

HUMORIST ROY BLOUNT, JR. TAKES AN OFFBEAT JOURNEY DOWN THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER IN **THE MAIN STREAM**, A BUOYANT CELEBRATION OF FREEDOM AND DIVERSITY – AMERICAN-STYLE  
Two-Hour Film By Award-Winning Filmmaker Roger Weisberg – Produced In High Definition Television (HDTV) And Presented By Thirteen/WNET New York – Premieres December 17 At 9 P.M. [ET] On PBS

*“The Mississippi River flows right down the middle of the country. Maybe along this great liquid divide, I can discover what holds this wildly diverse country together.” – Roy Blount, Jr.*

The beloved humorist and celebrated author Roy Blount, Jr. takes an offbeat journey down the Mississippi River, the literal and metaphorical “main stream” of America, in a new documentary from Thirteen/WNET New York. Blount’s unpredictable odyssey, captured in rich, often amusing detail by the cameras, celebrates a broad range of American eccentricity, from an off-the-rack wedding at the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota, to a “guts-and-glory” rodeo at the state penitentiary in Angola, Louisiana.

Produced and directed by the award-winning documentarian Roger Weisberg, and shot and mastered on high definition video, **THE MAIN STREAM** premieres Tuesday, December 17 at 9 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings). In the spirit of Weisberg’s earlier work, *Road Scholar*, which has become a cult classic, **THE MAIN STREAM** is an entertaining potpourri of American life, adding a welcome touch of humor and irreverence to a wide variety of subjects, from history and geography to sociology and cultural anthropology.

“The 20 public affairs documentaries I’ve made for PBS leave little room for levity,” Weisberg said. “But, every once in a while, I need a good laugh

and I think our audience deserves one as well. Ever since I made *Road Scholar* about a decade ago, I've been eager to take another offbeat documentary journey in search of the ironies of contemporary American life. I can't imagine a more quintessential American journey than a trip down Mark Twain's river or a host more affable and amusing than Roy Blount Jr."

Like Mark Twain, Blount is a displaced Southerner with the wit and wisdom to capture contemporary life on the great river Twain immortalized over a century ago. While floating downstream on an assortment of vessels – including a canoe, rowboat, raft, steamboat, towboat, and fishing boat – Blount introduces an unforgettable cast of characters.

Blount throws himself into unusual 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 writer and public radio personality Garrison Keillor, who challenges Blount to a stone-skipping contest; Winona LaDuke, an Ojibwe activist who twice ran for Vice President of the United States; Kenny Salway, a reclusive environmentalist who spent 28 years living alone in the swamp; Leonard Kuhnert, a fisherman who catches giant catfish with his bare hands; Leslie Eaton, a hippie nomad who makes a living reading palms; and Wilbert Rideau, an award-winning newspaper editor serving a life sentence for murder.

Many of the communities and individuals featured in the film are struggling with beliefs and lifestyles that fall outside of mainstream culture. There are Native Americans battling to reclaim tribal lands and traditions, African Americans working with Greenpeace to fight environmental racism, and homesteaders contending for the right to live in old boathouses. Many have

distinctly non-mainstream professions as well, including a Mark Twain impersonator, a Voodoo Priestess, a Native-American spiritual healer who manages a casino, a French chef who touts swamp rats as a gourmet delicacy, a musician who teaches the blues to children in the Delta, an Elvis impersonator who curates the “Elvis is Alive Museum,” and a trumpet player who is being heralded as the next Louis Armstrong.

As one self-proclaimed river rat remarks, “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.

**THE MAIN STREAM** is a production of Public Policy Productions, Inc. in association with Thirteen/WNET New York. Over the past two decades, Thirteen has presented 20 PBS documentaries by Roger Weisberg on subjects ranging from health care, aging, and the environment to defense policy, child welfare, adolescent sexuality, and criminal justice. These documentaries have won more than 70 awards, including Peabody, Emmy and duPont-Columbia Awards, and recently, an Academy Award nomination.

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Thirteen/WNET New York is one of the key program providers for public television, bringing such acclaimed series as *Nature*, *Great Performances*, *American Masters*, *Charlie Rose*, *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, *Stage on Screen*, *EGG the arts show*, and *Cyberchase* – as well as the work of Bill Moyers – to audiences nationwide. As the flagship public broadcaster in the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut metro area, Thirteen reaches millions of viewers each week, airing the best of American public television along with its own local productions such as The Ethnic Heritage Specials, The New York

Walking Tours, *New York Voices*, *Reel New York*, and its *MetroArts/Thirteen* cable arts programming. With educational and community outreach projects that extend the impact of its television productions, Thirteen takes television “out of the box.” And as broadcast and digital media converge, Thirteen is blazing trails in the creation of Web sites, enhanced television, CD-ROMs, DVD-ROMs, educational software, and other cutting-edge media products. More information about Thirteen can be found at: [www.thirteen.org](http://www.thirteen.org).

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