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AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY, INC./KCET/WGBH/WNET

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Sex, Lies and Education

Texas Teen Weighs Christian Values and Social Realities In Modern Morality Tale to Premiere on P.O.V.

*"The Education of Shelby Knox," Sundance Film Festival Award-Winner,
Kicks Off 18th Season of P.O.V. Series June 21, 2005 on PBS*

Co-presentation with the Independent Television Service (ITVS)

As the nation reflects on the outcome of the recent presidential election, "moral values" is a factor often cited in George Bush's win. A look at the "red" and "blue" states paints a picture of "red" voters who embrace traditional religion and family life, and reject what they see as the erosion of American ideals and culture that the "blue" states represent.

Federally funded, abstinence-only sex education is part of the equation, sparking an intense national debate. Sex may be everywhere – in music, television, fashion and movies – one argument goes, but schools need to give teenagers the tools to resist peer pressure and say "no." Won't teaching about sex only encourage teens to try it? Opponents say that withholding information about condom use and birth control will only lead to unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

Into the culture wars steps feisty teenager Shelby Knox of Lubbock, Texas. Although her county's high schools teach abstinence as the only safe sex, Lubbock has some of the highest rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases in the nation. Shelby, a devout Christian who has pledged abstinence until marriage herself, becomes an unlikely advocate for comprehensive sex education, profoundly changing her political and spiritual views along the way.

The Education of Shelby Knox, by Rose Rosenblatt and Marion Lipschutz, will have its national broadcast premiere **Tuesday, June 21, 2005** at 10 p.m., kicking off the 18th season of the P.O.V. series on PBS. (Check local listings.) The film won the Excellence in Cinematography Award in the documentary category at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival. American television's longest-running independent documentary series, P.O.V. is public television's premier showcase for point-of-view, nonfiction films.

Texas public schools have had abstinence-only sex education since 1995, when then-governor George W. Bush signed a law making Texas the third state to follow the curriculum. The "abstinence-only" initiative gained national attention in 1996 when President Clinton enacted landmark welfare reform that included grants for abstinence programs. In November 2004, Congress included more than \$131 million for abstinence programs in a spending bill, an increase of \$30 million but about \$100 million less than President Bush requested. A national evaluation of abstinence programs has been delayed, and is expected in 2006.

In the fall of 2001, Shelby, then a 15-year-old high school sophomore, budding opera singer and politically conservative Southern Baptist, joined the Lubbock Youth Commission, a group of high school students empowered by the mayor to give Lubbock's youth a voice in city government. "We get no [sex] education at all in school," says Shelby in **The Education of Shelby Knox**. "Maybe twice a week, I see a girl walking down the hall pregnant. . . . It's part of normal life at my school. If a student asks a teacher about sex, the teacher by policy is required to answer with 'Abstinence is the only way to prevent STD's and teen pregnancy.' . . . If they don't, they're in danger of losing their job."

Shelby attends a youth assembly called Love, Sex and Dating, held by charismatic local pastor Ed Ainsworth. "If they say there's no information at all in the schools, then they haven't listened to me," he says. "Safe sex? You have been lied to, kids," he tells them, warning them not to get hurt "physically, mentally, emotionally, and financially" by being sexually active. Ainsworth's seminar, with its religious references excised, is also given in 200 Texas junior high schools as part of a national movement called "True Love Waits," which claims 2.4 million teen "pledgers" since 1993. Shelby links hands with the other teens, promising before her parents and God, "On my wedding night, that night will be my first time."

Although committed to her personal vow, Shelby is not convinced that Ed Ainsworth's lectures constitute real sex education. "Every time we said we wanted sex ed, everyone said 'Sex Ed' was already doing it, but he's really doing something very different." The Youth Commission decides to fight for comprehensive, fact-based sex education in the town's public schools. Shelby takes up the campaign with missionary fervor and runs for "mayor" of the Youth Commission, but another teen, Corey Nichols, wins and she is devastated.

Two distinctly different personalities, Corey and Shelby spend the next year trying to advance their cause of comprehensive sex ed while attempting to outdo one another. As they bicker through a range of activities, Shelby increasingly defines herself as a hot-tempered activist. Corey, in contrast, emerges as the diplomat, a politician in the making who sees no good in confrontation, insisting instead on compromise.

Shelby finds herself in a difficult position on the home front, too. Her parents are supportive, but they are also concerned about the stress the campaign is putting on her, and by Shelby's increasingly liberal attitudes. When they suggest she quit the commission, Shelby explodes, "I'm not dropping out. . . . I have power there."

On the public level, the youth group is getting extensive media coverage but little attention from school officials. After repeated requests, the school board finally allows them to present their recommendations. Although the school board listens, the members are not persuaded, and it becomes clear that the district will continue to implement its abstinence-until-marriage sex education in the city's high schools. Again, Shelby refuses to give up.

Shelby now allies herself with a group of gay students who have been denied the right to form a gay-straight alliance in school, feeling it will galvanize her campaign. This is not a fight that Corey and the kids on the commission, afraid of adding more controversy to their already contentious agenda, want to join. Soon after, the mayor of Lubbock announces that he is considering doing away with the youth commission because of a city budget shortfall. Corey shows his penchant for political compromise and saves the commission by agreeing to operate without funding and, in the process, abandoning the sex education campaign. An infuriated Shelby decides she can work more effectively outside "the system." Accusing Corey of betraying a cause he claimed to champion, she resigns from the commission.

By her senior year, Shelby is committed to working with the gay teens, who have decided to sue the Lubbock School Board. She has also declared herself to be a liberal Democrat, a turn that shocks her Republican parents. But when an organization whose slogan is "God Hates Fags" comes to Lubbock to protest the gay kids' lawsuit, Shelby, along with her mother, joins a counter protest, carrying a sign that reads "God Loves Everybody," and affirming a belief that will guide her into adulthood: "I think that God wants you to question," Shelby says, "to do more than just blindly be a follower, because he can't use blind followers. He can use people like me who realize there's more in the world that can be done."

Shelby is now a sophomore at the University of Texas in Austin, where she is studying political science. She continues her activism for comprehensive sex education.

The Education of Shelby Knox is funded by grants from the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Brush Foundation, the Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, the Columbia Foundation, the Lalor Foundation, the General Service Foundation, the H. van Ameringen Foundation, the Playboy Foundation, the Trull Foundation, the Independent Television Service (ITVS) and American Documentary, Inc.

About the filmmakers:

Marion Lipschutz and Rose Rosenblatt are partners in Incite Pictures and Cine Qua Non. Most recently they produced *The Trenchcoat Gang* for Court TV, about the most successful bank robbers in U.S. history. In 2000, PBS's P.O.V. aired *Live Free or Die*, the story of Wayne Goldner, a doctor from Bedford, New Hampshire who was banned from teaching in his children's schools because he provides abortions. They have also produced *Fatherhood USA*, a PBS mini-series exploring contemporary fatherhood, and *The Abortion Pill*, about the history and controversy over the French drug RU486, which also aired on PBS. In addition to broadcast work they have produced videos for organizations working on a wide range of social issues.

Rose Rosenblatt

Rose Rosenblatt trained as a writer and editor, beginning with the Emmy award-winning series *Lifeline*, which aired on NBC. She wrote several National Endowment for the Humanities scripts, including *The Two Worlds of Angelita*, a dramatic film that showed at the Carnegie Hall Cinema in 1987. She edited *Mandela in America* (1990) and then launched her producing/directing career with *Rights and Wrongs* (PBS), a series chronicling human rights abuses around the world. In 1991, while editing *The Human Language*, a series on linguistics for PBS, she met and partnered with Marion Lipschutz. Rose lives with her husband in Manhattan's Tribeca neighborhood, in a loft that she did not, unfortunately, buy in 1980. Her daughter is a sophomore at Bowdoin College in Maine.

Marion Lipschutz

Beginning her career teaching video production in New York City schools and working on projects about early American cinema, Marion Lipschutz started producing and directing with the award-winning *Hard Choices*, about a "rustbelt" steel town devastated by the closing of its local mill. After associate producing and researching series on the history of entrepreneurship and the history of

early American films and a special on AIDS, she worked for HBO on several *America Undercover* shows and the *Real Sex* series. She lives on a farm outside of New York City with her husband, two kids, a dog, two cats and two donkeys.

Credits:

Executive Producers: Sally Jo Fifer, Cara Mertes
Producers/Directors: Marion Lipschutz, Rose Rosenblatt
Cinematographer: Gary Griffin
Editors: Rose Rosenblatt, Jeremy Stulberg
Associate Producer: Rebecca Honig
Composer: Rick Baitz

Running Time: 86:46

Awards & Festivals:

- Sundance Film Festival 2005 – *Excellence in Cinematography Award, Documentary*
- South by Southwest (SXSW) Film Festival 2005 – *Audience Award*
- Full Frame Documentary Film Festival 2005, Durham, N.C. – *Women in Leadership and Emerging Pictures Special Audience Awards*
- Miami Gay & Lesbian Film Festival 2005
- INPUT International Public Television Conference 2005, San Francisco
- Newport International Film Festival 2005, Newport, R.I.
- Hot Docs International Documentary Festival 2005, Toronto
- Outfest 2005, Los Angeles

Co-Presenters:



Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the weekly series *Independent Lens* on PBS. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have helped revitalize the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting www.itvs.org. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American People. **The Education of Shelby Knox** was produced in association with the Independent Television Service.



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and entering its 18th season on PBS, *P.O.V.* is the first and most-awarded series on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m. during the summer, and 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 on-line series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, *P.O.V.* has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent non-fiction 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.

P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. It also produces a Web site for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through community-based and educational applications, focusing on involving viewers in activities, information and feedback on the issues. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov houses our unique *Talking Back* feature, filmmaker interviews and viewer resources, and information on the P.O.V. archives as well as myriad special sites for previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

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Support for P.O.V. is provided by Starbucks Coffee Company. Starbucks has a rich tradition of supporting the arts and independent film and celebrates the fact that numerous points of view can be discussed over a good cup of coffee. Starbucks is committed to offering the highest quality coffee in grocery stores nationwide.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.americandocumentary.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. Through two divisions, *P.O.V.* and *Active Voice*, AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, on line and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback, to educational opportunities and community participation. **The Education of Shelby Knox** is a co-production of American Documentary, Inc.

TAPE REQUESTS: Please note that a broadcast version of this film is available upon request, as the film may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.



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