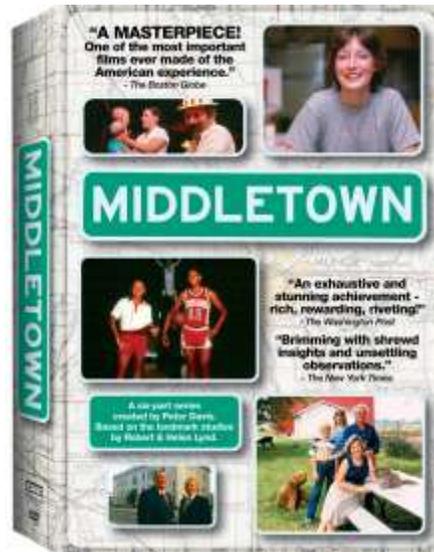


# MIDDLETOWN

A six-part film series

Created & produced by Academy Award and Emmy-winner Peter Davis



The Campaign - Directed by Tom Cohen  
The Big Game - Directed by E.J. Vaughn  
Community of Praise - Directed by Richard Leacock & Marisa Silver  
Family Business - Directed by Tom Cohen  
Second Time Around - Directed by Peter Davis  
Seventeen - Directed by Joel DeMott & Jeff Kreines

Color, 457 minutes, U.S., 1982

UPC # 854565001244

4 Discs / + 16-page booklet / SRP: \$44.98  
+ a bonus filmed interview with Peter Davis

**Pre-Book Date: Aug. 17, 2010**

**Street Date: Sept. 21, 2010**



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For stills and to download the press kit:  
<http://homevideo.icarusfilms.com/pressroom.html>

## **Short Synopsis:**

Created and produced by the Academy Award-winning Peter Davis (HEARTS AND MINDS), this Emmy-winning six-part film series documents middle-class life, American values and customs in "Middletown"- a.k.a. Muncie, Indiana.

Inspired by immensely influential Depression-era sociological studies by Robert and Helen Lynd - *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* (1929) and *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (1937) - this series of films made for PBS in 1982 transforms the Middletown studies into an unprecedented overview of American life seen through the prisms of local politics, high school sports, a family business, religion, marriage and divorce, and (at the time still explosively) interracial dating.

## **Producer's Statement:**

MIDDLETOWN was intended to search for continuity and change in American life as embodied in the people, institutions and core values of a single community. I wanted to produce films that located vital American processes in their cultural contexts. In this effort I was inspired by the pioneering work of cultural anthropology done in the 1920s by Robert and Helen Merrell Lynd in Muncie, Indiana. They looked at Muncie, which was referred to as Middletown, the way Margaret Mead looked at Samoa or Claude Levi-Strauss at the Amazon rainforest. Although the design is grand, Middletown's form is simple and purposeful, propelled by character, conflict and action.

This is neither a survey nor a slice-of-life series of films; it is instead a non-fiction exploration of critical events in the lives of our subjects. We were dealing with ordinary Americans at extraordinary moments, at turning points. Each film is an individual entity, yet each contributes to the comprehensive structure of the series as a humanist inquiry into American life. MIDDLETOWN is not only a series of films but also, I hoped then and continue to hope, a mirror in which we, as Americans, might see our own reflection.

-MIDDLETOWN creator and producer, Peter Davis,  
2010

**THE CAMPAIGN**  
Directed by Tom Cohen  
Emmy winner for Best Sound



Focusing on Muncie's mayoral race, THE CAMPAIGN follows closely the personalities, strategies, and pressures involved in an American political contest. In particular, it examines the sharply contrasting styles and backgrounds of the Democratic and Republican candidates.

"The achievement of THE CAMPAIGN is that these vignettes are both believably specific and broadly symbolic. It's a classic slice of Americana." -Atlanta Constitution

"This is politics as real life. Proof of the film-ready narrative structure of a campaign: life or death drama, where one candidate will win, one will fail; without presidential candidates or national celebrities, just everyday characters reaching out for the votes of their neighbors, the people they knew--and who knew them. Unforgettable."  
-Paul Stekler, International Documentary

Credits:

Created and Produced by.....Peter Davis  
Directed by..... Tom Cohen  
Photographed by.....John Lindley  
Film Editor..... Bob Brady  
Production Manager..... Craig Perry  
Unit Manager, Location Coordinator..... Terry Simon  
Research Consultants..... Dwight Hoover, Joseph Trimmer, Warren Vander Hill  
Sound..... Tom Cohen  
Additional Photography..... Paul Goldsmith, Kevin Keating,  
Vic Losick, Ed Marritz, Jim Coyne, John Gunselman, Tom McDonough  
Additional Sound.....Danny Michael, Francis Daniel,  
Philip Pearle, Tony Buba, Don Regensburger, Paul Glicksberg, Bud Bennett  
Assistant Editor.....Emily Paine  
Sound Editor..... Marc Cerutti  
Assistant Editors..... Martha Jeroaman Goode, Jean Standish, Marshall Grupp  
First Assistant Cameraman..... David Eubank  
Assistant Cameraman. Ed Marritz, Sean Drury, Philip Holahan, Gabe Kover, Ken Knight

Additional Unit Managers..... Jackie Leopold, Paul Glicksberg  
Gaffers..... Steve Silverman, Pat Troyon  
Production Assistant..... Rob Goubeaux  
Production Secretary..... Susan J. Baum  
Cellist..... Janos Starker  
Pianist..... Anthony Davis

# COMMUNITY OF PRAISE

Directed by Richard Leacock and Marisa Silver



COMMUNITY OF PRAISE examines faith in the lives of a family whose fundamentalist beliefs are revealed in how they deal with both the emergencies and the ordinary problems and strife of daily life.

## Credits:

Created and Produced by.....Peter Davis  
Directed, Photographed, Edited by.....Richard Leacock & Marisa Silver  
Assistant Editor..... Emily Paine  
Production Manager..... Craig Perry  
Production Secretary..... Susan J. Baum  
Research Consultants..... Dwight Hoover, Joseph Trimmer, Warren Vander Hill  
Cellist..... Janos Starker  
Sound Editor..... Bonnie Kozek  
Apprentice Sound Editor..... Terry Shands  
Assistant Sound Editor..... John Murray

# THE BIG GAME

Directed by E.J. Vaughn  
Co-Directed by Ruth Neuwald



As the basketball teams of Muncie Central and Anderson High prepare to meet in an annual game charged with the spirit of long-established rivalry, **THE BIG GAME** examines what this competition and what the sport itself means to the community, the coaches, and most of all to the players themselves.

"The best scene is not when Morgan goes one on one with Rowray. It's when Morgan goes one-on-one with his guidance counselor. If this powerful segment of **MIDDLETOWN** changes the life of one such high school basketball player, we should all stand up and cheer." -Buffalo Evening News

## Credits:

Created and Executive Produced by..... Peter Davis  
Produced & Directed by..... E.J. Vaughn  
Edited & Co-Directed by..... Ruth Neuwald  
Creative Consultant..... Charlotte Zwerin  
Photographed by..... Paul Goldsmith  
Associate Producer & Associate Director..... Tom Simon  
Assistant Producer..... Ira Halberstadt  
Production Manager..... Craig Perry  
Principal Photography..... Paul Goldsmith, Mark Benjamin  
Principal Sound..... Ron Yoshida, Phil Gleason  
Location Sound Mixer..... John Hampton  
Additional Photography..... Tom McDonough, Barry Rebo, Michael Hall  
Additional Sound..... Danny Michael, Ron Honsa  
Video Engineer..... Barry Minnerly  
Video Recordists..... Alvin Krinsky, Peter Schnall, Neil Smith, Neil Sydor  
Recruiting Sequence..... Robert Brady, Don Lenzer, Petur Hliddal, Kenneth Fink  
Location Chef..... Leslie McBride  
Sound Mixer..... Vin Gizzi  
Additional Sound Editing..... B.G. Williams

Post Production Engineer..... Phil Fallo  
Associate Editor..... Herman K. Trabish  
Assistant Editors..... Vito Brunetti, Kathy Schermerhorn  
Video Dubber..... Steffan Finkel  
Research Consultants..... Warren Vander Hill, Dwight Hoover, Joseph Trimmer  
Production Assistants..... Jan Blackwell, Dave Webb, Mike Blackwell, Laura Wirthlin,  
Matthew Hanifa, Mark Yates, Jon Vander Hill  
Cellist:..... Janos Starker

# SECOND TIME AROUND

Directed by Peter Davis  
Co-Directed by John Lindley



Through focusing on the pre-wedding arrangements of David and Elaine, an engaged couple who each had a prior marriage and divorce, **SECOND TIME AROUND** presents a picture of the issues and complexities of contemporary marriage.

## Credits:

Created, Produced & Directed by..... Peter Davis  
Photographed & Co-Directed by..... John Lindley  
Editor..... Tom Haneke  
Assistant Editor..... Richard Howorth  
Associate Producer..... Terry Simon  
Sound..... Larry Loewinger  
Production Manager..... Craig Perry  
Additional Photography..... Nancy Schreiber, Mark Obenaus  
First Assistant Camera..... David Eubank  
Additional Sound..... Danny Michael, Larry Hoff  
Assistant Camera..... Lisa Rinzler, Steve Drellich  
Unit Manager..... Tom Simon  
Gaffers..... Tim Wallace, Rufus Standefer  
Electrician..... Doug Armstrong  
Research Consultants..... Joseph Trimmer, Warren Vander Hill, Dwight Hoover  
Post- Production Photography..... Richard Howorth, Michael Hall  
Assistant to the Producer..... Susan J. Baum  
Production Assistants..... Laura Wirthlin, Leon Falk, Mike Blackwell, Steve Todd,  
Frank Foster, Larry Craig, Bob Nonweiler, Jamey Baer, Eric Hoopingarner  
Cellist..... Janos Starker  
Sound Mixer..... Lee Dichter  
Negative Matcher..... Larry Mischel

**FAMILY BUSINESS**  
Directed by Tom Cohen  
Emmy winner for Best Editor



Although they differ in their attitudes toward work and its rewards, all ten members of the Snider family struggle to keep ex-marine Howie Snider's Shakey's Pizza Parlor franchise from sliding into bankruptcy in FAMILY BUSINESS.

"Howie Snider's eight children may privately despair as they slave in his kitchen, but they never stop enveloping him with solidarity and love. This is a story of genuine heroism."  
-Harry F. Waters, Newsweek

"Marvelous... as close to a genuine slice of life as television can muster."  
-Los Angeles Times

"Remarkably intimate... There are scenes that will stick with you for life."  
-Chicago Tribune

Credits:

Created and Executive Produced by.....Peter Davis  
Produced & Directed by..... Tom Cohen  
Photographed by..... Tom Hurwitz  
Editor & Associate Producer..... Bob Brady  
Sound..... Peter Miller  
Research Director/ Unit Production Manager..... Terry Simon  
Assistant Editor..... Caroline Emmons  
Sound Editor..... Bonnie Kozek  
Apprentice Editor..... Terry Shands  
Assistant Sound Editor..... Janet Conn  
Assistant Cameraman..... David Eubank  
Gaffer..... Rufus Standefer  
Grip..... Judy Hoffman  
Best Boy..... Jim Sofranko  
Production Manager:..... Craig Perry  
Production Assistants....Margie Waller, Michael Blackwell, Jon Vander Hill, Mark Yates

Sound Mixer..... Lee Dichter  
Production Secretary..... Susan J. Baum  
Research..... Peter Esmonde  
Research Consultants..... Dwight Hoover, Joseph Trimmer, Warren Vander Hill  
Cellist..... Janos Starker

# SEVENTEEN

Directed by Joel DeMott and Jeff Kreines

Winner Grand Jury Prize Documentary, 1985 Sundance Film Festival



In their final year at Muncie's Southside High School, a group of seniors hurtle toward maturity with a combination of joy, despair, and an aggravated sense of urgency. They are also learning a great deal, both in and out of school, that is often quite different from what school officials think they are teaching.

"One of the best and most scarifying reports on American life to be seen on a theater screen since the Maysles brothers' "SALESMAN" and "GIMME SHELTER...haunts the memory." -Vincent Canby, New York Times

"Truly scandalous." -J. Hoberman, The Village Voice

"[SEVENTEEN has] a rare and gripping sense of gritty honesty." -Judy Stone, San Francisco Chronicle

"SEVENTEEN is more frightening than 'The Day After' " -The Atlanta Constitution

## Credits:

Created & Produced by.....Peter Davis  
Co-Produced, Directed, Photographed, Recorded, Edited by.....Joel DeMott &  
..... Jeff Kreines  
Assistant Editor, Production Assistant..... Peter Esmonde  
Sound Mixer..... Lee Dichter  
Project Coordinator.....Craig Perry  
Project Secretary..... Susan Baum  
Research Consultant..... Joseph Trimmer  
Cellist.....Janos Starker

## About the Original Middletown Studies:

In the 1920s, Robert and Helen Lynd conducted a sociological study of Muncie, Indiana, that was published in 1929 as *Middletown: A Study in American Culture*.

The Lynds wrote that "the aim of the field of investigation recorded in the following pages was to study the interwoven trends that are the life of a small American city." They examined the following areas: "Getting a Living," "Making a Home," "Training the Young," "Using Leisure," "Engaging in Religious Practice," and "Engaging in Community Activities." They admitted that "a typical city, strictly speaking, does not exist, but the city studied was selected as having many features common to a wide group of communities."

Robert Lynd updated the study in *Middletown in Transition*, published in 1937. These works were just the beginning of a continuing series of articles, books, documentaries, and other examinations that would make Muncie-as-Middletown one of the most studied communities in America. Middletown III was a research project funded by the National Science Foundation from 1976 to 1981, and Middletown IV was done in 1999-2000.

The [Center for Middletown Studies](#) was established in 1980 to collect materials and support research on Muncie. It became a unit of Ball State University in 1984.

## MIDDLETOWN Filmmaker Biographies:

TOM COHEN (The Campaign and Family Business) made several documentaries in Latin America, including Campamento about the Chilean revolution, The Healer about a Peruvian witch doctor, and Triunfo about a Peace Corps volunteer. He was associate producer and sound man on Hearts and Minds, a film about the Vietnam War. Other film work has taken him from the floor of the New York Stock Exchange to the rice paddies of Bangladesh to the muddy fields of Woodstock. He has written non-fiction as well as a script for the PBS series, The History of the Jews in America, and he has made a video presentation about the New Deal for the Roosevelt House in New York.

PETER DAVIS (Second Time Around and Middletown Series producer) wrote Hunger In America and made The Heritage of Slavery, The Battle of East St. Louis, and The Selling of the Pentagon for CBS News; Hearts and Minds, distributed by Warner Brothers; The Best Hotel on Skid Row for HBO; JACK (with Nick Davis) for CBS. His books include Hometown, Where Is Nicaragua? and If You Came This Way. Among numerous magazine articles, he covered the war in Iraq for The Nation Magazine.

JOEL DEMOTT and JEFF KREINES (Seventeen) have worked together for more than thirty years after attending Ricky Leacock's MIT film lab. Jeff Kreines made an early

film, *The Complaint of Steve Kreines as Recorded by His Younger Brother Jeff*, and together DeMott and Kreines made *Demon Lover Diary* about Kreines' attempt to help a friend make a horror movie. They have filmed the realities of working class life in Montgomery, Alabama, exploring issues of race, gender relations, class and sexuality. Jeff Kreines developed the Kinetta Camera which he introduced at the NAB Digital Cinema Summit in 2004.

RICHARD LEACOCK (Community of Praise) is a legendary documentarian whose reputation is of a magnitude that many if not most younger non-fiction filmmakers claim descent from him and his pioneering techniques in Cinema Verite. For twenty years he was head of the Film Department at MIT. His films include his work as cinematographer on Robert Flaherty's *Louisiana Story* and on Robert Drew's *Primary*, which was also shot by Albert Maysles and edited by D. A. Pennebaker. Leacock co-directed the films *A Happy Mother's Day* with Joyce Chopra; *Lambert, Hendricks & Co.* with D. A. Pennebaker; *A Stravinsky Portrait* with Rolf Lieberman, *Lulu In Berlin* with Susan Woll, *Les Oeufs a la Coque* and *Les Vacances de Monsieur Leacock* with Valerie Lalonde, and many, many others.

MARISA SILVER (Community of Praise) dropped out of Harvard to work on *Middletown's* religion film with Ricky Leacock. She is a screenwriter, film director and, more recently, a noted author. Her feature films include *Permanent Record*, *Vital Signs* and *He Said, She Said*. Her enthusiastically praised fiction includes the short story collection *Babe In Paradise* and the novels *No Direction Home* and *The God of War*.

E. J. VAUGHN (*The Big Game*) has produced and directed the feature documentaries *America's Pop Collector* about the American art market, and *Deal*, a behind-the-scenes study of the game show *Let's Make A Deal*. He has produced and directed for *Bill Moyers' Journal*, contributed to *NBC News' Today Show* as well as to *ABC News' Close-Up* and *20/20*. He has a PhD in Communications Studies from the University of Michigan, and he is currently developing programming that attempts to stem the tide of high school and community college drop-outs.

The *Middletown Series* would not be what it is without the work of JOHN LINDLEY, who shot both *The Campaign* and *Second Time Around* (which he also co-directed), TOM HURWITZ, who shot *Family Business*, and PAUL GOLDSMITH, the principal cameraman on *The Big Game*. This is equally true of the film editors BOB BRADY (*The Campaign* and *Family Business*), TOM HANEKE (*Second Time Around*), and CHARLOTTE ZWERIN (*The Big Game*).

*Middletown's* Research Director was TERRY SIMON, who was invaluable in making and maintaining contacts in Muncie as well as finding several of the filmed participants in the Series. The Production Manager was CRAIG PERRY, who was adept at moving film crews to their locations where and when they were needed as well as preventing the Series from going even further over budget than it did. SUSAN BAUM was office manager, production secretary, and if there is such a position as *Morale Booster*, she filled that slot.

The Middletown Series was nominated for ten Emmies and won two – Tom Cohen for sound on *The Campaign* though it may as well have been for his directing, and Bob Brady for editing on *Family Business*. The individual films have won a number of other awards, including the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance for *Seventeen*.

## THE MIDDLETOWN FILM PROJECT

### By Peter Davis

Looking at the Middletown films a generation after their completion, I find it striking – embarrassing really – that a single word not only binds but flows like a rushing stream through all six films. It is a peculiarly American word that seems to apply to us as it would not if a similar study were made in Italy, China or even among our cultural progenitors in the British Isles. The word is *wanting*.

Though my intention was to explore deeper issues of power, faith, fairness, social forces, race, gender and class in Middletown, wanting turns out never to be far from the surface in any of the films.

Anyone in pursuit of trends or truths in contemporary American experience hopes to do work that is timely, of course, yet you also hope it will have a resonance that may carry into the next generation. Though I am speaking for myself, not for the gifted filmmakers I hired nor for the Project's knowledgeable academic advisors, none of us failed to notice the encounter between continuity and change. This scrum enticed me so much I paid insufficient attention to wanting, the tidy gerund so clearly on display in the films. Now anyone can see it. Icarus Films' decision to bring out this DVD set exposes The Middletown Film Project to the harsh light of at least a few decades of posterity.

My embarrassment is that I didn't see the wanting much earlier. When the academic advisors and I formed the Middletown Film Project in 1976, my own aim was to look at a single American community for what it could tell us about our society. Writers and observers as far apart as Alexis de Tocqueville, Saul Bellow, and Robert and Helen Merrell Lynd have looked at America and seen the wanting. "The Indian," de Tocqueville wrote, "knew how to live without wants," while the new American man was "constantly on the move" trying to improve his lot, "and you will always find him preoccupied with fresh plans to increase his comfort." In Henderson *The Rain King*, Bellow's protagonist is assailed by the refrain, "I want, I want, I want," which also haunts the main character in his late novel *Ravelstein*. The reprise is neither lazy nor accidental; it was Bellow, born a Canadian, on American yearners.

Robert and Helen Lynd, with their pioneering 1929 work of cultural anthropology, *Middletown: A Study In Contemporary American Culture*, were the inspiration for The Middletown Film Project. Though it wasn't what I focused on when I first read their study, a substantial amount of wanting filled the Lynds' Middletown. Workers wanted to improve their social and economic position; new devices for leisure lured customers; "petting parties" beckoned teenagers; the drive for social change was in high gear; citizens wanted to own their homes; and the accumulation of wealth was a primary goal. Much of this wanting echoed de Tocqueville's observations that "in no

other country is the love of property keener or more alert than in the United States,” and “as one digs deeper in the national character of Americans, one sees that they have sought the value of everything in this world only in the answer to this single question: how much money will it bring in?”

The films then. The advance into filmmaking was made with the well-informed advice, if not always the enthusiastic consent, of my distinguished academic colleagues: Professors Dwight Hoover, Warren Vander Hill, and Joseph Trimmer of Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, where all the films were shot. The Project was searching for realities in American life as embodied in the people, institutions and core values of one town. Although that design sounded grand, perhaps even grandiose, the films’ form is simple and purposeful, propelled by character, conflict and action. Middletown is neither a survey nor a slice-of-life film series; it is instead a beholding – an inspection as close as we could make it – of critical experiences in the lives of our subjects. Ordinary people, as the saying goes, at extraordinary moments, at turning points. Each film is an individual entity, yet each contributes to the comprehensive structure of the series as a humanist inquiry into American life. Middletown is not only a series of films but also, I hoped then and still do, a mirror in which we might see our reflection.

The Lynds divided their inquiry into six parts, and so does the Middletown series. In the Lynds’ words, their categories were: getting a living; making a home, training the young, using leisure in various forms of play, engaging in religious practices, and engaging in community activities. The Middletown films, in the order of their scheduled broadcast by PBS, are in the corresponding categories of politics, play, religion, work, marriage, and education. The final film, on education, ran into an institutional buzzsaw for reasons I’ll come to presently. But it was not because the film is devoid of wanting; on the contrary, it was the forms wanting takes among high school students that proved unacceptable to those who saw themselves as sentries at the gates of respectability.

The Campaign, the Project’s politics film, directed by Tom Cohen, is about two candidates who want to be Muncie’s mayor. The baby-kissing Irish pol Democrat, after two separate indictments while he was serving as chief of police and sheriff (he was never convicted but the mud sticks), wants a return to the high regard of his community. The milder, almost bland Republican wants to project an image of leadership ability that will make him electable. The Democrat hugs everyone within reach; the Republican, knocking on doors to ask for votes, is awkward but sincere. The contrast between the two is starkly evident when the Democrat is interviewed bare-chested while the Republican relaxes in an easy chair in a vest and tie. Both candidates have non-political desires when they have time to be human beings. The Republican tells his young son he’d rather play with him than campaign; the Democrat tells his mother-in-law, “I been screwing your daughter fifteen years and I want to keep doing it.”

The Big Game, directed and produced by E. J. Vaughn, pits two high school teams against one another in a basketball game that defines not only character and ability but also helps determine the players’ future. In basketball-mad Indiana, both teams want to win, of course, but there are other goals as well. Star players want college scholarships. On a recruiting tour, various coaches tell the white star of Muncie’s team how much they want him at their colleges. What the black leader of the opposing team wants, mostly, is “my ticket out,” by which he means out of his own social background as well as his town.

But there's another agenda, another level of wanting: "Discipline becomes a fundamental part of training for an extreme contest," one of the recruiting college coaches tells the white player, making it clear he means to train his players for combat.

Community Of Praise, directed, filmed and edited by Richard Leacock and Marisa Silver, is about wanting salvation. "It's all a search for Jesus," one evangelical says. A veterinarian leads a prayer meeting where he reveals personal problems among his brethren by saying he wants to purge "the spirit of epilepsy, alcoholism, smoking, harlotry." While she's trying to be saved, the central family's wife and mother wants to hold on to her husband, who leaves her and drinks; the husband just wants to be allowed to express his urges, which include beating his children. A young son admits, "I haven't been willing today," hoping he will be made willing to be saved. The veterinarian prays for a miracle cure for a child with severe scoliosis. The family is never far from surrendering to anguish, keeping its hopes up through prayer and the support of the evangelical community.

Family Business, directed and produced by Tom Cohen, features the ex-Marine proprietor of a Shakey's Pizza franchise that is in sharp, agonizing decline. With mixed elements of a carnival pitchman, Willy Loman, and Archie Bunker, the proprietor wants to save the business and hold together his family, most of whom work for him. Forlornly, gamely, he plays the banjo and sings "Show me the way to go home" to his dwindling customers. His wife weeps when the Shakeys headquarters threatens to close down the franchise. His grown children want to help their father but also to rebel against his authority so they can begin to lead their own lives. "Everything I own is in hock and tied up with this business," the proprietor says, and adds later, referring to his loyal but discontent children, "They don't know how thin the ice is I skate on." He's a dreamer who sometimes forgets it's a dream and believes he can make his wishes come true. But then, sadly, realistically, he declares, in a querulous tone that may echo in the ears of anyone facing foreclosure, "You know what you have to do to borrow money? You have to prove you don't need it."

Second Time Around, which I directed, portrays a man and woman in their thirties, each having endured a painful divorce, as they try to proceed toward a new marriage. They are dreamers too, as much as the candidates for mayor, the basketball players, the religious fundamentalist trying to hold onto both her faith and her husband, or the Shakey's proprietor himself. The engaged couple look at homes they want to move into but can't afford. "Nice way to start a new life," the man says, "in debt up to your ears." In what they regard as a shabby neighborhood, they tour a run-down house, leaky with broken appliances, and the woman cringes. With two young sons by her first marriage, the woman reluctantly agrees to go to work if her fiancé won't insist on more children. They give one another baleful looks over his attempt to make a manageable budget and her efforts to integrate him into her sons' lives. "What we have that's good is great," the woman says, "but what we have that's not so good is terrible." Pulling in different directions and worrying about money, family, and love itself, the couple's pastoral visit is a bust; "take time to have fun," the minister counsels to deaf ears. When the planned wedding is only days away, the couple have a showdown in her apartment. She is discouraged and nervous. Both are having second thoughts. "Fifty per cent of the people who get married get divorced," he says, "so what are we going to do?"

Seventeen, the final Middletown film, made by Joel DeMott and Jeff Kreines, follows students in their senior year of high school. This film fairly bleeds with want. The girl at the center of the film wants her freedom from adult control and from school; she wants friendships her community frowns on, and of course she and her friends want sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll. They want to be grown-ups while also wanting to remain kids free of responsibility. An interracial theme is prefigured in the opening scene when the teacher of an unruly cooking class says, "You take half a cup of white sugar and half a cup of brown." The film's central girl student, who is white, has a romance with a black friend. Her mother initially supports the relationship until a cross is burned in the family's yard. This is in the same neighborhood, revealingly known as Shedtown, that depressed the struggling couple in *Second Time Around* when they were looking for a new home. The class division is clear here. The engaged couple in the previous film is in debt and virtually broke, but they are white collar and marginally middle class. The girl's family in *Seventeen* almost certainly has more money, but they are culturally and socially in the working class. Unlike a few of her black friends, the white girl is not upwardly mobile, and her material and social wants, readily apparent in the film, do not include conventional education. "With the ability that you have," a teacher tells her, "it just absolutely makes me sick to think that you're throwing all that away." The teacher wants to teach and her students want to learn, but what they want to learn about how to get along in the world they inhabit is not what the teacher is teaching. "Life," says a civics teacher, "is nothing more than a combination of hard work and luck." He urges his students to become productive citizens, great parents, good husbands and wives. "Try to control your own destiny," he says. Whatever their long-term destiny may turn out to be, anyone on the other side of thirty can only look on uneasily. "We respected the kids' complexity," Joel DeMott said, "celebrated their liveliness, despaired of their future." The year comes to a close with uncertainty the only constant that takes its place next to all the kids' wanting. "At graduation," the central girl says as the school year ends, "I'm gonna party till I puke."

*Seventeen* deserves extra consideration here because of what happened to it on the way to broadcast, scheduled for April 28, 1982 on PBS. The film was objectionable to some at PBS in at least five ways: it contains an interracial romance; pot-smoking; drinking and drunkenness; schoolchildren being disrespectful to their teachers; and kids flamboyantly, even creatively, using the word "fuck". In other words, these kids behave like our kids and, in our day, like we ourselves behaved. After a screening held at a leading prep school, Phillips Exeter Academy, I was told the students walked out and one said, "That's us," to which a friend replied, "Fuckin' A."

It was too much. PBS put out a lie that I'd forsaken journalistic standards by showing the film to our corporate funder, Xerox. The lie was printed in *TV Guide*. The last time I spoke to the courtly gentleman who was my Xerox contact, about fifteen years after the *Middletown* series, I was trying to interest him in another film. But I asked him also if he'd ever yet seen *Seventeen*. He still had not, nor as far as he knew had anyone else at Xerox. The corporation had withdrawn its logo from the film, but not its financial support, simply because of what I had told him about the film's content, in line with our initial agreement, approved by PBS, regarding the entire series two years earlier. PBS, on the other hand, asked me to kill the film itself. The National Endowment for the Humanities, our principal funder, which had put up approximately two million of the six

films' three million dollar budget, told me they would not object if I decided to kill the film but they would never ask me to do so. NEH is no less dependent on Congress for its budget than PBS, but I was grateful for what I regarded as their entirely honorable and supportive stand. It was PBS that caved to what the top executives may have assumed would be Congressional disapproval. Or perhaps the executives only worried that some of their affiliates would object. In any case, PBS treated Seventeen like a delinquent child who had to be quarantined.

But PBS had to have morality on their side. They took Seventeen to Muncie and held a screening at the PBS affiliate. None of the other films was previewed in Muncie. I was informed that the audience at the Seventeen screening was shaped like a pyramid, with the schoolchildren at the bottom. Above them were their teachers, their parents, the school officials led by the principal, and the citywide education establishment. As soon as the screening ended, microphones were literally shoved into the kids' faces and they were asked if the film showed how they normally behaved, or were they performing because cameras were present? Guess what they said.

Just before the series went on the air we screened the politics film, *The Campaign*, in Washington, a political town after all. Several members of Congress attended, including the member who represented Muncie. The response was extremely positive. "That's the way it is when you run for office," one of the Congressmen said, "including the heartbreak." The Washington Post ran two very favorable articles. Yet not a single senior executive from PBS came to the screening. The promotion of the Middletown series was scaled back to something resembling a whisper. The whole series was hurt along with everyone who worked on it. But of course no one was hurt with anything like the gut punch that Seventeen's filmmakers, Joel DeMott and Jeff Kreines, had to absorb. All that time, all that work, all the trust between them and the students they filmed, followed by capital punishment. Given the humiliation the students and their families had suffered during the prosecutorial screening at the PBS affiliate in Muncie, broadcasting was no longer an option.

April 28 came and went with no Seventeen on PBS.

The film has had a robust afterlife: a theatrical release, enthusiastic reviews, numerous accolades, among them the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance. It is not unknown in film schools.

But until *Icarus* rescued the series by issuing the current DVD box set, the Middletown films have never been available in a convenient package, to be seen, if a viewer chooses, in their original order. *The Campaign*, *The Big Game*, *Community of Praise*, *Family Business*, *Second Time Around*, and *Seventeen*. The five sixths of the series that PBS broadcast ended with a kiss. That was hardly what I intended for the conclusion of Middletown. In the context of *Second Time Around*, the kiss is not without its bittersweet ambiguity. But this is a springtime stroll in the park compared with the irony – and ambiguity – that ends *Seventeen*.

We are left with the wanting, all the wanting in all the people we filmed, in Middletown. Sometimes, it now appears, we may have been using optical instruments other than cameras – microscopes as well as telescopes – to peer inward at our participants' emotions and outward at their horizons. That the films are saturated with diverse forms of want – desire, ambition, striving, wishes, dreams, hunger, even aches – was not the design. It was only the result, the outcome, the discovery.

I hope we portrayed our subjects accurately and with fidelity, and I remain thankful for the hospitality of all the principal participants and their families:

Alan and Beverly Wilson, Jim and Marilyn Carey in *The Campaign*  
Rick Rowray, Andre Morgan, Bill Harrell and Norm Held in *The Big Game*  
The Tobey family – Phyllis, Phil, Noel, Rebecca, Chris – and Dr. Marcus Haggard in *Community of Praise*  
Howie and Judy Snider and all their children in *Family Business*  
Elaine Ingram and David Shesler and David's mother and Elaine's sons in *Second Time Around*  
Lynn Massie and her parents Shari and Jim, her brother Tom, her many friends, the teachers Jane Hartling and Mike Gorin, and the Boys' Dean Daniel Showalter in *Seventeen*

That's all I ought to say now except to express enduring gratitude to the people of Muncie for their friendship and cooperation, and to Icarus for this box set.

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## **Critical Response to the MIDDLETOWN Series:**

"MIDDLETOWN is a masterpiece, one of the most important films ever made of the American experience." - Jack Thomas, Boston Globe

"An uplifting, disquieting and ultimately haunting status report on the American Dream... Focusing on ordinary individuals at extraordinary points in their lives ... MIDDLETOWN combines the intimacy of a Frederick Wiseman documentary with the poignancy of a Sherwood Anderson story - culminating in the most explosive depiction of adolescent rebellion ever to ignite the home screen." - Harry F. Waters, Newsweek

"The MIDDLETOWN documentaries are brimming with shrewd insights and unsettling observations." - John O'Connor, New York Times

"MIDDLETOWN offers a microcosm of American life, six programs, each about a different facet of Muncie, that hold universal truths for us all." - Howard Rosenberg, Los Angeles Times

"MIDDLETOWN is an exhaustive and stunning achievement- rich, rewarding, riveting..." -Tom Shales, Washington Post

"MIDDLETOWN is a monumental piece of work." - R.D. Rosen, Boston Phoenix

"A remarkable film achievement." -Variety