“Better This World” Tells Gripping Tale of Idealism, Activism, Crime And Betrayal, Tuesday, Sept. 6, 2011, on PBS’ POV Series

How Did Two Boyhood Friends from Midland, Texas Find Themselves Accused Of Domestic Terrorism?

A Co-production of ITVS in Association with American Documentary / POV

“The timely new documentary Better This World tells a provocative and cautionary story about the shifting fault lines of civil liberties, protest and government vigilance. Two boyhood friends from the heart of Texas, Bradley Crowder and David McKay, find themselves increasingly out of step with their neighbors as they react against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. After moving to Austin, they go to a presentation at a local bookstore about protesting the 2008 Republican National Convention (RNC) in Minneapolis-St. Paul. There they are approached by a charismatic older activist, who suggests that they work together to prepare for the demonstrations.

Six months later, on the eve of the convention, the two young friends make eight Molotov cocktails but then decide not to use them. The matter might have ended there — but not everything was as it seemed. The FBI and other law enforcement agencies had been engaged in a two-year, multimillion-dollar counterterrorism effort leading up to the convention. The young men’s mentor, it turns out, was a government informant and had been long before meeting them; Crowder and McKay were arrested and charged with domestic terrorism.

Katie Galloway and Kelly Duane de la Vega’s Better This World, winner of Best Documentary Feature prizes at both the San Francisco International Film Festival and Sarasota Film Festival, has its national broadcast premiere on Tuesday, Sept. 6, 2011 at 10 p.m. on PBS as part of the 24th season of POV (Point of View). The film will stream on the POV website, www.pbs.org/pov/betterthisworld, Sept. 7– Oct. 8. POV continues weekly through Sept. 27 and concludes with November 2011 and winter/spring 2012 specials. POV is the winner of a Special Emmy Award for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking, an IDA Award for Best Continuing Series and NALIP’s 2011 Award for Corporate Commitment to Diversity.

Growing up in Midland, Texas, Crowder and McKay had little political education beyond their parents’ encouragement to “stand up for the oppressed” and to “stand up for what you believe in.” Somewhere along the way, partly in late-night walks through the town’s deserted streets, the friends began to form their own interpretation of their parents’ words. It was Crowder who made the first public statement of his political beliefs in 2003 when the United States declared war on Iraq. He drew an upside-down American flag with the words “No War” on a T-shirt and wore it to his high school the next day — a move that, he recounts, “became a pretty dramatic event.”
Seeking “something else,” Crowder and McKay moved to more progressive Austin, where they met Brandon Darby, who had gained prominence as the co-founder of Common Ground, a grassroots relief organization that fed and housed thousands of victims of Hurricane Katrina. Crowder and McKay were flattered when the larger-than-life activist approached them at a bookstore in Austin about organizing together.

Two years prior to the 2008 RNC, Minneapolis-St. Paul was designated a “homeland security site” and the FBI began “preventative” intelligence operations nationwide, including sending informants into many activist circles. As FBI Special Agent Christopher Langert says, “We . . . knew that there were . . . some people [coming] to St. Paul to do more than just demonstrate. . . . They were going to try to block delegates, cause destruction.” So the FBI tasked Darby with infiltrating Austin-based activist groups.

As several people in the film who knew Darby, Crowder and McKay recount, Darby urged the young men to become more radical — to take more extreme actions. According to Larra Elliott, one of the activists who accompanied the three to the RNC, “Brandon . . . said something that caught my attention, like, ‘Don’t you feel that firebombs and armed militias . . . that kind of . . . action is necessary sometimes?’ And Brad was like, ‘No, I don’t feel that way.’ Brandon would not leave it alone.”

Darby echoes some of this sentiment in letters to his FBI handler about meetings with McKay and Crowder. “I told them that direct action is intense, and we could all expect to have violence used against us. I told them I was ready to deal with that, and if they weren’t, then they shouldn’t work with me.”

On Aug. 28, 2008, Crowder and McKay joined Darby and several other activists Darby had brought together for the long van ride up to the RNC, where they would join thousands of other protestors. Within days Crowder and McKay were under arrest. The “Texas Two” faced multiple domestic terrorism charges, agonizing legal decisions and decades in prison. Darby, until then their mentor, would be the government’s star witness against them.

**Better This World** reconstructs the story of the relationship between these three men and the subsequent twists and turns of their legal cases through interviews with Crowder, McKay and their family members; FBI agents and attorneys; and a wealth of intriguing surveillance and archival footage — presenting an extraordinarily well-documented account and untangling a web of questions: Why did Darby, a committed activist, become a government informant? What led these young men to build eight homemade bombs? Did Darby and law enforcement save innocent victims from domestic terrorists bent on violence and destruction? Or were Crowder and McKay impressionable disciples set up by overzealous agents and a dangerous provocateur? Or does the answer lie somewhere in between?

**Better This World** probes these questions and more as it paints a gripping portrait of the strange and intriguing odyssey of these men — poignantly describing not only the problems of power and authority, but also the ultimate power of friendship, forgiveness and love.

“When we first read about McKay and Crowder in *The New York Times*, we saw an opportunity to look deep inside one case and also to illuminate a much broader national story — about tensions between civil liberties and the domestic security apparatus in the United States,” says filmmaker Katie Galloway. “We were familiar with dozens of cases where there had been FBI sting operations and domestic terrorism charges, followed soon after by defense allegations of misconduct or entrapment by government agents or informants.”

“Over the two and half years it took to make the film — interviewing FBI agents, attorneys, defendants, family members, jurors and journalists — we were repeatedly surprised by the twists and turns we found,” says filmmaker Kelly Duane de la Vega. “At several points we were forced to reevaluate our perspectives; debates about personal morality and responsibility versus government accountability and
meanings of entrapment erupted in the field and the edit room. We learned a lot through the process, and we wanted to allow audiences to share those experiences, so we committed early on to building the twists, moral ambiguity and big questions we wrestled with into the film.”

**Better This World** is a production of Loteria Films in association with Picturebox, Motto Pictures, Passion Pictures and the Investigative Reporting Program at University of California, Berkeley. The film is a co-production of Loteria Films and ITVS in association with American Documentary | POV, with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

**About the Filmmakers:**

**Kelly Duane de la Vega (Director/Producer)**
Kelly Duane de la Vega is an award-winning documentary filmmaker, 2009-2010 HBO/FIND Fellow and 2010 Sundance Documentary Fellow. Her feature documentaries have been shown at hundreds of film festivals around the world and broadcast on PBS stations and on the Documentary Channel. Her Emmy-nominated “Monumental: David Brower’s Fight for Wild America” opened theatrically nationwide and was selected by the New York Film Society to screen at Lincoln Center. Called “stylish and substantial” by Variety and “inspired” by The New York Times, the film is part of the curriculum at more than 50 universities worldwide. In addition to producing feature-length documentaries, Duane de la Vega has produced short-format web and television content for the Discovery Channel and Planet Green, among others. She recently produced two television series for IFC focusing on emerging and innovative artists. She and Katie Galloway are partners in the Bay Area production company Loteria Films.

**Katie Galloway (Director/Producer)**
Katie Galloway is an award-winning filmmaker and 2010 Sundance Documentary Fellow who has produced and directed more than 20 hours of cinéma vérité documentary films and series for POV and PBS’ Frontline, among others. Her critically acclaimed POV 2007 feature documentary **Prison Town, USA** (which she co-directed with Po Kutchins), called “documentary making at its best” by the San Francisco Chronicle and “intriguing” by The New York Times, was developed by IFC as a fiction series for which she co-wrote the first three episodes. A 2009-2010 HBO/FIND documentary fellow, Galloway taught documentary production at the Columbia Journalism School and now teaches media studies at the University of California, Berkeley, where she is also the filmmaker-in-residence at the journalism school’s investigative reporting program. She is partners with Kelly Duane de la Vega in Loteria Films.

**Credits:**

Directors: Kelly Duane de la Vega, Katie Galloway
Producers: Katie Galloway, Kelly Duane de la Vega, Mike Nicholson
Co-Producer: David Layton
Executive Producers: John Battsek, Julie Goldman, Nicole Stott, Chana Ben-Dov
Executive Producer for ITVS: Sally Jo Fifer
Cinematographer: David Layton
Editor: Greg O’Toole
Original Music: Paul Brill
Running Time: 86:46

**POV Series Credits:**

Executive Producer: Simon Kilmurry
Co-Executive Producer: Cynthia López
Vice President, Production and Programming: Chris White
Series Producer: Yance Ford

**Awards and Festivals:**

- Best Documentary Feature, San Francisco International Film Festival, 2011
- Best Documentary Feature, Sarasota Film Festival, 2011
- Best Bay Area Documentary Feature, San Francisco International Film Festival, 2011
- Finalist, Best Documentary Feature, Ashland Independent Film Festival, 2011
- World Premiere, SXSW Film Festival, 2011
- Full Frame Documentary Festival, 2011
- Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival, 2011
- Human Rights Watch Film Festival, 2011
- Silverdocs, 2011
- Stranger Than Fiction documentary series, 2011
- Official Selection, DocuWeeks, 2011

(For a list of upcoming screenings, go to [http://www.betterthisworld.com/screenings.html](http://www.betterthisworld.com/screenings.html).)

**ITVS**

Independent Television Service 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 was 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 provide for underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people. Visit [www.itvs.org](http://www.itvs.org).

**POV**

Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and now in its 24th season on PBS, the award-winning POV series is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today’s best independent documentary filmmakers. Airing June through September with primetime specials during the year, POV has brought more than 300 acclaimed documentaries to millions nationwide and has a Webby Award-winning online series, *POV’s Borders*. Since 1988, POV 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. Visit [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov).

**POV Interactive** ([www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov))

POV’s award-winning website extends the life of our films online with interactive features, interviews, updates, video and educational content, as well as listings for television broadcasts, community screenings and films available online. The *POV Blog* is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss their favorite films and get the latest news.

**POV Community Engagement and Education**

POV films can be seen at more than 450 events across the country every year. Together with schools, organizations and local PBS stations, POV facilitates free community screenings and produces free resources to accompany our films, including discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. With our community partners, we inspire dialogue around the most important social issues of our time.

Major funding for POV is provided by PBS, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, The Educational Foundation of America, New York State Council on the Arts, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, FACT and public television viewers. Special support provided by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Funding for POV’s Diverse Voices Project is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Project VoiceScape is a partnership of Adobe Youth Voices, PBS and POV. POV is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including WGBH Boston and THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG.

**American Documentary, Inc.** ([www.amdoc.org](http://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 develops 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.

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