



Contact:

Cynthia López, 212-989-7425, [clopez@pov.org](mailto:clopez@pov.org), 646-729-4748 (cell)

Cathy Lehrfeld, 212-989-7425, [clehrfeld@pov.org](mailto:clehrfeld@pov.org), Neyda Martinez, 212-989-7425, [neyda@pov.org](mailto:neyda@pov.org)

Online Pressroom: [www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom)

**P.O.V.'s "WAGING A LIVING"**

By Roger Weisberg

***MEDIA ALERT – FACT SHEET***

*"An eye-opening, often heartbreaking documentary about America's working poor."*

— Jeanette Catsoulis, *The New York Times*

National Air Date: **Tuesday, Aug. 29, 2006** at 10:00 p.m. on PBS. (Check local listings.)

Summary: The term "working poor" should be an oxymoron. If you work full time, you should not be poor, but more than 30 million Americans—one in four workers—are stuck in jobs that do not pay for the basics of a decent life. **Waging a Living** chronicles the day-to-day battles of four low-wage earners fighting to lift their families out of poverty. Shot over a three-year period in the Northeast and California, this observational documentary captures the dreams, frustrations and accomplishments of a diverse group of people who struggle to live from paycheck to paycheck. By presenting an unvarnished look at the barriers that these workers must overcome to escape poverty, **Waging a Living** offers a sobering view of the elusive American Dream. A *co-presentation with Thirteen/WNET New York*.

Filmmaker's  
Statement:

"In making **Waging a Living**, I wanted viewers to understand what it's like to work hard, play by the rules, and still not be able to support a family," says producer/director Roger Weisberg. "It's easy to take for granted the janitors and security guards in the offices where we work, the waiters and bus boys in the restaurants where we eat, and the nurses and care-givers in the facilities where we place our children and elderly. I wanted to bring viewers inside the daily grind of the nameless people we encounter every day who struggle to survive from paycheck to paycheck. My goal was to get people to take a new look at the prevailing American myth that hard work alone can overcome poverty."

People in the film:

**Jerry Longoria, San Francisco**

**Jerry Longoria** is a 45-year-old security guard whose \$12 per hour job barely covers his modest living expenses and his rent in a single room occupancy hotel in a blighted neighborhood in San Francisco. Five years ago, Jerry was homeless and fighting a losing battle with alcoholism. Today, he is sober and manages to send his children regular child support payments.

Jerry's real passion is his work for his union. He leads rallies, speaks at city council meetings, and helps organize a successful campaign to improve wages and benefits for security guards. His biggest goal is to visit his two children whom he hasn't seen in nine years. Eventually, he is able to save enough to make an emotional journey to North Carolina, but shortly after he returns, he has a disagreement with his boss and is fired. With the help of

his union, Jerry finds a new job, but it pays 20% less than his old one. Jerry worries that it will take him years to advance to his previous salary and that his plans for future reunions with his children will have to be put on hold.

### **Barbara Brooks, Long Island, New York**

**Barbara Brooks** is a 40-year-old single mother of five living in Freeport, N.Y. She grew up abused and impoverished but is determined to break the cycle of domestic violence and poverty. Barbara struggles to balance her responsibilities as a full-time college student, worker, and mother.

She makes \$8.25 per hour as a counselor at a juvenile detention facility, but her earnings are insufficient to make ends meet. To supplement her wages Barbara receives a range of government benefits including Medicaid, food stamps, child-care assistance, utility assistance, and subsidized Section 8 housing. Barbara eventually receives a raise to \$11 per hour, but her increased earnings make her ineligible for most government benefits. She calculates that by earning an additional \$450 a month, she loses almost \$600 a month in government aid. "I'm hustling backwards," she says.

Barbara is convinced that the only way to become self-sufficient is to get a college degree. When she earns her associate's degree, she finds a job as a recreational therapist at a nearby nursing home that pays \$15 per hour. She loves her new job with its professional status, increased earnings, and full medical benefits, but quickly discovers that she is again going backwards when her remaining government benefits are eliminated. With a heavy heart, Barbara resorts to working part-time so that her benefits can be restored while she completes her college education.

### **Jean Reynolds, Keansburg, N.J.**

**Jean Reynolds** is a 55-year-old certified nursing assistant in Keansburg, N.J., who is supporting her three children and two grandchildren. She leads her union's successful struggle to increase wages, but since she's been at the same job for over 15 years, she earns the maximum wage of \$11 per hour and does not qualify for a salary increase.

Jean's oldest daughter has cancer and Jean struggles to pay her medical bills along with the other household expenses. When Jean takes emergency custody of two more grandchildren, her wages cannot stretch to cover the needs of her family of eight. She falls behind on her bills and is evicted from her home. As the family faces the prospect of living in homeless shelters, Jean reluctantly turns to public assistance. Although the authorities have consistently rejected her applications in the past, they discover that Jean's sick daughter now qualifies for help. With emergency public assistance, Jean manages to find a place for her family to live but still struggles to make ends meet. Ultimately, Jean feels trapped in a dead-end job and cheated out of the American Dream.

### **Mary Venettelli, Cream Ridge, N.J.**

**Mary Venettelli** is a 45-year-old single mother of three living in southern New Jersey. She led a very comfortable middle-class life until she started going through a bitter divorce. When Mary enters the workforce to support her family, the only job she finds in her rural community is a waitress position, paying \$2.13 per hour plus tips. Her evening schedule at the restaurant forces Mary to hire babysitters that she can't afford and puts enormous stress on her children.

Mary relies on local food pantries for emergency food, borrows money from friends, and runs up \$15,000 in credit card debt to pay her household bills. She loses her car and is afraid she will lose her house. Ultimately, her divorce settlement stabilizes her financial predicament, but she realizes that her future is not secure. Mary returns to school to acquire new computer skills and begins to build a new life for her family.

Filmmaker's  
Biography:

Producer/director Roger Weisberg joined public television station Thirteen/WNET New York in 1976. He produced dozens of programs on subjects including aging, domestic violence, juvenile justice, consumer fraud, health care, the environment, and urban poverty. Since 1980, he has written, produced, and directed 25 PBS documentaries through his independent production company, Public Policy Productions. These documentaries have won over 100 awards including Peabody, Emmy, and duPont-Columbia awards. His 1993 film, **Road Scholar**, and his 1999 film, **Sound and Fury**, had wide theatrical releases before airing on PBS. Weisberg received an Academy Award nomination in 2001 for **Sound and Fury** and in 2003 for **Why Can't We Be a Family Again?** His current production is **Money and Medicine**, about the nation's health insurance crisis.

Length: 86:46

Awards & Festivals:

- *CINE Golden Eagle Award and CINE Master Series Award*
- Council on Foundations – *Henry Hampton Award for Excellence in Film & Digital Media*
- New Jersey International Film Festival – *Grand Prize Winner*
- Philadelphia International Film Festival – *Silver Award*
- Columbus International Film and Video Festival – *Silver Chris Award (Best of Its Division)*
- Official Selection: Cinequest Film Festival, Asheville Film Festival, Fort Meyers Beach Film Festival, Indiefest Chicago, Kansas International Film Festival, Newport Beach Film Festival, Ojai Film Festival, Pacific Palisades Film Festival, Red Bank International Film Festival, Santa Cruz Film Festival, Tiburon Film Festival, Seoul International Labor Film Festival

Credits:

**Waging a Living** is a production of Public Policy Productions in association with Thirteen/WNET New York, with funding provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Ford Foundation, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB).

Producer/Director:	Roger Weisberg
Co-Producers/Co-Directors:	Eddie Rosenstein (East Coast), Frances Reid, Pamela Harris (West Coast)
Associate Producer:	Deborah Clancy
Principal Cinematographer:	Slawomir Grunberg
Editors:	Sandra Christie, Lewis Erskine, Christopher White
Original Music:	Richard Fiocca
Executive Producer:	Stephen Segaller

Community Outreach  
& Education:

P.O.V. is working with public television stations and national and community-based groups across the country to foster community dialogue around the

issues presented in **Waging a Living**. For a list of upcoming screening and discussion events, go to <http://www.pbs.org/pov/utills/povnews.html>.

Among the materials that now available online are a Discussion Guide for employers, labor leaders, and community stakeholders developed by Outreach Extensions, and a Policy Guide called "Opportunities for Action" developed by The Hatcher Group. Dr. Faith Rogow is creating a Lesson Plan. In addition, the American Library Association and P.O.V. are creating a multimedia resource list of related fiction and nonfiction books, Web sites and videos that further explore the issues in the film. The materials will be available free of charge at [www.pbs.org/pov/outreach](http://www.pbs.org/pov/outreach) on August 10, 2006.

On P.O.V. Interactive: The **Waging a Living** companion Web site ([www.pbs.org/pov/wagingaliving](http://www.pbs.org/pov/wagingaliving)) offers exclusive streaming video clips from the film, a podcast version of the filmmaker interview and a wealth of additional resources, including a Q&A with filmmaker Roger Weisberg, ample opportunities for viewers to "talk back" and talk to each other about the film, and the following special features:

Exclusive podcast series: Tune in during the month of August for downloadable conversations about the struggles of low-wage earners in America. Participants include *Nickel and Dimed* author Barbara Ehrenreich, *Democracy Now!* host Amy Goodman, author and economist Robert Pollin, historian Howard Zinn, filmmaker Roger Weisberg, and more guests to be announced shortly.

Co-Presenters:

Thirteen/WNET New York

Thirteen/WNET New York is one of the key program providers for public television, bringing such acclaimed series as *Nature*, *Great Performances*, *American Masters*, *Charlie Rose*, *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, *Wide Angle*, *Stage on Screen*, *Secrets of the Dead*, and *Cyberchase* – as well as the work of Bill Moyers – to audiences nationwide. As the flagship public broadcaster in the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut metro area, THIRTEEN reaches millions of viewers each week, airing the best of American public television along with its own local productions such as The Ethnic Heritage Specials,

The Thirteen Walking Tours, *New York Voices*, and *Reel New York*. With educational and community outreach projects that extend the impact of its television productions, Thirteen takes television "out of the box." And as broadcast and digital media converge, THIRTEEN is blazing trails in the creation of Web sites, enhanced television, CD-ROMs, DVD-ROMs, educational software, and other cutting-edge media products. More information about THIRTEEN can be found at: [www.thirteen.org](http://www.thirteen.org).

P.O.V.

Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and now in its 19th season on PBS, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running showcase on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through October, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought nearly 250 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. More information about P.O.V is available online at [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov).

Major funding for P.O.V. 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 Ford Foundation, PBS and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.'s Community Engagement activities and the *Diverse Voices Project* 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 Thirteen/WNET New York.



To download additional press materials, transcripts and color art, visit P.O.V.'s online pressroom at [www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom).

