

## THE MAIN STREAM

Roy Blount, Jr., "America's foremost humorist" according to *The Chicago Tribune* takes an offbeat journey down the Mississippi River. Navigating this great liquid divide, THE MAIN STREAM explores what holds this wildly diverse country together. In the affectionately irreverent spirit of Roger Weisberg's previous film, ROAD SCHOLAR, Blount introduces a cast of unforgettable characters along the Mississippi - the literal main stream of America.

Heralded as "our next Mark Twain," Blount is a natural choice for our river guide. Like Twain, Blount is a displaced Southerner with the wit and wisdom to capture contemporary life on the Mississippi. While floating downstream on an assortment of canoes, rowboats, rafts, steamboats, towboats and fishing vessels, Blount offers viewers an amusing and poignant portrait of the great river that Mark Twain immortalized over a century ago.

This unpredictable odyssey captures the full range of the river's ironies from a wedding ceremony at the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota to a rodeo at America's toughest prison in Angola, Louisiana. Blount throws himself into unique Mississippi River events such as National Tom Sawyer Days (which *Life* magazine called an orgy of wholesomeness), the King Biscuit Blues Festival, the Cleveland Mississippi Annual Barbecue Contest, and the Great Mississippi River Balloon Race. Viewers meet such memorable characters as Leonard Kuhnert, a fisherman who catches giant catfish with his bare hands; Garrison Keillor, a renown humorist who challenges Blount to a stone skipping contest; Winona LaDuke, an Ojibwe activist who ran twice for vice president of the U.S.; Kenny Salway, a reclusive environmentalist who spent 28 years living alone in the swamp; Leslie Eaton, a hippie nomad who makes a living reading palms; and Wilbert Rideau, an award winning newspaper editor who is serving a life sentence for murder.

Many of the individuals featured in THE MAIN STREAM are struggling with beliefs and lifestyles that fall outside of mainstream culture. For example, we meet Native Americans battling to reclaim tribal land and traditions, the descendants of slaves joining forces with Greenpeace to fight what they call environmental racism, homesteaders fighting for the right to live in old boathouses, and an embattled fisherman trying to hold onto a commercial fishing operation that's been in his family for three generations. We get to know several characters with distinctly non-mainstream professions including a Mark Twain impersonator who works the crowds in Twain's boyhood hometown, a performance artist who invented a revolutionary new swimsuit, a Native American Spiritual Healer who manages a casino, a French chef who was hired by Louisiana to convince locals that swamp rats are a gourmet delicacy, a musician who teaches the blues to children in the Delta, a Voodoo Priestess who tries to heal our weary traveler, an Elvis impersonator who opened a museum to convince the public that Elvis Presley is still alive, and a trumpet player who is being heralded as the next Louis Armstrong.

As one self-proclaimed river rat tells us, "the Mississippi River needs the backwaters." Blount comes to realize that the unconventional and embattled characters and communities he encounters in America's backwaters are critical to the vitality of the mainstream. Ultimately, the film celebrates diversity, eccentricity, and freedom of expression, as Blount concludes that America is not nearly as homogeneous as he feared.

Shot on high definition video, THE MAIN STREAM is produced and directed by Roger Weisberg. Weisberg's twenty previous documentaries have won over sixty awards including Peabody, Emmy, and duPont-Columbia awards. His 1993 documentary, ROAD SCHOLAR, and his 1999 Academy Award nominated documentary, SOUND AND FURY, were distributed theatrically before airing on PBS. THE MAIN STREAM builds on these previous productions, offering viewers a colorful insight into the literal and metaphorical mainstream of America.

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