



Vote Yourself

Day of reckoning

By John Ross

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The world's eyes were fixed on the United States on Nov. 2, 2004, and more Americans than ever before went to the polls.

Republican Jim Fuchs organized poll workers at a pancake house in a Democratic ward near Chicago. Rashida Tlaib of Dearborn, Michigan, took off work to shuttle her family to their polling place, ensuring they cast votes for John Kerry. Eighteen-year-old Franny Fisher, her farming family struggling in a tiny Wisconsin hamlet, registered and cast her first vote.

These and a handful of other carefully chosen stories make up the remarkable, winning patchwork of Election Day, a documentary on the 2004 presidential contest making its broadcast premiere as part of the long-running P.O.V. series on PBS. The 86-minute film will air at 10 p.m. Tuesday, July 1, on WOSU-HD.

Refreshing to anyone who tires of a constant stream of pie charts, graphs and exit-poll punditry, the film refocuses political coverage to the myriad gears that turn it: about 122 million people, each with their own story, who cast a ballot for the leader of the free world.

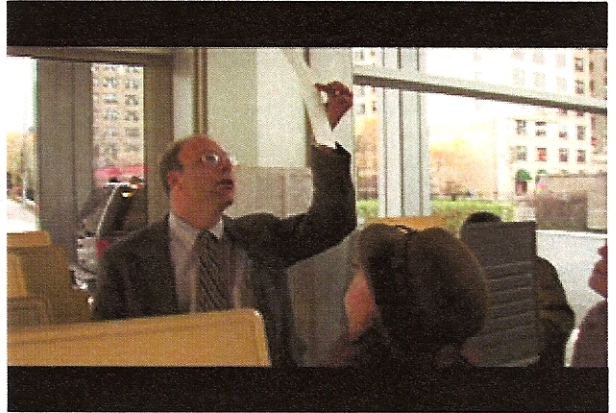
"In some ways, it's just the most nerve-wracking thing in the world to do an observational documentary," director Katy Chevigny said. "On the one hand, you know, you don't have to write a script. But if nothing happened in front of the camera, we weren't gonna have a movie."

"Election Day"

10 p.m. Tuesday, July 1, WOSU-HD

Web: pbs.org/pov

Lucky for them, plenty happened.



DANA KUPPER PHOTO

Republican poll-watcher Jim Fuchs examines a ballot in a Chicago precinct after suspecting that the voting machine was faulty.

Chevigny and a production staff tracked down representative stories and interesting characters for months and, starting before dawn on Election Day, sent out 14 film crews to capture the process of voting through a range of individual experiences.

The results combine the street-level intimacy of a TV news report with the subtler sensibility of cinema verite, in which voters become the center of their own unique drama.

"What we're doing here is making a character-driven piece," Chevigny said about directing staff spread from Florida to South Dakota, New York to Wisconsin. "It may mean staying on sort of the quieter, less active moment as opposed to whipping your camera around to go follow the person who's yelling at the other end of the line."

Footage runs the gamut from touching to hilarious to frustrating, and the portrait of a single, historic day shows how far Americans go to make their voices heard, Chevigny said.

"There's all these pundits every election who are on TV all the time complaining all the time about voter apathy," she added. "I felt like, after looking at the footage, you know, there's some apathy. But mostly what I saw was people going to incredible lengths to try to vote and to try to have their vote count."

In Site

Media that Matters Film Festival

Web: mediathatmattersfest.org

Director Katy Chevigny has now turned her attention to Media that Matters, a showcase for short films covering everything from gay rights to global warming. Twelve are chosen each June to screen at a festival in New York, and the home page offers a streamable online archive for works inspiring debate in 12 minutes or less.

Vote Yourself '08

Too often, the electoral process can seem daunting, confusing and downright ridiculous to younger voters. Alive hopes to make voting easier and issues more relevant to our readers. If you've got a question you want answered in this column, click to ColumbusAlive.com/voteyourself.

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