



**ACORN AND THE FIRESTORM – ON DRAMATIC
EVENTS THAT WOULD SERVE AS A PRESCIENT
FORESHADOWING OF TODAY'S POLITICAL CLIMATE
– OPENS IN U.S. MOVIE THEATERS STARTING
FRIDAY, APRIL 6 AT THE METROGRAPH IN NYC**

In a politically charged election year, a national community organizing group comes under attack by undercover amateur journalists.

An award-winning documentary feature film about ACORN, America's most controversial, effective, and powerful grassroots community organizations; the salacious story involves an investigation by a fake pimp and prostitute, voter fraud, and the rise of Breitbart.com



From award-winning filmmakers **Reuben Atlas** and Oscar Nominee / Emmy Winner **Sam Pollard**

WORLD PREMIERE – Tribeca Film Festival

OFFICIAL SELECTION – AFI Docs

OFFICIAL SELECTION – Traverse City Film Festival

WINNER – NJ Films Special Jury Prize / American Truth Seeker Award at Montclair
Film Festival



FLAVORWIRE

"Crisply assembled, cleverly constructed, and properly infuriating. Seek
this one out."

– Jason Bailey, Film Editor, *Flavorwire* (via Twitter)



"Disturbingly relevant... very much a documentary of our age."

– Tom Roston, *Salon*

Synopsis: ACORN, America's largest grassroots community organizing group, became a major player in the 2008 presidential election that resulted in Barack Obama's victory. Big businesses, Republicans and Right-wing activists took issue with the group, firing accusations of voter fraud and government waste at the left-leaning organization. The conservative opposition found unexpected allies in a pair of amateur journalists who posed as a pimp and prostitute hoping to expose ACORN via hidden-camera. The ensuing political drama spawned the now-omnipresent Breitbart Media, and served as a prescient foreshadowing of today's political climate. In an age where fake news and truthiness obscure reality, ACORN and the Firestorm tells a deep, uniquely fair, moving story about what lies beneath a divided America.

Two election cycles before Donald Trump famously declared the existence of rampant voter fraud, ACORN, a national community-organizing group, became the target of a similar claim. With a 400,000 strong, grassroots membership, in 38 states, ACORN stood at the height of its power. For decades, the controversial anti-poverty organization fought to empower marginalized communities. ACORN won a lobbying campaign that forced President Bush to increase the national minimum wage, saved thousands of people from foreclosure, and



fought against predatory lending (presciently, a decade before the Great Recession). Uniquely, ACORN also operated on a local level, helping to clean up parks, put stop lights at dangerous intersections, and fight to improve neighborhood schools.

Leading up to the 2008 election, ACORN helped to register 1.3 million voters, mostly low-income minorities, in swing states. When some of those registration cards appeared fraudulent, Right Wing activists and politicians singled out ACORN as a conspiratorial criminal organization. Strategists and pundits joined the chorus, casting ACORN, along with Reverend Wright, as frightening figures from Obama's past.

When **Hannah Giles**, a 20 year old journalism student, raised by conservative parents, heard about ACORN in the news, she became fascinated. She conceived of an investigation into the organization that involved a hidden camera, a fake prostitute, and a

YouTube video. Never in her wildest imagination could she guess that within a year, she would become a Fox News darling, put Breitbart on the map, and bring ACORN to its knees.

Bertha Lewis, the CEO of ACORN, also unaware of the firestorm to come, felt hopeful about her organization's recent run in the media. *Maybe it could be an opportunity to discuss the real work ACORN had been doing, the crucial, on the ground, everyday work it takes to move the needle ever so slightly to improve the lives of the country's working poor.*

As a black woman, born to a teenage mother in a Florida migrant camp, and raised in South Philly, Bertha believed in Obama's promise. After all, he had something in common with her: he too started out as a community organizer. ACORN won many battles before, but now, with an ally in the White House, actual systemic change seemed possible.

ACORN and the Firestorm unfolds through the stories of these two women on opposite sides of the political spectrum, as well as through the eyes of ACORN staff, (like founder, *Wade Rathke*), members (like *Travis Munnerlyn* and *Maude Hurd*), and ACORN's opposition, including Republican *Congressman Steve King*. A complex and even-handed political drama emerges, that pits the history of ACORN's rise against the ferocity of the salacious video takedown, encapsulating the conflicts and contradictions of our political present.



Filmmakers' Statement - Reuben Atlas and Sam Pollard

We hoped to tell a story that was not etched in history, but that felt present, and character driven, that would provide a deeper and nuanced sense of the people and the work. We wanted to discover their complexities and the sincerity of their motivations.

Hopefully, our approach will allow viewers the latitude to assess ACORN's legacy for themselves, and allow them to understand the conflicting elements within American society that motivated ACORN's founders, members, staff, and opponents.

Our Obama-era vision, though, did not account for the election of Donald Trump, the rise of fake news, and the power that Breitbart Media would hold in the White House. We did not know we would be making a film that spoke so directly to the present moment.

About Directors Reuben Atlas and Sam Pollard

Reuben Atlas is an award-winning filmmaker and former lawyer who recently co-directed the wine fraud feature *Sour Grapes* for Netflix and Arte. He also directed and produced *Brothers Hypnotic* a feature music documentary that premiered at SXSW and aired on PBS's Independent Lens.

Sam Pollard produced the Academy Award®-nominated documentary *Four Little Girls* as well as HBO's *When the Levees Broke*, and *If God is Willing and Da Creek Don't Rise*, amongst his filmmaking credits as a producer, director, and editor spanning over 40 years of legendary work, and include the seminal, *Eyes on the Prize*.

Credits:

Directors/Producers: Reuben Atlas, Sam Pollard

Cinematographers: Frank Larson, Spencer Chumbley, Natalie Kingston, Nati Gamez

Editors: Francisco Bello, Paul Greenhouse

Composer: Khari Mateen Motion Graphics: Brandon Sugiyama

Cast: Bertha Lewis, Hannah Giles, Wade Rathke, Maude Hurd

Runtime: 84 minutes • USA • English

Distributor:

First Run Features

www.firstrunfeatures.com

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