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Americans Bring Passion, Discord and Hope to the Polls In P.O.V.'s "Election Day," Tuesday, July 1 on PBS

Fourteen Film Crews Fan Out Across America to Polling Places Big and Small
To Capture Sweeping Chronicle of 2004 Election Day

A co-production of Independent Television Service (ITVS)

"Election Day' is unique largely because it's not about politics so much as the act of voting and what voting means to people of various walks of life . . ." – Chris Vognar, Dallas Morning News

Forget the pie charts, color-coded maps and hyperventilating pundits. What's the street-level experience of voters in today's America? In a triumph of documentary storytelling, P.O.V.'s **Election Day** combines 11 stories — shot simultaneously on Nov. 2, 2004, from dawn until long past midnight — into one.

To make **Election Day**, award-winning director Katy Chevigny fielded 14 film crews to capture the action *vérité*-style in a diverse range of locations, including Chicago; Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota; Dearborn, Mich.; Cincinnati and Shaker Heights, Ohio; Orlando and Quincy, Fla.; St. Louis; New York; the little town of Sapulpa, Okla.; and even tinier Stockholm, Wis. **Election Day** is as fast-paced and suspenseful as a thriller, but with vote counts and political activism substituting for shootouts and car chases. The heroes of the day are ordinary Americans determined to vote, to turn out others to vote and to see that the voting is legally and fairly done.

Election Day has its broadcast premiere in time for Independence Day on **Tuesday, July 1, 2008** at 10 p.m. on PBS, during the 21st season of P.O.V. (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, and is a 2007 recipient of a Special News & Documentary Emmy Award for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking.

The good news in **Election Day** is that more and more Americans are bringing their passion for democracy to the polls, drawing unprecedented numbers of voters eager to make the most of their right to cast a ballot and have it counted. Taking place in the long shadow of 2000's bitterly contested presidential vote, the 2004 election also brought more scrutiny of polling-place practices from citizens as well as international observers. One beacon of democracy and validation of the electoral system captured by the film came when little Quincy, Fla., a town in the state's Panhandle with a 70 percent black population, finally elected its first black sheriff since the 1800s.

The bad news in **Election Day** is that close scrutiny of American elections finds a surprisingly antiquated system, which often works as much to frustrate voter participation as to encourage it, and which harbors wide disparities in access between rich and poor neighborhoods. The presence of

international observers seems suddenly not so out-of-place when one observer finds confusion and two-hour waits in St. Louis' poor, predominately black precincts while wealthier white neighborhoods have smoothly operating polling places.

Election Day takes viewers around the country to capture the drama unfolding on November 2, 2004. In Chicago, Republican committee man Jim Fuchs swims against the city's legendary political tides to make sure Republican voters aren't intimidated at prevailingly Democratic polling stations. At Pine Ridge, S.D., Jason Drapeaux leads a volunteer organization working hard to increase voter turnout on the Reservation. He and his cohorts succeed in raising turnout to 55 percent in 2004 from a dismal 33 percent in 2000, but it's not difficult to find the cynicism that keeps many Native Americans from voting. One man explains that he will vote that day in the tribal election only, having been disillusioned by promises from politicians on the federal level over the years.

Rashida Tlaib devotes her day in Dearborn, Mich., to turning out her family and Muslim friends to vote: some, like her Palestinian immigrant husband, for the first time. Bob and Traci Buzbee in Sapulpa, Okla., work opposite shifts at the same factory to be able to meet the high costs associated with their son's kidney disease. They watch the elections with some trepidation, wondering what impact, if any, the vote might have on their needs. Paula Thompson, a first-time volunteer at a crowded and chaotic polling place in Shaker Heights, Ohio, finds herself confronted by frustrated voters who aren't on her rolls.

Up in remote Stockholm, Wis., the Fisher family, organic farmers who supplement their income by selling homemade pizzas, prepares for a bonanza of orders from neighbors settling in for a long night of results-watching. Their youngest daughter, 18-year-old Franny, goes down to the one-room polling station where her neighbor, who lives just up the road in the little burg (pop. 97 at the time of filming), registers her and lets her vote all at the same time, as allowed by Wisconsin law.

Voting is more of a challenge in St. Louis. Australian observer Shanta Martin of Fair Election International is surprised to witness poor, black precincts mired in confusion and long waits, where people are nonetheless determined and anxious to vote — and more vocal than ever about the obstacles they face — while in richer neighborhoods, the polling stations run smoothly. In New York City, Leon Batts, an ex-felon who just regained his right to vote, is preparing to cast his first — a vote he sees as one representing all ex-convicts denied the right, despite having served their time. But Batts finds casting a vote more problematic than he anticipated.

In Florida — a state that until recently effectively banned all ex-felons from voting — former Democratic state legislator Alzo Reddick welcomes Kerry campaign volunteers to his Orlando restaurant, while “Bossman” the dishwasher, an ex-felon, laments his ineligibility to vote. In Cincinnati, Dan “Buzz” Deters is running a write-in campaign for his Republican brother for county prosecutor. Deters employs an imaginative tactic using imprinted pencils, which run into conflict with poll station workers on that always-contested line where campaigning should stop and voting begin.

In Quincy, Fla., it looks like the town, with a long-held African-American majority, might elect a black sheriff for the first time in over 100 years. Brenda Holt, a local activist mindful of Florida's infamous role in the 2000 elections, is on hand to make sure the people are not robbed of that possibility.

Just as Americans prepare to go to the polls again, **Election Day** offers a vivid, expansive and sometimes unsettling account of the last presidential election, when America's voting practices, once taken for granted, came under new and intense observation and challenge.

“In making **Election Day**, we set out to depict the real people who make our democracy work, but whose actions are not the stuff of the evening news,” says director Chevigny. “Our jumping-off point 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. We hope that viewers find the film to be a nuanced portrait of the attitudes and experiences of the citizens who make this democracy tick.”

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 (CPB).

About the filmmaker:

Katy Chevigny

Director

Katy Chevigny is an award-winning filmmaker who runs the nonprofit media organization Arts Engine and its production arm, Big Mouth Films, in New York. Her credits include the acclaimed “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, the film was broadcast on NBC, was nominated for an Emmy and won the Thurgood Marshall Journalism Award. She also directed the feature-length “Journey to the West: Chinese Medicine Today.”

Chevigny has produced five award-winning documentaries: “Arctic Son” (P.O.V., 2007), “Innocent Until Proven Guilty,” “Nuyorican Dream,” “Brother Born Again” and “Outside Looking In: Transracial Adoption in America.” She 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.

Credits:

Director:	Katy Chevigny
Producers:	Maggie Bowman, Dallas Brennan Rexer
Editor:	Penelope Falk
Original Music:	John Kimbrough

Running Time: 86:46

Festivals:

- South by Southwest Film Festival, Austin, Texas, 2007
- Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival, Toronto, 2007
- Human Rights Watch International Film Festival, New York, 2007
- Buenos Aires International Festival of Independent Films, 2007
- Stranger Than Fiction Documentary Series at IFC Film Center, New York, 2007
- St. Louis International Film Festival, 2007
- Atlanta Film Festival, 2007
- Maine International Film Festival, Waterville, Maine, 2007
- South Dakota Film Festival, Aberdeen, S.D., 2007
- Rhode Island International Film Festival, Providence, R.I., 2007
- Camden Film Festival, Camden, Maine, 2007
- Global Peace Film Festival, Orlando, Fla., 2007



The Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the Emmy Award-winning weekly series *Independent Lens* on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. 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 revitalized 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 itvs.org. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people.



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and now in its 21st 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 more than 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 at www.pbs.org/pov.

P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces special features for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of our films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, streaming video and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. P.O.V. Interactive produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov has launched the *P.O.V. Blog*, a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss and debate their favorite films, get the latest news and link to further resources. The P.O.V. Website, blog and film archives form a unique and extensive online resource for documentary storytelling.

P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education

American Documentary | P.O.V. works with local PBS stations, educators and community organizations to present free screenings and discussion events to inspire and engage communities in vital conversations about our world. As a leading provider of quality nonfiction programming for use in public life, P.O.V. offers an extensive menu of resources, including free discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. In addition, P.O.V.'s *Youth Views* works with youth organizers and students to provide them with resources and training in order to use independent documentaries as a catalyst for social change.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by PBS, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Educational Foundation of America, The Fledgling Fund, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the New York State Council on the Arts and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.'s *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.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.amdoc.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. Simon Kilmurry is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

DVD 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.



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