



Contact:

Cathy Lehrfeld, 212-989-7425, [clehrfeld@pov.org](mailto:clehrfeld@pov.org)

Neyda Martinez, 212-989-7425, [neyda@pov.org](mailto:neyda@pov.org)

Online Pressroom: [www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom)

## P.O.V.'s "Bright Leaves" by Ross McElwee

Acclaimed Filmmaker Visits His Native North Carolina In Search of Lost Family Tobacco Legacy

### ***MEDIA ALERT – FACT SHEET***

"Reflective, wise, often hilarious. . . . leaves you feeling invigorated by the boundless curiosity, humor and high spirits of its creator." – Stephen Holden, *The New York Times*

"Yet another of documentarian Ross McElwee's droll, irresistible, multilayered, multifaceted journeys through the beguiling yet contradictory land of his youth." – Kevin Thomas, *Los Angeles Times*

National Air Date: **Tuesday, August 23, 2005** at 10 p.m. on PBS. (Check local listings.)

**Bright Leaves** receives its national broadcast premiere as part of the 18th season of public television's P.O.V. series. P.O.V. will also present a short film that evening about a day in the lives of two Iraqi boys – one in New York and one in Baghdad – **A Song for Daniel** by Jason DaSilva.

MoMA

Retrospective:

**Bright Leaves** will also screen at the Museum of Modern Art as part of an 11-film mid-career retrospective of McElwee's work September 21-28. McElwee will introduce **Bright Leaves** on September 21, followed by a conversation with Darryl Pinckney, essayist and author of the novel *High Cotton*. [www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org)

Summary:

What legacy is passed down to generations when a family is a giant tobacco producer? Filmmaker Ross McElwee (**Sherman's March**, P.O.V.'s **Time Indefinite**), whose great-grandfather created the famous Bull Durham brand in his native North Carolina, takes viewers on an autobiographical journey across that state's social, economic and psychological tobacco terrain. This meditation on the allure of cigarettes looks at loss and preservation, addiction and denial. **Bright Leaves** also examines filmmaking itself, as McElwee grapples with home movies, a vintage Hollywood melodrama purportedly about his great-grandfather starring Gary Cooper, Lauren Bacall and Patricia Neal, and McElwee's own efforts to document North Carolina and his family.

Also airing on August 23 is a short film by Jason DaSilva, **A Song for Daniel** which compares a routine day of two nine-year-old Iraqi boys: one living in Baghdad and the other born and raised in New York. It offers a profound examination of culture and race through the eyes of Iraqi youths living on opposite sides of the world.

Filmmaker's  
Statement:

"In 1975, as a graduate student at MIT's Film Section, I began filming 'chapters' from my own life and the lives of people close to me," says Ross

McElwee. “Those chapters coalesced into films like **Backyard**, about my relationship to my surgeon father and my medical school-bound brother.

“**Backyard** reveals my father's pride in my brother's choice of careers, as well as his somewhat puzzled concern about my choice – making documentary “home movies.” He would say to me, ‘Why don't you try to make films about nature?’ Instead, I went on to make **Sherman's March**, in which retraced General Sherman's destructive Civil War route through the American South, interweaving this journey with portraits of seven southern women I met along the way. In **Time Indefinite**, I document my somewhat awkward shift into adulthood, getting married (finally), and then having to confront the sudden death of my father. At the end of the film, I become a father myself.

“**Bright Leaves** is a subjective, autobiographical take on cigarettes and their troubling legacy,” he continues. “As with each of my films, members of my family and close friends appear. Some of them have been showing up in my films for over 25 years now. This adds a dimension to my work, a record of how much – or how little – my family and I have changed over time.”

Filmmaker's Bio:

**Ross McElwee**  
**Director/Producer**

Ross McElwee has made seven feature-length documentaries as well as several shorter films. Most of his films were shot in his native American South, among them the critically acclaimed **Sherman's March**, **Time Indefinite** (which aired on P.O.V. in 1994), and **Six O'Clock News**. **Sherman's March** won numerous awards, including Best Documentary at the Sundance Film Festival, and was cited by the National Board of Film Critics as one of the five best films of 1986. McElwee's films have been shown in festivals worldwide, and have received retrospectives at the Art Institute of Chicago, the American Museum of the Moving Image, and États généraux du film documentaire in Lussas, France. In 2000, **Sherman's March** was selected for a Cinéma du Réel retrospective at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and four of his films were featured in a selection of western documentaries shown for the first time in Tehran, Iran. The Library of Congress National Film Registry has chosen **Sherman's March** for preservation.

A native of North Carolina, McElwee graduated from Brown University and earned an MS in filmmaking from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His began his career in his hometown of Charlotte where he was a studio cameraman for local evening news, housewife helper shows, and "gospel hour" programs. He later worked shooting films for documentary filmmakers D.A. Pennebaker and John Marshall. McElwee started producing and directing his own documentaries in 1976. McElwee has been teaching filmmaking at Harvard University, where he is a professor in the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies, since 1986.

Running Time: 107 minutes

Awards & Festivals:

- PRISM Film Festival Award, 2005
- Cannes Film Festival, Director's Fortnight, 2003
- Toronto International Film Festival, 2003
- New York Film Festival, 2003
- Rotterdam International Film Festival, 2003
- Sydney Film Festival, 2003

Credits:                    Producer:                    Ross McElwee  
Associate Producer:    Linda Morgenstern  
Director:                    Ross McElwee  
Editors:                     Ross McElwee, Mark Meatto  
Cinematographer:      Ross McElwee

Also on P.O.V.  
August 23

### **A Song for Daniel**

This short film compares a routine day of two nine-year-old Iraqi boys: one living in Baghdad and the other born and raised in New York. Like most boys their age, Ahmad and Daniel are enthralled by cartoons, spend the best part of their day playing with friends, and radiate a natural optimism about the world around them. But their everyday lives reveal stark differences, too, as seen when Ahmad shows off his family's electric generator and explains the frequent gas shortages in Baghdad. **A Song for Daniel** is a simple but profound examination of culture and place through the eyes of two Iraqi children living on opposite sides of the world.

Filmmaker's bio:        Jason DaSilva's first collaborative feature film was **Cuba Dreams**, shot in Havana in 1999 and screened at the Latin America Film Festival in Cuba later that year. His next film, **Olivia's Puzzle**, screened at more than 30 festivals including Sundance. His feature film **Lest We Forget** premiered at the International Documentary Festival of Amsterdam in 2004. **A Song for Daniel** premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2005. Born in Dayton, Ohio, DaSilva has lived in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and Vancouver, B.C., and now resides in New York City. He received the Project Involve Filmmaker Fellowship award from the Independent Feature Project/New York in 2004.

Running time:            9 minutes

Total running time  
For both films:            1:56:46

Community Outreach  
And Education:

P.O.V. provides Discussion Guides for all films as well as curriculum-based P.O.V. Lesson Plans for select films to promote the use of independent media among varied constituencies. Available free online, these originally produced materials ensure the ongoing use of P.O.V.'s documentaries with educators, community workers, opinion leaders and general audiences nationally. P.O.V. also works closely with local public television stations to partner with local museums, libraries, schools and community-based organizations to raise awareness of the issues in P.O.V.'s films. *Youth Views*, P.O.V.'s youth engagement program, expands these efforts by working directly with youth service organizations.

On P.O.V. Interactive: The **Bright Leaves** companion website ([www.pbs.org/pov/brightleaves](http://www.pbs.org/pov/brightleaves)) offers exclusive streaming video clips from the film and a wealth of additional resources, including a Q&A with filmmaker Ross McElwee, ample opportunities for viewers to "talk back" and talk to each other about the film, and the following special features:

OVERVIEW  
[North Carolina and Tobacco](#)

Tobacco has always been an important part of North Carolina's economy and state identity. Learn more about the history of tobacco farming in North Carolina and the Duke family's tobacco empire.

#### POINTS OF VIEW

##### Personal Filmmaking

Acclaimed essayist Phillip Lopate reflects on Ross McElwee's approach to personal filmmaking and the growing complexity of his films over the past 20 years.

##### A Song for Daniel

Viewers can access a discussion board, filmmaker interview and related links on a special "more information" page on P.O.V. Interactive.

About P.O.V.:

Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and now in its 18th season on PBS, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running series on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through September, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought over 220 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. 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. More information about P.O.V. is available online at [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov).

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