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AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY, INC./KCET/WGBH/WNET

## For Immediate Release

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## P.O.V.'s "Street Fight" Delivers Edge-of-Your-Seat Political Race

Newark, N.J.'s Idealistic Black Newcomer Challenges Entrenched African-American Political Machine in New Documentary Premiering Tuesday, July 5 on PBS

Winner of Awards at 2005 Tribeca and Hot Docs Film Festivals

*Produced in Association With ITVS and P.O.V./American Documentary, Inc.*

There's a saying that democracy is a contact sport. The new film **Street Fight** gives you a ringside seat. Even if you know the outcome from national reports, or lived in Newark at the time, this insider's chronicle of the 2002 race for mayor in Newark, New Jersey is riveting, delivering a dramatic account of youthful energy and ideals running headlong into old-guard machine politics and racial demagoguery. These opposing forces are, of course, nothing new in American elections. But, in Newark in 2002, a black mayor was using these tactics against a black challenger.

Marshall Curry's **Street Fight**, winner of the 2005 Audience Award at the Tribeca Film Festival and at Hot Docs (where it also won for Best International Documentary), has its national broadcast premiere **Tuesday, July 5, 2005** at 10 p.m., as part of the 18th season of public television's P.O.V. series. The film is an Independent Television Service (ITVS) co-presentation. P.O.V. continues on Tuesdays at 10 p.m., through September 13 on PBS stations nationwide. (Check local listings.) American television's longest-running independent documentary series, P.O.V. is public television's premier showcase for point-of-view, nonfiction films.

Early on, a staffer for Cory Booker, the upstart challenger in the race, warns that this election will be decided in the streets. **Street Fight** lives up to the staffer's prediction – and to its own title – as the campaign between Booker and four-time Mayor Sharpe James devolves from dirty tricks to intimidation to the threat of worse. The film crew itself becomes a target for Mayor James' supporters – and the mayor himself – who see everyone as either for them or against them.

At first, the 32-year old Booker, a recently elected councilman for the city's poor Central Ward, mounts a rather respectful challenge to the incumbent. In Newark, after all, politics are non-partisan, and both men are Democrats. Booker recognizes that the mayor, representing a first generation of black politicians who came up the hard way, is personally popular and has raised Newark's stature with corporate, downtown-centered development, including a new Performing Arts Center and minor-league baseball stadium.

But Booker questions the value of the mayor's policies to the city's poorer neighborhoods and residents. He cites Newark's sky-high murder rate, a poverty level over 30%, and an astounding high school dropout rate of 60%. Booker suggests that it's time for a new generation to bring Newark's downtown "renaissance" to all the city's residents.

Booker is well positioned to fight the mayor on the issues while projecting a positive image. A son of civil-rights activists who integrated a white neighborhood in northern New Jersey, Booker is a poster child for the civil rights movement. Excelling in high school where he was an all-American football player, he went on to Stanford, to Oxford where he was a Rhodes Scholar, and then graduated from Yale Law School. Upon graduating, Booker didn't seek high-paid law work, but instead embraced his parents' activist ideals, moving to Newark, setting up house in the Brick Towers high-rise projects, and starting a nonprofit to fight slumlords. He also got himself elected to the city council when no one gave him much chance. He undertook unorthodox actions, such as living in an RV parked at notorious drug corners to drive away the dealers.

Sharpe James, Newark's mayor for 16 years, promptly labels Booker a carpetbagger engaged in publicity stunts. He turns Booker's "golden boy" image to his own favor, contrasting with great effect his own background as a native son who pulled himself up from the city's meanest streets. This mayor will be no pushover for any golden boy. He has achievements to point to and support from state Democrats. More to the point, the mayor has solid support among poor blacks and Latinos – the very constituency Booker claims to be standing up for – who identify with James' rags-to-riches story or who have benefited from the mayor's patronage.

The mayor claims that Booker is funded by right-wing white interests, and anonymous fliers charge that he is part of a Jewish conspiracy; he is, in the language on the street, not "black enough." The mayor's campaign turns Booker's education and success – not to mention his lighter skin – into evidence that he is a "great white hope."

The race turns uglier as city police show up at public housing projects to bar Booker from canvassing for votes. Local merchants who display Booker signs, or hold house meetings for him, find their businesses raided and closed down for code violations. Anyone doing business with the city is made to understand they must support the mayor. Public housing residents fear eviction; city employees fear demotion.

These are brutal machine tactics; livelihoods are on the line. Booker's team has to run a "stealth" campaign that shields the identity of many local supporters. But this is only the beginning of James' bare-knuckle tactics – which turn menacing when the mayor's bodyguards accost **Street Fight's** film crew at a rally. Despite director Curry having gotten permission and encouragement from the mayor's campaign press director to attend, Newark police in suits eject him. The next time Curry attends a public, outdoor James rally, the mayor himself approaches the camera and has his security shut down the filming. In the middle of it all, a strip club scandal taints both campaigns, and as the election nears, federal law enforcement sends in observers to monitor cheating and violence.

"In the James-Booker mayoral race, we saw a story very different from the one found in other recent campaign films," says director Marshall Curry. "This wasn't a story of mass-media politics; it wasn't about spin doctors and photo ops, but a story about politics in the city streets."

#### **About the filmmaker:**

**Marshall Curry**  
**Producer/Director/Editor**

**Street Fight** is Marshall Curry's first feature-length film. He has worked for many years as a senior producer at Icon Nicholson, a New York multimedia design firm. There he has produced and directed interactive documentaries and Web sites for museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Mashantucket Pequot Museum.

Through his independent company, Marshall Curry Productions, LLC, he has shot, edited, and directed a number of short films for nonprofits including **The Day the Indians Won** (for the Rainforest Foundation), which tells the story of the Panara Indians in Brazil who successfully won

back their land, and **Negril Elementary** (for the Rockhouse Foundation), which chronicles an education project in Jamaica.

Curry is a graduate of Swarthmore College where he studied Comparative Religion and was a Eugene Lang Scholar. He was also a Jane Addams Fellow at Indiana University's Center on Philanthropy, where he wrote about the history, philosophy, and economics of nonprofits. He first got to know Newark N.J. in 1991, when he took time off from Swarthmore to set up a literacy program there. At the time, Mayor Sharpe James was in his second term. "I was surprised to hear, more than ten years later, that he was up for re-election again," says Curry. "A Newark election,' I was told early on, 'is not a televised, gentleman's boxing match. It's a street fight.'"

#### **Credits:**

Producer/Director: Marshall Curry  
Editor: Marshall Curry  
Director of Photography: Marshall Curry  
Additional Editing: Mary Manhardt  
Executive Producers: Liz Garbus and Rory Kennedy  
Executive Producer for ITVS Sally Jo Fifer  
Executive Producer for P.O.V. Cara Mertes  
Original Music: James Baxter

**Running Time:** 86:46

#### **Awards & Festivals:**

- Tribeca Film Festival, 2005, New York – *Audience Award*
- Hot Docs, 2005, Toronto – *Best International Documentary Award* and *Audience Award*
- Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, 2005, Durham, N.C.
- Museum of Television & Radio, 2005, New York
- SILVERDOCS Documentary Festival, 2005, Silver Spring, Md.

#### **Co-Presenters:**



Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the weekly series Independent Lens on PBS. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have helped revitalize the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting [www.itvs.org](http://www.itvs.org). ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people. **Street Fight** was produced in association with the Independent Television Service.



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and entering its 18th season on PBS, P.O.V. is the first and most-awarded series on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m. during the summer, and with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought over 220 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. **Street Fight** was produced in association with P.O.V./American Documentary, Inc. More information about P.O.V. is available online at [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov).

**P.O.V. Interactive** ([www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov))

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. It also produces a Web site for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through community-based and educational applications, focusing on involving viewers in activities, information and feedback on the issues. In addition, [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov) houses our unique *Talking Back* feature, filmmaker interviews and viewer resources, and information on the P.O.V. archives as well as myriad special sites for previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

Major funding for P.O.V./American Documentary is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Educational Foundation of America, the Ford Foundation, PBS and public television viewers. Funding for *P.O.V.'s Borders: Environment* ([www.pbs.org/pov/borders](http://www.pbs.org/pov/borders)) is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television stations including KCET/Los Angeles, WGBH/Boston, and WNET/New York. Cara Mertes is executive director of P.O.V./American Documentary, Inc.



Support for P.O.V. is provided by Starbucks Coffee Company. Starbucks has a rich tradition of supporting the arts and independent film and celebrates the fact that numerous points of view can be discussed over a good cup of coffee. Starbucks is committed to offering the highest quality coffee in grocery stores nationwide.

**American Documentary, Inc.** ([www.americandocumentary.org](http://www.americandocumentary.org))

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback, to educational opportunities and community participation.

***TAPE REQUESTS: Please note that a broadcast version of this film is available upon request, as the film may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.***