

ARTS ENGINE PRESENTS A BIG MOUTH FILM

ELECTION DAY

SYNOPSIS

An experiment in cinéma vérité filmmaking, *Election Day* was shot in a single day—November 2, 2004—by over a dozen camera crews around the United States. The stars of this documentary are a lively and eclectic group of citizens from the Florida panhandle to the South Dakota plains, making the most of their right to vote.

www.ElectionDaytheMovie.com

FILM SPECS

Completion Date: March 2007
Aspect ratio: 16:9
Total Running Time: 82:00
Original Format: mini DV, 24p
Screening Format: HD

RIGHTS AVAILABLE:

Foreign broadcast
Theatrical
Home video
Internet

CONTACT:

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FILM DESCRIPTION

Election Day follows an eclectic group of voters over one day, namely Election Day 2004, from the early morning until well after midnight. Capturing people from all walks of life, including an ex-felon voting for the first time at age 50 and a factory worker debating gay marriage with his co-workers, the film presents a glimpse of the real life stories that lie underneath the complex electoral process.

Jim Fuchs, a Republican poll-watcher, takes us on an energized ride through the precincts of largely Democratic Chicago, railing against the city's "machine" politics. Rashida Tlaib of Dearborn, Michigan, mobilizes Muslims to vote. Eighteen-year-old Franny Fisher, of Stockholm, Wisconsin registers and votes at the same time in a one-room building staffed by her neighbor from down the road. Meanwhile, an international elections observer in St. Louis, Missouri is shocked to see voters waiting in line for two hours. A Native American activist works to get out the vote in Pine Ridge, South Dakota.

As these stories intertwine, audiences take in a portrait of American elections that is expansive, revealing and intimate. It is an entertaining and sometimes unsettling tapestry of the stories of citizens who are determined on one fateful day to make their vote count.

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ELECTION DAY

CREDITS

Director	Katy Chevigny
Producers	Maggie Bowman Dallas Brennan Rexer
Editor	Penelope Falk
Original Music	John Kimbrough
Associate Producer	Christina D. King
Assistant Editor	Laurent Hugon
Field Producers	Sarah Klein David Becker Wellington Bowler Blue Chevigny Katy Chevigny Beth Davenport Melissa Godoy Kristi Jacobson Christina D. King Faye Lederman Alicia Sams Peter Sassi Andrea Torrice Angela Tucker
Cinematographers	Robert Reed Altman Rick Butler Rob Featherstone Melissa Godoy Alan Jacobsen Kirsten Johnson John Kelleran Dana Kupper Vic Losick Ben Shapiro Jonathan Skurnick Melba Williams Matthew Woolf Juan Carlos Zaldívar

Featuring the song "Election Day" by Blaze Foley

Election Day is a co-production of Arts Engine, Inc. and The Independent Television Service (ITVS) with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

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ELECTION DAY

THE MAKING OF ELECTION DAY

By Katy Chevigny, Director

The Idea: A Different Story About Elections

In the fall of 2004, we started thinking about making a film on the upcoming 2004 election. We knew that there was ample coverage of the “horse race” of the campaigns, and that the close contest between “red” and “blue” states was at the forefront of everyone’s minds, so we looked to cover something different. We set out to depict portraits of real people who make our democracy work, whose actions are not the kind of thing that would make the evening news. The jumping off place for *Election Day* was the 2000 election, which had brought the failures of our voting systems into sharp focus. We decided to look at how the shadow of that election would affect the attitudes and experiences of voters and poll-workers across the country in 2004.

My favorite documentaries are those that both have something to say—either through the story, the characters or a unique perspective on society—and that also offer a creative approach to filmmaking. This approach can be many different things but on some level it makes the documentary “feel like a movie.” *Election Day* is meant to play like that, with politics, humor, emotion and history—basically everything you find in life but in movie form.

The Format: Many Locations, Many Characters and One Day to Shoot

Election Day is one of the few days in the United States on which so many Americans are collectively engaged in a common activity. Over 100 million people across the country vote together on a single day. This short span of time—less than 24 hours—encompasses a mammoth operation through which the people choose the leader of the free world. We decided on a “form-follows-function” approach to the film’s structure: what the United States populace does in one day, so would the film. We would shoot all the footage on November 2, 2004. There are many fiction films that use this one-day conceit, but constructing a documentary film on a national scale out of a single day’s footage was a fantastic challenge.

A big part of the puzzle was to film this same “one-day” in many different locations at once. With the wide variations in voter experiences, we believed that no one location (or even two or three) would be sufficient to capture the breadth and character of this public election endeavor. And again, the creative challenge

ARTS ENGINE PRESENTS A BIG MOUTH FILM

ELECTION DAY

THE MAKING OF ELECTION DAY CONTINUED...

appealed to me: Can we weave together footage from all over the country into one cohesive piece? The safe route would have been to stick with two or three characters, but I wanted to get a richer texture. Inspired by filmmakers who celebrate the invigorating chaos of multiple characters such as Robert Altman or Jean Renoir, I decided to try to work with what would traditionally be considered too many situations, too ambitious, and, by some, undoable. In my mind, I wanted the film *Election Day* to be as broad a portrait of the real Election Day as we could get.

The Plan: A Big One-Day Shoot

Starting in late September, our small production team set ourselves the task of “casting” the different characters, locations or stories we intended to follow on November 2, 2004. This was a massive undertaking that required calling upon colleagues, friends and family for leads on interesting, unusual or colorful Election Day scenarios. We also worked with some nonprofit election reform partners, such as the Global Exchange, the Brennan Center for Justice, Project VOTE and Demos, who provided valuable insights into locations where problems or improvements in the voting systems were apparent. Producers Maggie Bowman and Dallas Brennan Rexer, in tandem with Associate Producer Christy King and other staff producers at Arts Engine, created a giant grid on the wall—what we called the “matrix”—so we could cross reference characters with locations and available crews.

In addition to the casting, the team was also tenacious in fighting for access to film in polling places around the country, something that is often discouraged by local election offices if not downright prohibited, as in the state of Florida. These prohibitions intensified our determination to get into polling places as much as we could. Much of the confusion had occurred at polling places in 2000. Was the public going to be prohibited from documenting what occurs at these sites? Our unequivocal answer was, No way.

One of the dangers of working with multiple crews is that the look of the film might not be consistent across locations. To address this, I created a document that served as a set of guidelines for the kind of cinéma vérité style I was looking for. *Pay attention to the small regional detail, the quiet moment. We don't need talking-head interviews. Don't ask the subjects to repeat actions. We don't need to shoot it like we're TV news crews, but instead shoot it like this is a story of one person's daily activities.* I also had extensive conversations with each DP and field producer, many of whom were acclaimed filmmakers who generously offered their time to work one long, grueling day. Our star crews included Kirsten

ARTS ENGINE PRESENTS A BIG MOUTH FILM

ELECTION DAY

THE MAKING OF ELECTION DAY CONTINUED...

Johnson, cinematographer and co-director of our previous film *Deadline*, Dana Kupper, award-winning cinematographer of *Stevie*, Juan Carlos Zaldivar and Vic Losick, among many others.

When November 2nd arrived, a team of three worked the headquarters in our New York office, fielding updates from our crews around the country. We had the incredible experience of going from zero hours of footage to 105 hours by the next morning, something like a drag race for footage. It was thrilling! Receiving the tapes from our crews in the weeks that followed was like an early Christmas. Since it was impossible for us to be on every shoot, each new package represented a new discovery of what the film would eventually become.

Putting It All Together

By the time we began editing, I had become inspired by Spencer Overton's book "Stealing Democracy: The New Politics of Voter Suppression," which illuminates patterns in many of these devilish details that our footage, and now the film, reveals. A former member of the Carter-Baker Commission on Federal Election Reform, Spencer Overton explains how seemingly insignificant practices at the local level can control the outcome of elections and weaken the real power of voters. As an advisor to *Election Day*, Spencer screened footage and threw ideas around with us, providing valuable insights into how our footage fit into a larger picture of the election system pressure points that are under scrutiny today.

There is no way of knowing where your film is going to end up when you edit a cinéma vérité film. We had a couple of governing principles for our edit process but everything else was up for grabs as we followed the guide of the footage itself.

One principle was that the film structure would loosely follow the chronology of the day, starting at 4:30 a.m. with Jim Fuchs in Chicago and ending after 1 a.m. in Quincy, Florida. Another principle was that we would steer away from the story of the presidential race as much as possible, in order to focus on the local situations of our characters and places. Lastly, as a sort of creative philosophy, we wanted to ensure that we left space in the film for minor details of character, of place and of time. This was partly because the footage demonstrates how aptly the phrase "the devil is in the details" sums up many of the major problems in the electoral process. Also, by preserving the visual and auditory nuances of various locations around the country, we hoped to make the film a specific portrait of the U.S. in 2004 as well as a commentary on the election process itself.

ARTS ENGINE PRESENTS A BIG MOUTH FILM

ELECTION DAY

THE MAKING OF ELECTION DAY CONTINUED...

With those broad guidelines, we then had the task of screening all 105 hours of footage and searching for the similarities and contrasts that would give the film vivid texture and drama. After narrowing the footage down to our favorite scenes, the rest of the process was essentially a video and audio sudoku puzzle. As we moved closer to the end of the process, it became increasingly clear that moving one scene caused a ripple effect that changed the emotional tenor of a number of surrounding scenes as well. The final film structure reflects this interdependence among the stories and the decisions we made within this puzzle. Our hope is that the effect of *Election Day* on the viewer is greater than the sum of its parts, showing a portrait of the U.S. election system that no one has seen before.

ARTS ENGINE PRESENTS A BIG MOUTH FILM

ELECTION DAY

FILMMAKER'S BIO

KATY CHEVIGNY, DIRECTOR

Katy Chevigny, the director of *Election Day*, is an award-winning filmmaker who runs the non-profit Arts Engine, a leading independent media organization, and its production arm, Big Mouth Films. She is best known for *Deadline*, an investigation into Illinois governor George Ryan's commuting of death sentences, which she co-directed with Kirsten Johnson. After premiering at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival, *Deadline* was broadcast on NBC to an audience of over 6 million, was nominated for an Emmy, and won the Thurgood Marshall Journalism Award. Chevigny also directed *Journey to the West: Chinese Medicine Today*, a feature-length documentary about traditional Chinese medicine and its influence in the West. She has produced five award-winning documentaries: *Arctic Son*, *Innocent Until Proven Guilty*, *Nuyorican Dream*, *Brother Born Again* and *Outside Looking In: Transracial Adoption in America*. These films have screened at festivals around the world, including Berlin and Full Frame, and have been broadcast on public television and HBO/Cinemax, among other outlets. Chevigny is currently in post-production on *The Dishes*, the story of a punk rock band that juggles family and careers in Chicago. Through her work at Arts Engine, Chevigny also oversees MediaRights.org and the Media That Matters Film Festival.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2007 *Election Day*, Director, 84 min.

2007 *The Dishes*, Director/Producer, work-in-progress

2006 *Arctic Son*, Executive Producer, 76 min.

2004 *Deadline*, Director/Producer, 90 min.

2001 *Journey to the West: Chinese Medicine Today*, Director/Producer, 58 min.

2001 *Outside Looking In: Transracial Adoption in America*, Producer, 56 min.

2000 *Brother Born Again*, Producer, 76 minutes

2000 *Nuyorican Dream*, Producer, 82 minutes

1999 *Innocent Until Proven Guilty*, Producer, 67 minutes

ARTS ENGINE PRESENTS A BIG MOUTH FILM

ELECTION DAY

PEOPLE AND PLACES

Jim Fuchs, Chicago, Illinois: Jim, a Republican poll-watcher and Committeeman, rushes from one polling place to the next, railing against the notorious corruption in the Democratic “machine.”

Brenda Holt, Quincy, Florida: Brenda is one of many volunteers working to keep a close eye on the vote in 2004. Located in the panhandle, Gadsden County is the only majority-black county in Florida. Morris Young is running an underdog campaign for county sheriff against the Deputy Sheriff Ed Spooner. If elected, Young would be the first black sheriff in Gadsden since Reconstruction. The race is unexpectedly close, causing a late-night suspenseful ballot count in which Young finally emerges as the winner by a margin of 69 votes. One of the reasons there are so many watchful eyes on the 2004 voting process is because in the 2000 election, an exceptionally high percentage (12%) of votes were deemed invalid due to technicalities, an anomaly that drew national attention.

Rashida Tlaib, Dearborn, Michigan: Rashida lives in one of the largest Arab-American communities in the United States, just outside of Detroit. She works at the Arab-American Institute in Dearborn. Her husband, Fayez, a naturalized U.S. citizen who works in the automotive industry, is voting for the first time in 2004. Election Day falls during the Ramadan holiday, and at sundown Rashida and her extended family break their daily fast with a traditional meal for the grownups and pizza for the kids.

Leon Batts, New York, New York: Fifty-year-old Leon, a former prisoner with a felony conviction, votes for the first time in his life. In New York State, ex-felons can apply to have their voting rights reinstated once they have completed their parole. Leon is not on the list of registered voters and instead must vote on a provisional ballot. Weeks after the election, Leon learns that his registration was never processed and therefore his vote was not counted.

Alzo Reddick, Orlando, Florida: Former state legislator Alzo, a partisan Democrat, welcomes Kerry campaign volunteers to his restaurant in a swing section of the city. Meanwhile, back in the kitchen the dishwasher, “Bossman,” laments his ineligibility to cast a vote due to his ex-felon status. Florida, in contrast to New York State (and others), is one of a few states in which it’s very difficult, if not practically impossible, for ex-felons to regain their voting rights. As a result of a range of state laws restricting ex-felons’ voting rights, almost 2,000,000 ex-felons nationwide are prohibited from voting.

ARTS ENGINE PRESENTS A BIG MOUTH FILM

ELECTION DAY

PEOPLE AND PLACES CONTINUED...

Shanta Guate, St. Louis, Missouri: An international elections observer from Australia, Shanta observes polls in many parts of St. Louis to see whether they meet international standards. In the report she later prepares for Fair Election International, she notes the great disparity in resources between polling places in rich neighborhoods and poor ones.

Dan “Buzz” Deters, Cincinnati, Ohio: The brother of a Republican candidate for county prosecutor, Buzz works to coordinate the Deters campaign team. Deters is a write-in candidate, so Buzz’s team is providing pencils to voters as they head into the polls.

Bob and Traci Buzbee, Sapulpa, Oklahoma: Bob and Traci both work in a glass factory outside of Tulsa. Traci works the night shift, opposite her husband Bob’s day shift. Due to the high medical costs associated with treating their son’s kidney disease, they work these two shifts out of financial necessity although they continue to hope for a more compatible and family-friendly work schedule.

Paula Thompson, Shaker Heights, Ohio: A first-time volunteer, Paula works at a crowded polling place trying to facilitate the process for disgruntled voters in the suburbs of Cleveland. At the end of the day, she helps one of the precincts tally the ballots by hand, which is one of the responsibilities of election poll-workers.

The Fisher Family (Ted, Robbi, Franny, Emmett and Louis), Stockholm, Wisconsin: Organic farmers in a remote area near the Minnesota border, Ted and Robbi home-school their three children and make pizzas every Tuesday to supplement their income. In Wisconsin, eligible voters can register and vote on the same day. Franny, who recently turned 18, registers and votes at the sleepy polling place in town (population 97).

Jason Drapeaux, Pine Ridge, South Dakota: Jason leads a volunteer operation to get thousands of Native American voters to the polls. The Pine Ridge Reservation covers hundreds of miles and many voters and poll-workers live far from their polling places. As a result, part of the volunteer effort consists of driving voters to the polls and bringing food to poll-workers over the course of the long day. Tribal elections are held on the same day as the U.S. federal election.

BIG MOUTH FILMS

ABOUT

BIG MOUTH was founded in 1997 by Katy Chevigny and Julia Pimsleur to produce provocative and engaging social-issue documentaries and to provide production services for U.S. and international clients. Since its inception, BIG MOUTH has produced seven feature-length documentaries that cover topics ranging from the criminal justice system to alternative healing, and has worked with numerous clients in film video production.

CURRENT FILMS

ARCTIC SON

In the tiny Arctic village of Old Crow a father and son are reunited after 20 years apart. Stanley Sr. is a hunter, a rugged man of the land steeped in Native Vuntut Gwitchin traditions. Seattle-raised Stanley Jr. immerses himself in hip-hop and partying. As their worlds collide, this moving father-son journey becomes a larger exploration of the complex relationship between tradition and modernity; nature and pop culture; addiction and independence; and the bigger quest we all embark at some point—the need to know who we are and where we belong.

ELECTION DAY

Once every four years, on the first Tuesday in November, Americans put their own democracy to the test at polling places across the country. *Election Day* follows a dozen citizens on November 2, 2004—from the plains of South Dakota to the palm trees of southern Florida—over the course of 24 hours. Uplifting yet troubling, their experiences offer rare insight into a hallowed American ritual. *Election Day* is a co-production of Arts Engine and the Independent Television Service (ITVS) with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

THE DISHES

The Dishes is a verité documentary that follows a midwestern punk rock band — three women and a man — as they juggle family, careers and survival in America's cutthroat music industry. The film takes the viewer from the band's local haunts in Chicago to life on the road during their U.S. tour. *The Dishes* is not a story about the likes of The Rolling Stones or Beyoncé. It is about bare-bones band-making and the dramatic politics that surround it.

BIG MOUTH FILMS

SERVICES

LINE PRODUCTION

BIG MOUTH FILMS can provide detailed budgets, hire complete production crews, cast talent, rent all necessary equipment, secure proper location permissions and supervise post-production in the United States, Latin America, Europe and Africa. These line producing services, including budgets and time commitments, are tailored to the needs of the production.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS & VIDEOS FOR NONPROFITS

“The video gave our mission real faces and a real voice...BIG MOUTH eloquently translated courageous stories into universal messages.”

- Rachel Keller,
Jewish Women International

BIG MOUTH produces educational videos for organizations in order to raise awareness about pressing issues. BIG MOUTH's staff produces hard-hitting informative videos (both long and short format) that help viewers gain a deeper understanding about the critical problems of today. Using techniques that are both engaging and content-driven, BIG MOUTH has found ways to use video to shed light on important situations that are frequently left out of the mainstream media. Our clients have found our videos useful for public awareness campaigns, membership recruitment, fundraising efforts, anniversary events, and national conventions.

Nonprofit clients include:

Johns Hopkins University: Project Restore
ACORN
Brennan Center for Justice
The New York Hotel Trades Council
National Institutes of Mental Health

BIG MOUTH FILMS

PAST FILMS

DEADLINE

• Premiere at 2004 Sundance Film Festival • Broadcast on NBC's Dateline and The Sundance Channel • Emmy-nominated and Winner of The Thurgood Marshall Award for Journalism

NUYORICAN DREAM

• World Premiere at 2000 Sundance Film Festival • Winner of the Audience Award at LA Outfest and at the New York Latino Film Festival, and the Joris Ivens Award at the Cinema du Reel Festival • Nominated by International Documentary Association (IDA) in the Best Documentary category • Broadcast on Cinemax ReelLife in 2000 • Distributed by California Newsreel

BROTHER BORN AGAIN

• World Premiere at SXSW Film Festival, 2001 • Broadcast in 2001 on public television • Distributed by New Day Films

OUTSIDE LOOKING IN: TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION IN AMERICA

• World Premiere at Hollywood Black Film Festival, 2002 • Screened at Riverside Church, NY, Harlem Film Festival, Newark Black Film Festival, Hollywood Black Film Festival, San Francisco Black Film Festival and Roxbury Film Festival • A selection of National Video Resources' "Viewing Race" series • Broadcast on public television in 2002 • Distributed by Filmmakers Library

JOURNEY TO THE WEST: CHINESE MEDICINE TODAY

• World Premiere at Asia Society, New York, 2001 • Screened in Hong Kong, Portland, Seattle, and San Francisco • Distributed by Wellspring Media

INNOCENT UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY

• World premiere at Berlin International Film Festival, 1999 • Nominated by International Documentary Association (IDA) for the Pare Lorentz Award • Winner of the PASS Award by National Coalition on Crime and Delinquency, and a Cine Golden Eagle • Broadcast on HBO Signature, 1999 • Distributed by Filmmakers Library

ARTS ENGINE

MISSION

ARTS ENGINE supports, produces and distributes independent media of consequence and promotes the use of independent media by advocates, educators and the general public. By fostering the production and use of independent film, video and new media, ARTS ENGINE connects media makers and active audiences in order to spur critical consideration of pressing social issues.

PROGRAMS

BIG MOUTH FILMS

Big Mouth Films produces award-winning, social issue documentaries and advocacy videos, independently and in collaboration with numerous companies and organizations.

MEDIARIGHTS.ORG

With over 2 million annual visits, MediaRights.org empowers media makers, educators, librarians, non-profits, activists and youth to use documentaries and shorts to encourage action and inspire dialogue on contemporary social issues.

MEDIA THAT MATTERS FILM FESTIVAL

The Media That Matters Film Festival brings high-impact shorts and Take Action tools to audiences around the country all year long through DVD distribution, web streaming, broadcasts and community screenings.

FISCAL SPONSORSHIP

Arts Engine serves as a fiscal sponsor for independent filmmakers who are applying for funding from organizations that require a non-profit status.

INTERN/MENTOR PROGRAM

Arts Engine has maintained an intern/mentor program since its inception, training over 50 young people in the art of social issue media making.

ARTS ENGINE

ENDORSEMENTS

“ARTS ENGINE is unique among independent media organizations for its insistence on bringing progressive and marginalized voices to larger audiences. By inspiring and cross-fertilizing conversation among media makers, audiences, advocates, educators and policy makers, ARTS ENGINE contributes immeasurably to the goal of expanding the import and reach of the independent media community, so that all voices can be heard.”

- SALLY JO FIFER, President/CEO,
Independent Television Service (ITVS)

“ARTS ENGINE and its programs are an integral part of the next wave of media makers. Savvy, digital, and woman-run, they are giving big media a run for their money. Everyone is watching what ARTS ENGINE does, the decisions they make, and the progressive media they promote.”

- NINA UTNE, Editor-at-Large, Utne Reader

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