

BookWars

*An award winning feature film
about the world of New York City
street booksellers*

***IFP Gotham Award Nominee 2000
WINNER New York Underground Film Festival 2000***

*"Terrific" — LA Times
"Superb...mesmerizing" — NY Film Critics Circle
"Hilarious...fascinating" — The New Yorker*



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BOOKWARS Synopsis:

The gritty, untamed world of street booksellers is exposed in a remarkable feature film that chronicles their lives and loves and their unique perspectives on life.

Watch as the NYPD and the Mayor try to shut them down!

Shot entirely on location by fellow street bookseller and filmmaker Jason Rosette, and produced by Emmy Award-winning filmmaker Michel Negroponte, BOOKWARS explores the other side of the book tables that line the streets of New York City's Greenwich Village, the Lower East Side, 6th avenue, and elsewhere in the city.

ONE LINE SYNOPSIS:

BOOKWARS: An insider's look at the untamed world of New York City street booksellers.

TAG LINES:

The Word is on the Street

The Street Bookseller Movie

BOOKWARS: the Word is on the street.

ABOUT BOOKWARS

Edgy yet eloquent, BOOKWARS highlights issues which are of vital concern to all people, not just in New York, not just in the USA, but everywhere where people function in this new age of electronic culture, an age which "would seem to render individualism obsolete and the corporate interdependence mandatory."
(Marshall McLuhan, The Gutenberg Galaxy)

Filmmaker Jason Rosette explains: "Public spaces, which are often home to our most unique public citizens--including the street booksellers--must remain public in the truest, Athenian sense."

Unique public citizens? In BOOKWARS, you'll meet Pete Whitney, street bookseller, collage artist, and collector of rare toads. Or Rick Sherman, street bookseller, aspiring magician, and all-around prankster. Witness Al Mappo, seller of maps and atlases, smoker of foot-long Philly Blunt cigars.

Or take a walk to 6th avenue, over on the wild side of the street bookselling scene, where you'll find Grady, Slim, and Ron. And there's Marv--the angel of 6th avenue.

"It's anarchistic!" – Lawrence Ferlinghetti (regarding BOOKWARS)

BOOKWARS celebrates these public characters while encouraging the literary tradition of the public spaces, the street. And everyone benefits: the people of the community gain access to affordable, quality recycled reading material, while the street booksellers carve a niche for themselves as self supporting, viable members of society.

But the Mayor has other ideas; he wants to "clean up the streets" by getting rid of the individuals who breathe life into our public spaces, who put the beat into the heart of the city.

It's nothing less than a cultural war, and the squeegee guys, the hot dog men, and the street booksellers are on the vanguard.

TREATMENT & STYLE

A Small Format, Digital Approach

BOOKWARS was produced in a variety of film and video formats including: Mini DV, Super 8 film, Regular 8 and Hi-8 video, and Super VHS (by choice and necessity). The aesthetic goals of immediacy and a natural, unobtrusive presence of the camera demanded the use of small format film and video.

The overarching goal of authenticity was furthered by the fact that filmmaker Jason Rosette was also a part time street bookseller in New York for years before he even picked up the camera--and then spent five more years in production and postproduction.

There are no formal interviews in BOOKWARS although the booksellers at times speak casually to the filmmaker. There are no subtitles or title cards within the film itself except for the opening titles and credits. Rather, the narrator's voiceover is designed to take over this role while conveying a more intimate, personal quality to the story.

Rosette explains: "There's no way we could have produced BOOKWARS with anything other than small format video. The unobtrusive cameras were the only choice considering the booksellers' natural aversion to media attention--they're pretty modest, and somewhat shy...of course, it also helped to be a street bookseller", explains Rosette.

"They never would have trusted an outsider to tell their story."

Although the use of smaller formats lent themselves towards a verite' sensibility, Rosette did not adhere to classical techniques of direct cinema. Some of the images have been manipulated chromatically, and several shots were slowed down to produce a more meditative, reflective tone.

In an unusual departure for a documentary, there's even have a dream sequence, in which the psyche of the street is somewhat psychedelically depicted visually using various compositing tools.

The filmmaker confesses that he has been influenced by road movies like *Easy Rider*, by the films of Robert Frank, and by a range of American poets, from Walt Whitman (hence the name of his company, Camerado, which comes from Whitman's "Leaves of Grass).

Rosette also adopted several formal and structural elements from the most "American" of genres--the Western--as an unlikely starting point to launch this highly original urban street-doc.

Music by jazz legends Willis Jackson and Jack McDuff, two legendary jazz performers, is provided courtesy of label 32 Jazz. An original score also hits the screen by way of the laid-back, Southwestern style guitar grooves of San Francisco based Little Muddy.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Ten Years in the Making

"I began production on BOOKWARS in 1995, when I was a bookseller on the streets of New York, down in Greenwich Village. But long before that, since the late 80's, I had been working on a series of stories and essays based on my experiences with some of the street booksellers I'd met. Many of these original notes and essays ultimately wound up in the narration of the final cut. Hence, the making of the moviegoers back a long way--at least ten years."

"I'd been selling books for a long time before I even decided to pick up the camera," explains Rosette. "Unlike a lot of other documentary projects, where the filmmaker enters the world of their subjects as a stranger or ethnographer, I'd been a real neighborhood "BookMan" for years before rolling the first frame."

The idea for BOOKWARS crystallized when Emmy-Award winning filmmaker Michel Negroponte happened upon Rosette at his bookstand.

"I felt compelled to make this picture, even though I had no experience with documentary film prior to this", says Rosette. "But as a street bookseller, I was privy to the incredible changes that were taking place on the street as a result of then-newly elected Mayor Giuliani's Quality of Life Program--which was rapidly stripping our public spaces of their character and vitality.

This was happening in the vicinity of my own bookstand, and it was happening all around New York. "

"At first, I had no idea that I'd be making a feature film of this scale. My initial goal was simply to capture the world of the street booksellers on tape, the world that I'd come to know from my own experiences as a street bookseller.

But after bumping into Michel (Negroponte) at my bookstand, and with the Mayor's "Quality of Life" program in full swing and irreversibly cleaning up the streets, it became clear that the story had to be told before it was too late."

So Rosette leaped into production despite an utter lack of money and began shooting with a borrowed camera. All the money he used to begin shooting was raised at the bookstand with money he made off the books.

Says Rosette, "since we had no funding, I had to put all my own money into making the flick. I still owe a lot of money on my student loans--hopefully this can change now that we've concluded (amongst others) a deal with Apple's iTunes, the very selective online content channel."

Rosette adds: "It's become vogue to claim that a project came into being with no money behind it" says Rosette. "Yet this is really, absolutely the case with BOOKWARS. I had no money--I mean, selling used and out-of-print books on the street, you're not getting rich.

I had no backers, had no rich relatives. Of all the foundations I approached for backing, only the Playboy Foundation came through with a modest post-production grant. After I'd been living in San Francisco for a couple years, editing the movie there, I approached the CA-based Pacific Pioneer Fund. Although they liked my proposal and idea, they declined, saying I'd "have to be a genius to pull it off.

Anyway, in the end everything we needed was begged and borrowed."

Rosette continues:

"For a couple years I traveled the country in my trusty Datsun, visiting various contacts' editing facilities around the country: New Mexico, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York. One place would let me edit for a while 'til a paying project came in, then, I'd have to move on."

I lived in residential hotels, slept in my car, on couches--you name it. For five years, all my time, money, and energy were directed towards completion of BOOKWARS.

I had no idea it would be so difficult. And in a way, I'm glad I didn't know because I probably never would have begun. But it's like...you have a wolf by the ears, when you're in the middle of a project like this.

You can't let go, 'cause if you do--you're finished."

BOOKWARS has been funded to date though: 1) money raised at the bookstand during shooting 2) out of pocket 3) a modest completion grant from the Playboy Foundation 4) miscellaneous individual donations and, 5) deferred rates on facilities and editing equipment.

Rosette understands why funders were hard to come by:

"At first, most people weren't interested in the fate of these apparent outsiders, the folks who live on or operate in the public spaces, like my fellow street booksellers. A common attitude was: "Oh, but they're just a bunch of homeless bums."

But it became apparent that a significant social change was occurring, not just in New York City with Mayor Giuliani's Quality of Life plan, but all across the country...that the life of the streets and all public spaces across the USA were being "sanitized", were being indiscriminately stripped of their character...people became concerned."

And many people began to realize that these folks were only *apparent* outsiders. The street booksellers are in fact enormously beneficial in that they contribute their communities on a genuine grass-roots level by helping disseminate information.

The books they sell are inexpensive used books, often recycled from thrift stores, apartment sales, or even the good old garbage. Poor people can afford to buy books from them...so the bookstand is available to any and all comers. It's the embodiment of the ideal of true egalitarianism."

PEOPLE

JASON ROSETTE (STREET BOOKSELLER, FILMMAKER)

Jason Rosette has been directing films since he was twelve years old, using a Super 8 camera to shoot his friends as actors in their own homes. Thus began his first ventures into realism, a perspective which he has sought to explore with the moving image ever since.

After first studying anthropology and philosophy at NYU, Mr. Rosette transferred into the undergraduate film program. He graduated in 1991--completely broke, of course. It was then, during A three-year stretch of selling books on the streets of New York City, that the documentary BOOKWARS was born.

Shot on location at his own sidewalk bookstand and at several of his colleagues' tables, BOOKWARS is the definitive, insider's look at the most vibrant and eloquent culture of the American public forum: the world of the New York street booksellers.

MICHEL NEGROPONTE (PRODUCER)

Michel Negroponte has been associated with the production of BOOKWARS ever since he ran into director Jason Rosette at his sidewalk bookstand, where they discussed the idea of developing a street bookseller documentary.

Among Mr. Negroponte's directing credits are SPACE COAST, which premiered at the Whitney Museum's New American Filmmakers Series; SILVER VALLEY which won the Grand Prize for Best Film at the Cinema du Reel and JUPITER'S WIFE which was awarded a Special Jury Prize at Sundance 1995 and the Grand Prize for Best Feature Documentary at the Vancouver and Santa Barbara Film Festival.

Originally shot on small format video, it premiered on HBO/Cinemax before going into a nationwide 35mm cinema release. JUPITER'S WIFE was awarded an Emmy for Outstanding Individual Achievement in Documentary.

CREDITS

Produced by Michel Negroponte, James & John Montoya
and Jason Rosette
Producer / Director / Editor / Shooter / Narrator - Jason Rosette
Produced by CAMERADO and S.A.I.D. Communications
Associate Producer (New Mexico) by Field & Frame / Alan Fulford
Online Production (NYC) by Doug Block / Debbie Rosenberg
@ Copacetic Pictures
Additional Camera by Rick Sherman, Ronan O' Sullivan, King
Rosette, Jennifer Rogers, Everett Shapiro,
Peter Whitney, John Doe
Technical Assistance by Dennis Muldrow
Additional Editing by Greg Janza
Mix by John Travis
Original Music by Rich Goldstein and Little Muddy
(from Little Muddy © 1999 Gravel Road Music)
Pre-existing music by Willis Jackson
(from *Bar Wars* © 1997 32 Jazz)
& Jack McDuff
(from *The Re-entry* © 1997 32 Jazz)
Fiscal Sponsorship by The Media Alliance, San Francisco
Legal Services by Richard Lee
Additional Funding by The Playboy Foundation

THE STREET BOOKSELLERS

Peter Whitney - Street Bookseller, Toadlover, Artist
Rick Sherman - Street Bookseller, Magician, Wiseguy
Marvin - Street Bookseller, Angel
Everett Shapiro - End-of-the night Journeyman
Polish Joe - Street Bookseller, Smoker of 100 cigarettes
Al Mappo - Street Bookseller, Seller of Maps
Margueritte - Street Bookseller, Strong Woman
Ron Harris - Street Bookseller, Damn--that guy

BOOKWARS: Color, USA. Running Time 79 minutes (Feature) 56:30 (TV)
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REVIEWS

"Terrific" - LA Times
"Superb...mesmerizing" - NY Film Critics Circle
"Hilarious...fascinating" - The New Yorker
"Anarchistic" - Lawrence Ferlinghetti
"A slice of true life" - The NY Times
"Utterly compelling!" - 5 stars out of 5" - Jacksonville Film Journal

Complete Reviews at:

WWW.BOOKWARSMOVIE.COM

SCREENINGS & BROADCASTS

BOOKWARS has screened and aired at venues and channels including:

Arte/ZDF, NHK, SVT, PBS, Metrochannels, Bravo, Access!, Book Television, The Danish National Film Institute, MoMA (NYC), the Freedom Forum, Cinema Village, Seattle 9/11 Media Center, FACETS, the Kansas City Film Jubilee, the Florida Film Fest, New York Underground Film Festival (Winner, Best Documentary).

BOOKWARS is available for purchase via DVD and Digital Download at the following outlets:

CreateSpace, FilmBaby, Amazon.com, Amazon UNBOX, Apple iTunes.

Rentals available @ NetFlix

Current availability and screening & broadcast information:
WWW.BOOKWARSMOVIE.COM



...a few of the street booksellers of NYC



Street Bookseller and Filmmaker Jason Rosette shooting BookWars at his sidewalk bookstand, NYC. © 2000 JRosette www.camerado.com

Shooting at the bookstand during production of BOOKWARS



Marvin, 6th Avenue street bookseller



"Slick" Rick Sherman, magician and street bookseller



*BOOKWARS is available on DVD and via Digital Download
for TV, theatrical and educational exhibition, inquire at:*
WWW.BOOKWARSMOVIE.COM