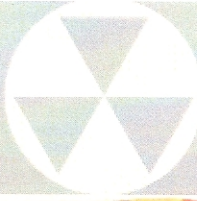


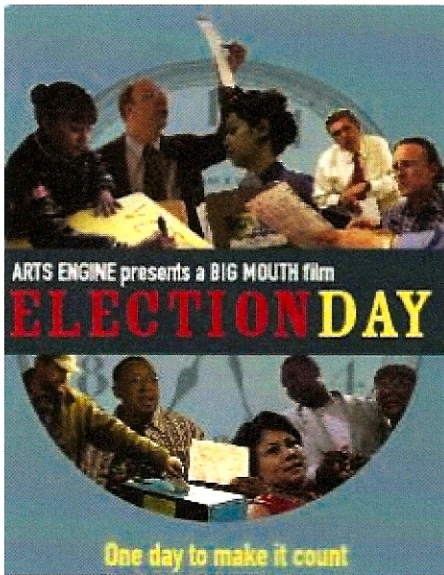
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Arts Engine releases 10th anniversary DVD set

October 14, 2008 at 5:51 pm by [Curt Holman](#) in [A&E](#)



Just in time for Election Day, [Arts Engine Inc.](#) releases the documentary *Election Day* and nine other DVDs as part of its Ten Year Anniversary Collection boxed set. Arts Engine Inc. produces socially conscious documentaries and advocates such projects as [MediaRights.org](#), an “on-line commons” for nonfiction films on social issues.

Directed by Arts Engine co-founder Katy Chevigny, *Election Day* (three out of five stars) offers a sprawling look at an Americans as they cast their ballots on Nov. 2, 2004. According to the closing credits, documentary crews chronicled the voting process in 14 different cities across the United States, three of which didn’t make the final cut (although some appear on the DVD’s deleted scenes). Chevigny presents a diverse cross-section of participants, including first-time voters, pollsters, volunteers and an Australian international election observer. Candidates actually running for office seldom make the stage, however, as *Election Day* focuses on the “troops on the ground,” and finds first-hand examples of the system breaking down.

The film reserves much of its sympathies for ex-convicts who have served their time but find themselves either legally prohibited from voting or thwarted by arcane rules. In New York, ex-con Leon Batts prepares to vote for the first time, only to discover that he’s not on the registry rolls when he shows up. Depressing titles at the end reveal that Batts’ registration form was never process, so his vote didn’t count.

Election Day also puts the system’s inequities on display. In St. Louis, the Australian observer sees African-Americans waiting in two-hour lines at polling places with limited resources, then visits more affluent neighborhoods where white people vote with virtually no hassle. In Ohio, a garrulous fellow campaigning for his brother openly sneers at vote-suppression conspiracies – “No one’s having their vote taken away!” – but the electoral machine clearly moves much less smoothly in the low-income districts.

By touching on so many places and characters, *Election Day* sacrifices some depth for breadth. Although we recognize some recurring figures better than others, like a “lonely” Republican organizer in a heavily-Democratic ward in Chicago, the perspective jumps around too much to build drama or provide context for some of the issues. Nevertheless, the documentary’s expansiveness also captures that bustling quality of the voting experience, how you stand elbow to elbow with strangers to practice your American right – or is it a privilege? Chevigny also evokes the texture of different places by focusing on the food, from the meals cooked in the early mornings to prepare for the long day to recurring shots at a Wisconsin organic farm that serves pizza to election workers.

Other DVDs on the Arts Engine 10th Anniversary boxed set, released Oct. 14, include: *Deadline*, an Emmy-nominated examination of the death penalty; *Arctic Son*, the tale of a culture-clash reunion between a Seattle-raised son and a father who lives in the Native Vuntut Gwitchin traditions; *Nuyorican Dream*, a chronicle of a Puerto Rican family’s struggles with poverty in Brooklyn (from the director of the feature film *Sherrybaby*); and two selections of short films.