va* (1995) - a portrait of a "ghost town in the making" - has received among others, a CINE Golden Eagle Award and a Jury Award, at NY Expo of Short Film and Video.

Harrison worked for eight years in France as an editor on French feature films before returning to the US to complete an MA in documentary filmmaking from Stanford University. Since 1997, Harrison has taught media literacy and video production in the public school system and curated programs for the Aurora Picture Show, in Houston. She is working on *Dreaming of Kawthoolei*, a portrait of a Burmese girl who lives in a refugee camp on the Thailand/Burma border.

Charlotte Lagarde

Charlotte Lagarde's documentary *Heart of the Sea: Kapolioka'ehukai* (2002) about Hawaiian legend Rell Sunn was broadcast nationally on PBS (Independent Lens Audience Award 2003) and won the Audience Award at both the San Francisco International Film Festival and the Newport Beach Film Festival and Best Documentary Award at the Ashland Independent Film Festival.

Lagarde's productions *Every Child Should Have a Chance* (2001), *Tribal Sovereignty: Unplugged* (1998) and *Juvenile Justice: Unplugged* (1997), are distributed in public schools throughout the United States, and the latter was screened at the White House for public policy makers. Lagarde's documentaries *Swell* (1996), about four generations of female surfers in Santa Cruz, California (Gold Apple from the National Educational Media Network) and *Zeuf* (1994), a documentary about a woman surfer's struggle with breast cancer (Directors' Choice award at the Black Maria Film and Video Festival) were broadcast on PBS stations and the Sundance Channel and are currently in distribution on home video.

Lagarde holds an MA in documentary filmmaking from Stanford University, and a BA in Political Science. She founded Swell Cinema in 1996 and teaches media study in high school. Born in France, Lagarde became an American citizen in 1995 so that she could vote.



ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS...

Francesca Talenti

Currently teaching animation and production at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Francesca recently won an Honorable Mention at Sundance for her film *The Planets*. She also just completed *Poetry in Motion*, a series of animations funded by ITVS. Five of these animations were selected to represent the US at INPUT 2004

Johnny Symons

Johnny's award-winning documentary *Daddy & Papa*, a story of gay fatherhood in America, had its premiere at the Sundance Film Festival and has gone on to win more than 15 international awards. It aired nationally on PBS' *Independent Lens* and is in use at over 200 universities and community groups around the country.

Charlene Gilbert

Charlene Gilbert's *Homecoming, Sometimes I am haunted by memories of red dirt and clay*, premiered nationally on PBS and won the NBPC Prized Pieces Award for Best Documentary. Ms. Gilbert also co-authored, with Quinn Eli, a companion book to the film entitled *Homecoming: The Story of African American Farmers* published by Beacon Press. Her most recent documentary, *Children Will Listen* premiered at the AFI Silverdocs Documentary Festival this past June and will have its national broadcast premiere on PBS this fall. Ms. Gilbert is also the recipient of the Rockefeller Media Fellowship, Harvard University's Bunting Fellowship, and the Kellogg National Leadership Fellowship award. She is currently working on an experimental documentary on bioethics, which she hopes to complete in 2005. Ms. Gilbert currently resides in Washington, DC where she is a professor in the School of Communication at American University.

Aiyana Elliott & Dick Dahl

Aiyana Elliott and Dick Dahl are an independent filmmaking team living in Los Angeles who first worked together on 2000's *The Ballad of Ramblin' Jack*, a documentary feature exploring the work and life of folksinger Ramblin' Jack Elliott, which won the Special Jury Prize for Artistic Achievement at the 2000 Sundance Film Festival. In addition to having produced various short documentary projects, they are currently developing a narrative feature entitled *El Camino de Dios*, which tells the story of a daughter's quest to reconcile with an estranged mother struggling to become a shaman amongst the Huichol Indians.

Christiane Badgley

A longtime collaborator of Marlon Riggs, Christiane co-directed and edited his award-winning last work, *Black is...Black Ain't*. Her latest film *A Prison for McRae* (2003) was produced for European Public Television ARTE.

Anne Lewis

Anne was associate director for Barbara Kopple's academy award winning *Harlan County U.S.A.* Her documentaries include: *On Our Own Land* (duPont Columbia Award), *Fast Food Women* (POV, Judges' Choice London Film Festival), *Justice in the Coalfields* (Gold Plaque INTERCOM), and *Belinda* (CINE Golden Eagle). Anne currently teaches film editing at UT-Austin and continues her 22-year association with the pioneering film group, Appalshop.

Laura Varela

Laura is a San Antonio based filmmaker whose work focuses on cultural preservation and social justice in the Chicano community. Her projects (*A Slight Discomfort: Echoes from the Clinic*, *Liteweight*,

Planeta Aztlan) have screened in Film Festivals throughout the nation including Latino Film Festivals in the US and Mexico. Laura's new film is about the experience of Latino Vietnam veterans.

Heather Courtney

Heather is an Austin based independent committed to immigrant rights. Her film about Texas day laborers, *Los Trabajadores*, was broadcast on PBS' Independent Lens series in 2003, and won the IDA David L. Wolper Award. Heather recently returned from a Fulbright fellowship to Mexico, where she spent a year working on her next documentary *Letters from the Other Side* about the women and children immigration leaves behind.

Lily Ng

Lily studied American cinema in Paris and documentary film production at Stanford University, where she received an MA in 1996. She has produced and directed five short films, including, *Balancing Act*, which won an award at the National Educational Media Network. Lily is a regular contributor to *Independent Documentary* and *DV* magazines, and has been integral to several independent documentaries nationally screened on PBS. Switching to the narrative film world, Lily has recently produced the 35mm feature, *Happily, Even After*, which won the Audience Award at Cinema Epicuria in 2004. Most currently, she has produced two Bay Area shorts, *Snakebite* and *The Horizon*, both due out in fall, 2004.

Lee Gardner

Lee became interested in film and video when he saw *The Making of Star Wars* in second grade. His first foray into directing and editing came when he decided to shave his head and then make a video about it. Since then, Lee has edited dozens of commercial spots, including the *Sopranos* promo for the 2004 season. He will edit the feature film, *The Other Half*, during the summer of 2004.

Tom Shepard

Tom Shepard produced and directed *Scout's Honor*, which won the Audience Award for Best Documentary and Freedom of Expression Award at the 2001 Sundance Film Festival and was broadcast on National PBS. Shepard co-produced and edited *Camp Lavender Hill*, which aired on public television, Free Speech Television, and CNN's International Insight. Previously, Shepard worked as an editor at National Public Radio for Linda Wertheimer and the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer. He graduated from Stanford University where he majored in biology and film. Shepard is currently co-producing and directing a feature documentary about Jehovah's Witnesses and their contributions to civil liberties.

Josh Kurz

Josh Kurz was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. His attempts at an early age to fuse the abstract concepts of comedy and science through home video led to many nights filming in the basement. Eventually this passion drew him out to sunny California where he became educated at USC Film School. However, living in the City of Angels for four long years without a car turned out to be hell. Soon after graduation, with a longing for the subway and tired of perpetual sunshine, Josh returned to New York and began directing offbeat interstitial segments for Comedy Central, ABC, Fox, and Noggin. The segments ranged from an explanation of cloning using large balls of Jell-O to an infomercial that explained how the ancient pyramids were built. Determined to reinvent children's television programming, he has returned to the West Coast (with car) and currently lives in the megalopolis that he now loves, Los Angeles.

Chris Metzler

After graduating from USC with a degree in business and cinema, Chris' film career has taken him from the depths of agency work, to coordinating post-production for awful American movies seen late at night in Belgium. His film directing and producing work has led him to criss-cross the country with the aid of caffeinated beverages, making his way in the Nashville country and Christian music video industries, finally forsaking his soul to commercial LA rock'n roll. These misadventures eventually culminated in him winning a Billboard Magazine Music Video Award. Burned out and hung over, he eventually fled to San Francisco to complete work on his award-winning feature documentary, *Plagues and Pleasures of the Salton Sea*.