Thank You!

The American West Center would like to thank you for being a part of the first Western History Association Documentary Film Festival.

This, our first year, would not have been possible without the help of all of those involved, including:

- The filmmakers of the eleven featured documentaries.
- Our documentary panelists
- The judges for our awards
- The Western History Association
- The support staff at the American West Center
- The staff at the Marriott City Center
- Instructional Media Services at the U of U

Be sure to grab a ballot and vote for your favorite film! On the back you can give us some feedback about your experience with this year’s festival.
Introducing The WHA Documentary Film Festival!

This festival is a response to the 2008 Program Committee’s invitation to undertake the “Risky Business” of shaking up the conference’s traditional three-paper panel format. In deciding to put together a documentary film festival for the conference, American West Center staff drew inspiration from our own backyard. Festivals like Sundance, organizations like the Salt Lake City Film Center, and the remarkable number of talented filmmakers based here all indicate the passion Salt Lake folks have for movies. Three principal objectives have guided our work: to introduce documentaries about aspects of the western experience to teachers who might find these films useful in their own teaching; to provide exposure for independent filmmakers and give them a chance to market their films to interested educators; and to provide a new way for WHA conference-goers to experience the West.

Our call for films garnered nearly thirty submissions from which we chose eleven fascinating entries that address political, social, and environmental issues faced by the region’s diverse population. We hope you will either come to the WHA “theater” on the 6th floor of the Marriott or, if you’re staying in the hotel, watch some of the films in your room on the hotel’s closed circuit TV system. The screening schedules for both options appear in this guide. Be sure to cast a vote at the 6th floor theater for the Audience Award.

We’re delighted that a number of the filmmakers have agreed to join us for a special panel on Saturday morning. Come chat with them about their films and their thoughts about how to teach them and documentary more generally. On Friday morning we hope that those of you who have always dreamed of making a documentary or who want to add a filmmaker’s perspective to your teaching of documentaries will attend the “How to Make a Documentary” discussion. As a novice to the process of making a documentary myself, I can’t tell you how fascinating and eye-opening it has been to talk to the panelists we have assembled about their art. This is a session that should not be missed.

Finally, please let the Program Committee, Kevin Fernlund, or any of the AWC crew know if you liked this new addition to the WHA Conference. After all, part of the fun in taking a risk is figuring out whether you should do it again!

Here’s to good viewing,
Matt Basso
Director, American West Center
Wednesday, October 22  1:30 PM – 6:00 PM
Small Towns and Government Land in the West

1:30 PM This American Gothic, Sasha Waters Freyer
2:45 PM Gimme Delta!, Nathan Fisher and Colin Platt
3:45 PM Arid Lands, Grant Acker and Josh Wallaert
5:20 PM Saving the American Wild Horse, James Kleinert

Wednesday, October 22  8:00 PM – 10:30 PM
Race and Utah

8:00 PM Nobody Knows: The Untold Story of Black Mormons, Margaret Young and Darrius Gray
9:15 PM King Coal, Ashkan Soltani
9:55 PM Auhia Kisu Atu Pe, Kainga Malosi and Matt Bradley

Thursday, October 23  7:00 PM – 10:30 PM
Session 1: Natural Resources and the People of the West
Session 2: Sexuality, Power, and the West

7:00 PM False Promises, Rustin Thompson
8:00 PM Hot Wind: America’s Fallout Casualties, Kirsten Alqidy
8:40 PM Laramie Inside Out, Beverly Seckinger
9:45 PM Engendered Species, Julie van der Wal
This American Gothic

Directed By: Sasha Waters Freyer

2008    63 minutes

This American Gothic is a history of one of the most famous paintings in the world and a quirky portrait of Eldon, Iowa, population 998, site of the house that inspired it. The film follows local boosters over two years as they work towards their dream of a Gothic House Visitor Center to attract tourists and save their fading rural community. On a single main street through town, yellow banners commemorating the Gothic House flap proudly in the wind, but the one restaurant in Eldon, called Jones’ Gothic Room, stands shuttered and closed. This American Gothic explores the poignant irony of a rural America abandoned to economic hardship trying to rebuild itself through tourism that glorifies a happier, if largely imaginary, country past.

Producer/Director/Editor: Sasha Waters Freyer’s films and videos have broadcast and screened widely in the U.S. and abroad, including on the PBS series Independent Lens, the Sundance Channel, the Ann Arbor Film Festival & Tour, the Woodstock Film Festival, the Tribeca Film Festival, the Videoex International Festival of Experimental Film in Zurich, Kasseler Dokumentarfilm Festival, and Recontres International Paris/Berlin. Since 2000, she has taught film & video in the Department of Cinema & Comparative Literature at the University of Iowa, where she is an associate professor. She lives in a house with a big front porch in Iowa City with her husband, artist John D. Freyer.

Festival Screening
Wednesday 1:30 PM

In Room Screening
Friday 11:00 AM
Arid Lands
Directed By: Grant Acker & Josh Wallaert 2006 98 minutes

Arid Lands is a documentary feature about the land and people of the Colombia Basin in southeastern Washington state. Sixty years ago, the Hanford nuclear site produced plutonium for the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki, and today the area is the focus of the largest environmental cleanup in history. It is a landscape of incredible contradictions. Coyotes roam among decommissioned nuclear reactors, salmon spawn in the middle of golf courses, wine grapes grow in the sagebrush, and federal cleanup dollars spur rapid urban expansion. Arid Lands takes us into a world of sports fishermen, tattoo artists, housing developers, ecologists, and radiation scientists living and working in the area. It tells the story of how people changed the landscape over time, and how the landscape affected their lives.

Grant Acker is originally from Minnesota and moved west to attend college in Portland, Oregon. He got his first film experience working for Departure Films in New York City. He is currently a medical student at Cornell University.

Josh Wallaert has an MFA in creative writing from the University of Minnesota. He is originally from Oregon and now lives in Vancouver BC. He often writes about landscapes of the North American West, but this is his first experience working in film. http://www.sidelongfilms.com/

Festival Screening
Wednesday 3:45 PM

Saving the American Wild Horse
Directed By: James Kleinert 2008 30 minutes

Saving the American Wild Horse documents the struggle of an animal that has long symbolized freedom, individualism, and unbridled passion, all traits that exemplify what humans strive for in their finest hours. Through interviews with scientific experts, ranchers, historians, wild horse owners, animal rights activists, environmentalists, and others, the filmmaker examines the origins and effects of the recent “Burns Bill,” which gutted the Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971 and cleared way for the slaughter and removal of a vast majority of the wild horse herds.

This critical documentary film explores BLM’s past management history within the Wild Horse and Burro Program and the current massive western land grab by oil, gas, and mining corporations exploiting over thirty million acres of natural western lands.

James Kleinert is an award-winning filmmaker whose long list of credits includes documentaries that have screened on PBS and in film festivals around the country. He won an Emmy award in 2007 for his film Wild Horse Spirit with Viggo Mortensen, which was part of the PBS series “Natural Heroes.” His film Spirit Riders won awards at numerous festivals. He holds degrees in Business from Colorado Mountain College and Film Studies from the University of Utah. In 2007 James was awarded an Artist in Residency from the University of Texas, Austin.

Festival Screening:
Wednesday 5:20 PM
In Room Screening:
Friday 2:30 PM
Nobody Knows: The Untold Story of Black Mormons

Directed by: Margaret Young & Darius Gray    2008 72 minutes

Nobody Knows: The Untold Story of Black Mormons traces the race issue in the LDS Church from the Church’s beginnings, through the Civil Rights Movement (when protests flared because Mormons restricted priesthood and other privileges from blacks), to the reversal of the restriction, and finally to the present, which is still tainted with racist folklore.

Using never-released footage filmed in 1968, recent interviews with the most renowned scholars on race and Mormonism (Dr. Newell Bringhamurst, Dr. Amand Mauss, Mr. Gregory Prince, and Dr. Ronald Coleman), Civil Rights leaders (Martin Luther King III), clergy (pastor Cecil “Chip” Murray and president Gordon B. Hinkley), as well as with numerous black Mormons or former Mormons, this documentary recounts a history that began only two years after the LDS Church was organized but is largely unrecognized. This is the story of black Mormons giving their lives and strength in the famous Mormon Migration and paving the way for modern pioneers. We focus mostly on these modern pioneers, whose stories rival any in American history and have much to say about “the most segregated hour.”

Margaret Young and Darius Gray are coauthors of an award-winning trilogy of historical novels about Black Mormon pioneers, called “Standing on the Promises.” Mr. Gray is an experienced filmmaker, educated in broadcast journalism at the University of Utah and at Columbia University, while Young comes to the project as a creative writing teacher and a prolific author of fiction and non-fiction, including scholarly articles on black Mormons.

King Coal

Directed By: Ashkan Soltani    2007 28 minutes

In Huntington, Utah, Mexican miners strike over unfair wages and unsatisfactory working conditions at the polygamist run Co-Operative mine (only few miles away from Crandall Canyon Mine where the six trapped miners lost their life in August 2007). Big business profits from cheap immigrant labor because the law protects the mighty corporations and ignores the workers who should be protected under labor laws. The hardships of immigrant labor are shielded from the public eye on a national scale in order to hide this ugly truth.

Ashkan Soltani received his MFA in Film Studies from the University of Utah in 2007. His previous film “Long Struggle” won him several awards at film festivals around the country. He currently teaches film at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in Los Angeles as he continues to make documentaries.
Auhia Kisu Atu Pe

Directed By: Kainga Malosi

Auhia Kisu Atu Pe explores the educational experiences of Pacific Islanders living in Utah with focus on both the strengths of the Pacific Islander community that lend themselves to educational pursuits, as well as the challenges many Pacific Islander youth face in educational settings.

Kainga Malosi is a group of young filmmakers living in the Glendale and Rose Park neighborhoods of Salt Lake City. They were students attending West, East, and Horizonte High Schools, who chose to call themselves Kainga Malosi to reflect their culture and goals. The word Kainga originates from the Tongan word meaning extended family and community. The word Malosi hails from Samoa and is defined as strength, energy, and power. They are committed to strengthening their community by drawing on their many powerful assets. Film is one medium through which they believe they can do this.

Festival Screening:
Wednesday 9:55 PM

Hot Wind: America’s Fallout Casualties

Directed By: Kirsten AlaQiday

Hot Wind: America’s Fallout Casualties relives the period of nuclear weapons testing at the Nevada Test Site as experienced by down winders from Parowan, Utah. Between 1951 and 1991, the United States Atomic Energy Commission detonated 928 nuclear warheads on and under the Nevada desert. Radioactive fallout clouds crossed every state in the country and continued beyond the U.S. borders. In southern Utah, generations of down winders have suffered from radiation-induced illnesses. The patriotic Mormon community of Parowan has struggled to deal with the physical consequences of radiation exposure, as well as the psychological trauma of having been betrayed by the United States government. The personal stories of suffering and betrayal in the documentary are typical of the collective experience of down winders not only in Utah, but nationwide.

Kirsten AlaQiday received her MFA in Film Studies from the University of Utah in 2007. “It wasn’t until I moved to Utah in 2000 that I became aware of the legacy of the nuclear weapons testing program at the Nevada Test Site. I began to notice stories in the local media about Utah down winders lobbying to expand compensation for fallout survivors from nuclear weapons testing. After researching the subject further, I was shocked by my own ignorance of this national tragedy. I began to talk to others about the testing, and found out that many people were also uninformed of the immensity of what had happened, including people born and raised in Utah. I am concerned that the generations born after the testing are not being taught the entire history, nor the consequences, of the U.S. nuclear weapons testing program.”

Festival Screening:
Thursday 8:00 PM

In Room Screening:
Friday 10:30 AM
I've driven through the eastern Washington town of Wenatchee countless times and never realized there was a Native American tribe of the same name. Nor that their original homeland lay in what is now Leavenworth, WA, a la-la land of Bavarian knick-knacks and hand-carved "Willkommen" signs. When I learned that the Wenatchis were reigniting their struggle to have their aboriginal fishing, hunting, and gathering rights recognized, and that they had two federally ratified treaties to prove their claim, I decided to make this documentary. With the assistance of the tribe and their research historian, we set out to tell the story of the broken treaties and the present-day fight for recognition.

Using the words and songs of the Wenatchi people, a rich trove of historical documents and photos, the dry but picturesque plains of the Colville Indian Reservation (where the Wenatchis now live), and the wild forests and rivers of the Cascade mountains, the resulting film, False Promises, weaves a tale of a lost land, a proud people, and a hopeful quest for justice.

Rustin Thompson is a Seattle-based filmmaker and co-owner (along with his wife, producer and writer, Ann Hedreen) of White Noise Productions, a documentary and video production company specializing in feature-length films and short videos for non-profits and environmental groups.

Thompson began his career in broadcast television as a reporter, photographer, and editor for several network affiliates and spent ten years as a freelance cameraman for CBS News, ABC, NBC, ESPN, the Learning Channel, and other programs. His television work has earned nine regional and national Emmys, as well as other awards.

Festival Screening: Thursday 7:00 PM
In Room Screening: Thursday 3:45 PM

In October 1998, Wyoming college student Matthew Shepard was brutally beaten and left to die. His shocking murder pushed Laramie into the media spotlight and sparked a nationwide debate about homophobia, gay-bashing, and hate crimes. Filmmaker Beverly Seckinger, a Laramie native, returns home to the site of her own closeted adolescence to investigate the impact of Shepard’s murder. She encounters students, teachers, parents, and clergy suddenly moved to speak out and take action.

Beverly Seckinger is a professor and interim director of the School of Media Arts at the University of Arizona, where she teaches course in media production, documentary studies, and LGBT studies. She is also a founding member of the university’s Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Studies, and since 1993 has served as director of the Lesbian Looks Film & Video Series. Seckinger is a longtime member of the University Film and Video Association and since 2004 has been a member/owner of New Day Films, a national network of documentary filmmakers.

Her work has been honored at international festivals in the US, Canada, Europe, Australia, and Latin America. She was the recipient of a Media Arts Fellowship for 2002 from the Arizona Commission on the Arts. She is currently in production on Hippie Family Values, a feature length documentary that explores the historical and contemporary hippie culture in the Southwest.

Festival Screening: Thursday 8:40 PM
In Room Screening: Friday 3:00 PM
Engendered Species celebrates diversity in Salt Lake City. ES is a support group for the Transgendered: cross dressers, pre-operative transsexuals, and post-operative transsexuals. Their intention has always been to promote awareness and knowledge of gender issues as well as to provide sanctuary to those individuals whose private pain keeps them closeted to society. Get a glimpse into the world of the Transgendered in a western city. Members of ES share their personal stories, hardships and joys.

Julie van der Wal is an alumna of the Rainbow Co. Children’s Theatre from Las Vegas, Nevada, where she attended the Las Vegas Academy. She later graduated from Marymount College in Rancho Palos Verdes, CA. Julie received her Masters in Film Studies from the University of Utah and currently teaches digital filmmaking at the Art Institute of Salt Lake City. Her special interests focus on documentary filmmaking and screenwriting.

Gimme Delta! Is the story of a Western landscape in flux, shaped by the confluence of different groups, each with a different stake in the land. With echoes of America’s history of expansion, Gimme Delta! provides a vision of what the future holds.

The film centers in the small town of Rio Vista, nestled in the Sacramento River Delta and skirting the periphery of the Bay Area. Faced with the collapse of its economy and the death of its core, the town has restructured its development model on the tenuous proposition that residential growth could be its salvation. Town officials have welcomed the arrival of Trilogy, a master-planned active-adult retirement community built around a world-class golf course. While the influx of residents has been a boon for business, Rio Vista’s resources have born the burden and the very character of the town itself has been threatened.

Through interviews with the old guard and new wave of residents, as well as policymakers and urban planners, what emerges is a picture of a struggle for sustainable growth fought out on an exurban landscape that had sunk below river level, only protected by centenarian levees. Can common ground be attained before the delta is irrevocably changed?

Blue Dot Productions was founded by Nathan Fisher and Colin Platt. Both are graduates of Pomona College in Claremont, CA. Mr. Fisher has a background in investigative journalism, and is currently pursuing a master’s degree in Documentary Film from the New School in New York City.

Mr. Platt has a background in film and theater acting and a degree in Media Studies. His work focuses on the interplay between human settlements and the environment.
For the last forty-four years the American West Center has had as its mission collecting, preserving, interpreting, and disseminating the history and culture of the American West. In that time, among its other accomplishments the AWC has produced more than fifteen textbooks and over 5,000 oral histories. As we move towards our Fiftieth Anniversary, the AWC continues to thrive. Twenty-five researchers, comprised mostly of undergraduate and graduate students, are currently collaborating on a number of exciting projects, including:

- The Utah American Indian Digital Archive
- The Utah Indian Curriculum Project
- The Digital Pacific Archive and Pacific Oral History Project
- The Outdoor Recreation and Utah Environmentalists’ Oral History Projects
- Saving the Legacy: An Oral History of Utah’s Veterans
- The Annual Westerns of the World Film Festival

We invite those interested in collaborating with the AWC, prospective students, and any others to visit our website to learn more about these and other initiatives.

http://www.awc.utah.edu