

# WAITING FOR **ARMAGEDDON**

A film by Kate Davis, Franco Sacchi and David Heilbroner

74 minutes, color, HDCAM



## **FIRST RUN FEATURES**

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***50 million Americans believe that the End of the World is just the beginning.***

“The Christian fundamentalists believe that this country is responsible to Christianize the world....They are more powerful than ABC, CBS and NBC together. They reach 200 million people around the world every week, in 77 languages on 40 thousand radio stations just here in America. They are not going away. They are firmly entrenched on the executive, legislative and judicial branches in Washington, D.C. and every other state capital and in the school boards in this country. They are everywhere.”

–***Mel White, Minister, Author, Founder of Soulforce***

“When I turn on the television and I see what’s happening either in Iraq or Israel, I don’t look at what’s happening with the hope that it will work out because I see that there are certain things that have to happen for the world to be ready for the return of Christ.”

–***Gary Derickson, Professor of Biblical Studies, Corban College***

“They don’t want a peace process. They want the Muslims to be evicted by the Jews, the Jews to rebuild the Temple of Solomon and then Christ to return and trump everyone.”

–***Chip Berlet, Senior Research Analyst, Political Research Associates***

### **SHORT SYNOPSIS**

***Waiting for Armageddon*** explores the culture of 50 million American Evangelicals who believe that Bible prophecy dictates the future of mankind and that Israel and the Jewish people play pivotal roles in ensuring Christ’s return. The film raises questions regarding how this theology shapes U.S.- Middle East relations and may encourage an international holy war.

### **LONG SYNOPSIS**

***Waiting for Armageddon*** delves into the heart of America's 50-million member Evangelical community, using intimate portraits and archival footage to explore how literal belief in Biblical prophecy -including the Rapture and Armageddon - exerts a dangerous influence on U.S. relations in the Middle East.

The film opens with portraits of three Evangelical families –James and Laura Bagg, a Connecticut couple who work as military jet-propulsion engineers, Tony and Devonna Edwards in McAlester, Oklahoma, and Dr. H. Wayne House in Salem, Oregon - all certain that upon Christ's Second Coming they will be "raptured" or lifted into the skies to join Christ while the rest of humanity suffers for seven years during “The Tribulation.”

*“Christ will come back with a sword on his side. And, he will come back as the ultimate judge of the world. We’re going to be behind him with, I believe, swords in our hands and we’re going to be his army. And, this battle...the blood from this battle will be as high as a horse’s bridle. It’s just something mankind has never witnessed before.”* –***Laura Bagg***

The Edwards' daughters, in particular, struggle with their own future. If they are raptured soon, how will they ever marry, or have children of their own?

*“It doesn’t seem fair. I mean, you know, your grandparents have lived these long lives, have all these stories to tell you. And, they’ve kind of adjusted to the fact that, you know, they’re not going to live terribly much longer. And, so, you’ve grown up hearing all these stories and you want your own stories. And, you want to live these experiences yourself. And, if you’re done at 24, then there’s only so many experiences you get to have.”* –***Christie Edwards***

Despite their very different lives and locations, all three families find the modern world laden with symbolism that suggests the End Times are at hand, and they proclaim the immense importance of Israel, where the battle of Armageddon will destroy the earth, clearing the way for Christ to return and create a new and perfect world.

The film then follows Wayne House and fellow minister Robert Dean as they lead a Christian Study Tour group to Israel -- among the tens of thousands of Evangelicals who pour into the Holy Land each year. As Wayne and Robert baptize their group in the River Jordan, sing the US national anthem on the Sea of Galilee, proclaim love for Israel, and describe how the Dome of the Rock, one of the holiest sites in Islam, must be destroyed in order for Jesus to return, a revealing and controversial relationship between Christian Evangelicals, Jews, and Muslims emerges.

Finally, we follow Wayne House and Robert Dean to a massive gathering in Dallas, Texas, where Evangelicals debate, in highly sophisticated terms, the need to spread Biblical literalism to counter the dangerous effects of post-modernism. The climax of the conference comes as Pastor John Hagee, the enormously influential Texas Minister of an 18,000-member megachurch, declares, "World War III has started."

*"There is a war between Islamofascism and freedom. There is a war between the culture of death and those who love life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is a war WE MUST WIN. The Bible says that you, ladies and gentlemen, are the light of the world. May God anoint each of you and there can be a spiritual awakening in this country. That Christ will be seen as the answer. For there is no other name given among men whereby we might be saved." –Pastor John Hagee*

By portraying the Evangelical apocalyptic worldview from within their community, *Waiting for Armageddon* seeks to clarify the elusive relationship between Christian Zionists and Jews, and foster dialogue among dissenting groups. In the end, the film asks whether this large American voting block is creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of international holy war.

### **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

The three filmmakers behind *Waiting for Armageddon* all came to this project having independently contemplated the force of apocalyptic thinking in America and so it seemed natural to join forces.

At the outset there were many obstacles. We had only a sketchy understanding of what fundamental Evangelical concepts like the Rapture, the Tribulation and Armageddon really meant. None of us knew any Christian Zionists personally. And most challenging of all, we needed to earn the trust of Christian Zionists in order to gain access to their personal experiences, thoughts and feelings.

Throughout, we reminded our subjects and ourselves that the goal of the film was not to pass judgment but to break through stereotypes and help spark dialogue among dissenting voices. Part of our interest in trying to tackle this subject came from reading about the vast power of the Evangelical community both in the US and in Israel. In particular, the details of the complicated alliance between Christians and Jews, while much discussed in political journals and books, and in Bill Moyer's PBS reports, still seemed elusive.

We wondered why so few of our friends understood how this unlikely relationship came about, or how some 50-60 million Evangelicals came to rest their deepest beliefs on a literal reading of Bible prophecy. During the filming we came to know a community of men and women who firmly believe that in order for Christ to return and redeem the planet, Israel must remain in Jewish hands and a new temple must be built on the

current site of the Dome of the Rock, the third holiest site in Islam. It is a foregone conclusion in their view that until these events occur, the problems in the world - from terrorism to global warming - will increase.

To many outside the Evangelical community, these beliefs may sound extreme. Yet we found these believers to be highly intelligent, sophisticated and very well organized at all levels of politics.

As we filmed, a larger political picture came into focus. For decades Evangelical leaders have influenced the power elite in Washington, helping shape policies regarding war and peace in the Middle East. Still, the prophetic underpinnings of their beliefs remained obscure, misunderstood, or simply disregarded. This situation - the gap between the political/religious reality and the general public's understanding of it - struck us as needing urgent attention. And we hoped that by bringing to light the people and theory behind the political landscape, we could help viewers see for themselves how, against the backdrop of the Holy Land, Christians and Jews have come to depend upon one another, and give us insight into the benefits and possible dangers of this paradoxical relationship.

Our goal was not to draft a polemic. We worked to tell the story of prophecy through the eyes of Evangelicals while interweaving the voices of critics from within the religious community. What followed was a memorable journey into a community that is not well understood but one that has shaped the nation's political and social landscape for decades, and may now be urging us toward what one Evangelical leader calls "World War III."

## **FILMMAKER BIOS**

**Franco Sacchi** is an Italian filmmaker and freelance journalist living in Boston. His most recent directorial work, **THIS IS NOLLYWOOD**, portrays the fascinating world of the burgeoning Nigerian film industry. **THIS IS NOLLYWOOD** aired on SABC 1 (South African Broadcasting Corporation), SKY UK and it won the Audience Award at the Abuja International Film festival (Nigeria).

Franco's first feature length film, **AMERICAN EUNUCHS** screened at dozens of festivals including the prestigious International Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam (IDFA) and it aired in 2004 on the Sundance Channel and on several European networks.

Currently, Franco is a filmmaker in residence at the Center for Digital Imaging Arts at Boston University.

**Kate Davis**, who has been producing award-winning documentaries for more than 15 years, won an Emmy® Award for Best Non-Fiction Directing in 2004 for the film **JOCKEY**, a feature documentary that followed the harrowing lives of three Kentucky racehorse riders. With Heilbroner, she recently co-produced **PUCKER UP: The Fine Art of Whistling**, (Special Jury Prize and Audience Award, Florida Film Festival), to be released theatrically later this year.

Davis, a Harvard graduate, also produced and directed **SOUTHERN COMFORT**, which tells the story of a dying transsexual who finds love during the last year of his life. The Emmy-nominated film won more than 25 international awards, including the Grand Jury Prize for Best Documentary Feature at the Sundance Film Festival, Best Documentary Feature at the Florida Film Festival and the San Francisco International Film Festival. Other awards included First Prize at the Seattle Film Festival, the Grierson Award for Best International Documentary and the Special Audience Award at the Berlin Film Festival.

Davis' award-winning documentary **GIRLTALK**, about the lives of three teenage runaway girls from Boston, was released theatrically and broadcast worldwide. She has produced and edited films including **A WORLD ALIVE**, winner of the Golden Eagle Award for Editing, and worked as an editor on documentaries including Jennie Livingston's **PARIS IS BURNING**, Ross McElwee's **SHERMAN'S MARCH** and Robert Stone's **AMERICAN BABYLON**.

**David Heilbroner**, a Harvard graduate, is a former Manhattan prosecutor who has been making documentary films for more than ten years. Together with Kate Davis, Heilbroner directed and produced *TRANSGENDER REVOLUTION*, *LIFE AFTER DEATH ROW*, *THE DARK SIDE OF PAROLE*, *ANTI-GAY HATE CRIMES*, and *UNTYING THE STRAIGHTJACKET*, all for A&E. He also produced *JOCKEY* and *PUCKER UP* (see above), and was senior producer for Court TV's *Crime Stories*. In addition, Heilbroner produced *AMERICAN BABYLON* with Robert Stone, and wrote the critically acclaimed nonfiction books, *Rough Justice* and *Death Benefit*.

Kate Davis and David Heilbroner co-directed “Scopes: The Battle over America’s Soul” in *10 DAYS THAT UNEXPECTEDLY CHANGED AMERICA*.

**SHORT FILMMAKER BIOS**

Kate Davis, David Heilbroner and Franco Sacchi have been making award-winning documentaries for 15 years. Davis won the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance and 25 awards for *SOUTHERN COMFORT*, and an Emmy for Best Documentary Direction for *JOCKEY*. Heilbroner has made over a dozen films on social justice issues, and Franco Sacchi's recent film *THIS IS NOLLYWOOD* was released worldwide.

**CREDITS**

<b>Directed by</b>	Kate Davis Franco Sacchi David Heilbroner	<b>Sound Recordist</b>	David Heilbroner Roberta Dougan
<b>Produced by</b>	David Heilbroner Franco Sacchi	<b>Sound Mixer</b>	Rich Cutler
<b>Filmed by</b>	Franco Sacchi Kate Davis	<b>Avid On-Line Editor On-Line Editor Assist Services</b>	Mike Nuget Ryan McMahon PostWorks NY
<b>Co-Producers</b>	Hermine Muskat Roberta Dougan Andrew Herwitz	<b>“Midnight Cry” Performed by Scot Cameron</b>	
<b>Composer</b>	Gary Lionelli	<b>ARCHIVAL</b> AP Archive BBC Motion Gallery FootageBank HD Matt Heineman National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Jimmy Carter Presidential Library Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Vanderbilt Television News Archive Streamline Films	
<b>Additional Cinematography</b>	Genevieve Baker Roberta Dougan Hermine Muskat		
<b>Israeli Location Manager</b>	Ra’anan Gidron		
<b>Archival Research</b>	Roberta Dougan Bonnie G. Rowan		
<b>Researcher</b>	Hermine Muskat		
<b>Consultant</b>	Elizabeth Davis	International Sales – The Film Sales Company	
<b>Graphic Design</b>	Neilson Paty	<b>SPECIAL THANKS TO</b>	
<b>Additional Graphic Design</b>	Quentin Heilbroner	Diana Barrett Pastor Robert Dean H. Wayne House Matthew H. Luzzi (1935-2000)	
<b>Still Photographer</b>	Hermine Muskat		

Cara Mertes

**THANKS TO**

Jeff Asura  
James and Laura Bagg  
Roberta Beaver  
Robert Beaver  
Obie Benz  
Galyn Black  
Denise Bond  
Chip Berlet – PRA  
Carlos Bruna  
John Burger  
Scot Cameron  
Yolanda Callings  
Center for Digital Imaging Arts at Boston University  
Christian Friends of Israel, Jerusalem  
Christian Study Tour  
Corban College  
Aimee Corrigan  
Elizabeth Davis  
Pamela Dean  
Timothy Demy  
Leah Denlinger  
Russell Doughten Jr.  
Gary W. Derickson - Corban College  
Devonna and Tony Edwards  
Christie Edwards  
Ashley Edwards  
Amanda Edwards  
Travis Edwards  
John Edwards  
Deborah J. Fike  
Sharon M. Fox  
Arno Froese  
Arnold Fruchtenbaum  
Dennis Ganz  
Evie Goldfine  
Jonathan Goldman  
Gershom Gorenberg  
Philip Goodman  
Steven Greenberg  
John Hagee Ministries

Wilfred Hahn  
Walid Halaweh  
Laura Haughey  
Yitzahq Hayutman  
David Hunt  
Janice Ice  
Thomas Ice  
International Christian Embassy  
Douglas E. Karn  
Kelly Karn  
Melanie Karn  
Father LaHud  
Judy Laster  
David W. Lowe  
Paul Lyzun  
Pat McDonald  
Midnight Call Ministries  
Morning Star Church, Salem Oregon  
Beatrice Muskat  
Dina Nadai  
Scott Nelson  
Mick O'Connor – Devlin Video  
Howard Phillips  
Michael Phillips  
Kevin Phillips  
Political Research Associates  
Pre-Trib Conference, Dallas TX  
Randall Price  
Betty Riley  
Rabbi Felix Tsvi Rogin  
Tony Romero  
Tom Robotham  
Ray Sanders  
Renee Sweeney  
Laura Spiker  
Lisa Spiker  
David Tames  
Jeremy Thomas  
Jacki Verryt  
Yaakov Youlus  
Marlene Young - Shared Blessings  
Theresa Wise  
Avi Zakai

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## Waiting for Armageddon – Press Pulls

“By turns frightening, fascinating and eye-opening... an absorbing snapshot of America's highly influential, reportedly 50-million-strong evangelical Christian movement.”-Gary Goldstein, [The Los Angeles Times](#)

"Illuminates a worldview marked by absolute certainty and chilling finality... may raise goose bumps...a spine-tingling reminder that some prophecies are self-fulfilling.” –Jeannette Catsoulis, [The New York Times](#)

“Alarmingly good ...incendiary... a terrific documentary.”  
– Ella Taylor, [The Village Voice](#)

“Bold, courageous and brutally honest, *Waiting For Armageddon* is food for thought for us all. -David Alexander Nahmod, [The Jerusalem Post](#)

"An extraordinarily impressive work that manages to take a complex, in ways contradictory subject and present it in a lucid, perceptive manner that allow us to understand the phenomenon of Christian Zionism and pre-Tribulation politics." --Richard Peña, Program Director, Film Society of Lincoln Center

“Fascinating and appropriately unnerving.”  
–Gordon Haber, [The Forward](#)

"Much scarier than *2012* ... This is an eye-opening look at what 50 million fellow Americans believe.”  
-Peter Keough, [The Boston Phoenix](#)

“Provocative, probing and ultimately disturbing ... completely non-polemical and non-judgmental...a starting point for further inquiry, further study and greater dialogue. At a time when documentarians have increasingly become either pompous know-it-alls or self-centered carnival barkers, that's a refreshing and very overdue return to form.  
-Wade Major, [Boxoffice Magazine](#)

“*Waiting for Armageddon* shows how passion inspires political pressure, creating some very strange bedfellows between the Israeli government and the Christian Zionist movement...the filmmakers do a spectacular job of showing both how frightening and funny the end of the world, or at least the people who believe in it, can be.”  
-Abe Fried-Tanzer, [Heeb Magazine](#)

“Exceptionally well-made documentary...shocking, bizarre ...both an entertainment and a gem of enlightenment.”-  
Harvey Karten, *Arizona Reporter*

“Devastating.” –Lou Loumenick, [NY Post](#)

“Doggedly nonjudgmental...offers something for everyone.”-Ronnie Scheib, [Variety](#)

"A riveting and provocative production depicting Evangelical Christians who devoutly believe in an imminent religious apocalypse.”-Gary Rosenblatt, *The Jewish Journal*

“A good look into what a vocal and influential segment of our population believes is the world's ultimate destiny...an important film.” -Dan Persons, [The Huffington Post](#)

“Alternately amusing and alarming... the buffoonery here possesses a sharp foreboding.”  
–Joseph Jon Lanthier, [Slant Magazine](#)

“Tap(s) into a stream of molten hot modern religious dysfunction that wants to tie their country to the fate of Israel in a truly disturbing manner.” –Chris Barsanti, [Filmcritic.com](#)

“Don’t miss *Waiting for Armageddon!*” –Louis Proyect, [The Unrepentant Marxist](#)

Waiting for Armageddon is the best contribution to the Evangelical genre since *Jesus Camp*... The scary specter of all-out Holy War as a self-fulfilling prophecy. –Kam Williams, [The Sly Fox](#)

“An eyes-wide-open look at the belief of 50 million Evangelical Christians ... This film is a fascinating and complex look at a controversial subject.”- Kristin McCracken, *Tribeca Blog (Tribeca Film Festival)*

“Fascinating and absorbing ... It is a troubling film and I would recommend seeing it.”-*Gotham Girl*





MOVIE REVIEW

## 'Waiting for Armageddon'

### **Evangelical Christians are focus of 'Waiting for Armageddon.'**

By Gary Goldstein

February 10, 2010

By turns frightening, fascinating and eye-opening, the documentary "Waiting for Armageddon" offers much to rouse followers of various religious and political stripes. Though the film's structure may hang on the biblically foretold, world-destroying-then-renewing phases of Rapture, Tribulation, Armageddon and Millennium, the piece also serves as an absorbing snapshot of America's highly influential, reportedly 50-million-strong evangelical Christian movement.

Surprisingly (or not surprisingly, based upon one's theological proficiency), much of the movie takes place, both physically and spiritually, in Israel, where it is believed Jesus will return for a 1,000-year reign. That this heavenly period would supposedly include the conversion of 144,000 Jews to Christianity may not set well with, for starters, Jewish viewers is not the point here. Neither are some of the film's subjects' decidedly negative views of Islam.

What seemingly -- and effectively -- most concerns co-directors Kate Davis, Franco Sacchi and David Heilbroner is the power of evangelical commitment to certain long-held, some might deem extreme, principles, along with how these face-value beliefs factor into ostensibly average folks' daily lives and, at times, affect the American sociopolitical system. It's an ambitious yet compactly presented approach.

Though the filmmakers are not out to condone or rebut evangelical Christian doctrine, such pundits as theologian Barbara Rossing, the Rev. Dr. Mel White and Jerusalem's Rabbi Felix Rogin offer stirring counterpoint to the proceedings.

[calendar@latimes.com](mailto:calendar@latimes.com)

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## Film Review: Self-fulfilling prophecies

By [DAVID ALEXANDER NAHMOD](#)

**Waiting For Armageddon,**

**By Kate Davis,**

**Franco Sacchi**

**and David Heilbroner**

A fascinating collaboration between filmmakers Kate Davis, Franco Sacchi and David Heilbroner, *Waiting for Armageddon* focuses on the intense passion that American Evangelical Christians have for the State of Israel.

Evangelicals believe that the End of Days is coming, essentially when World War III begins in Israel, along with massive natural disasters in which millions will die around the globe. According to their beliefs, millions will kill each other in the war, the Dome of the Rock will be destroyed, the Temple will be rebuilt, and only the followers of Christ will survive.

Their passion is impressive, albeit disturbing. "I kept hoping that one of Saddam's missiles would strike the Dome of the Rock," says one Evangelical. Another refers to the Holocaust as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

Jerusalem's Rabbi Felix Rogin warns against taking the \$75 million that Evangelicals donate to Israel every year. "It's dangerous money," the Rabbi says, pointing out that whoever controls the gold controls the land.

Author Gershom Gorenberg (*The End of Days*) questions Evangelicals' love for the Jewish people. "We love you and want you to give up what is most basic to your identity" - that's how he describes Evangelical attitudes towards Jews. Indeed, the Evangelicals believe that exactly 144,000 Jews will accept Christ at the End of Days. The rest, they say, will perish. They don't say where these figures come from.

For a while, the filmmakers follow an Evangelical tour group in Israel, from baptism in the River Jordan, through a visit to the Temple Mount, where their disdain for all Muslims takes center stage. Rev. Barbara Rossing, author of *The Rapture Exposed*, calls the escalating Middle East violence a "self fulfilling prophecy" as extremists from various faiths show their contempt for each other.

For those of us who love Israel and want the nation to thrive, it's a profoundly sad spectacle to behold.

Bold, courageous and brutally honest, *Waiting For Armageddon* is food for thought for us all.

**New York Jewish Film Festival Reflects a Semitic Identity Crisis**

**By Ella Taylor Tuesday, January 13th 2009 at 3:37pm**

Given the rainbow muddle that is Jewish identity today—from born-again to secular and all the way to couldn't-care-less—what does a Jewish film festival mean? A very big tent is what, to judge by some of the movies previewed in this year's New York Jewish Film Festival.

For starters, there's not a Jew to be found in *Young Freud in Gaza*, one of the 18th annual showcase's most arresting entries. Yet Jewish (and, more pointedly, Israeli) identity hovers painfully in the shadows of Swedish filmmakers PeÅ Holmquist and Suzanne Khardalian's fair-minded, intimately probing documentary about a field psychologist serving the besieged West Bank city's Jabaliya refugee camp. By no means do all the cases shouldered by the 28-year-old Ayed—among them an anorexic teenager and an unhappy woman mired in polygamy and poverty—lead directly back to the Palestine-Israel conflict. But there's no question that the very definition of psychotherapy means something different under occupation. The movie's title unwittingly misleads, since there's no place for psychoanalysis in the essentially palliative care (which, for lack of support and resources, boils down to empathic listening and relaxation techniques) dispensed by Ayed, an educated freethinker who's hampered at every turn by regular strikes from Israeli forces, internecine fighting between Hamas and Fatah, and Hamas's reflexive Islamic rejection of all things secular and scientific.

If *Young Freud in Gaza's* presence on the festival's program reflects a clear, long-standing Jewish conviction that our ethical responsibilities reach beyond our own spiritual welfare, the question of what it means to be Jewish grows murkier in those films with a Jewish focus. I've loved every movie made by Argentine filmmaker Daniel Burman, up to and including his latest, *Empty Nest*, but despite a trip to Israel, this breezier-than-usual comedy about a couple whose grown children have flown the coop is curiously empty of the secular Jewish inquiry in Burman's other films. And I'm not sure on what grounds visual artist Gay Block's *Camp Girls* belongs here, other than by cultural default: Its group of extremely-put-together young matrons recall their time at a high-end summer camp mostly attended by Jewish girls, yet wholly without Jewish content beyond the perfunctory lighting of Shabbat candles. Block's photos are nice and the women are bright and appealing, but the doc lacks an organizing idea about the way the camp shaped their lives.

Then again, maybe cultural default is the question. If so, it comes with far more wigged-out élan in Susan Mogul's *Driving Men* (double-billed with *Camp Girls*), in which the Los Angeles-based filmmaker takes on a subject that, in less candid hands, might come off hopelessly wanky—herself, in relation to the men who have influenced her unorthodox life as a woman and an artist. Though there are probably too many shots of Mogul showing off her naked breasts, more edifying are her car rides with the now-paunchy dudes as she riffs on all her life journeys, including why it took her 34 years to find a man who loves her. It's a mystery whose answer, Mogul hints with admirable restraint, lies at least in part in the dilemmas of all Jewish women who grew up adoring and resenting their, shall we say, strong-minded fathers.

A similarly diffuse sense of identity pervades some of the festival's dramatic features. *Uncle Vanya* has been shipped abroad countless times, and though the polluted beauty of Northern Israel makes a suitably lush backdrop for *Weekend in Galilee*, veteran Israeli director Moshé Mizrahi's eco-reading of Chekhov, it's the universal truths addressed by this intelligent, if formally uninspired, movie that come across more forcefully than any specifically Jewish or Israeli predicament. A German girl prepares unwillingly for her bat mitzvah in Anna Justice's charming, if familiar, domestic comedy *Max Minsky and Me*, but that's about as Jewish as this budding romance between two kids with unraveling families gets, until the girl's mother drops a zinger by casually announcing that "the essence of Judaism isn't God, but acting as if there were one." I'm more or less with her there, though I wish the movie hadn't raised the wide-open question of whether Judaism is possible without God, even in the assimilated or rapidly secularizing Jewish communities of the West.

The apocalyptic Christian conservatives in the festival's alarmingly good closing-night documentary don't think so. Jews and Israelis who take comfort from the unsolicited affection of evangelical Christians—a group that gives more than \$75 million annually to Israel—might think again once they see Kate Davis and David Heilbroner's incendiary *Waiting for Armageddon*, which brings the interesting news that we Jews are loved because Israel has been chosen as the site for the upcoming end of the world. With friends like these, enemies need not apply.



<http://www.newenglandfilm.com/magazine/archives/2009/03/waiting>

## Waiting for the Documentary Storyline

Sun, 03/01/2009 - 01:00

Co-director Franco Sacchi discusses how waiting for a documentary's focus to emerge can bring objectivity to a hot-button issue like Christian fundamentalism.

By Mike Sullivan

Why do we make films? Beyond mere entertainment, what is the reason we go through all the grief and aggravation that is filmmaking, especially for documentaries? It certainly isn't the money. Is it to educate? Perhaps, if said films are for the History Channel or a museum. How about giving a voice to your own specific opinions or ideas? Also a possibility, especially if you're Michael Moore or Bill Maher. Or is it something else, something more important and more difficult to pull off?

I recently had a conversation about this very topic with Boston filmmaker Franco Sacchi. He is co-director, along with Kate Davis and David Heilbroner, of a new documentary making the festival rounds called *Waiting for Armageddon*. Hermine Muskat, Roberta Dougan, and Andrew Herwitz are the producers of the film. *Waiting for Armageddon* is about America's Evangelical Christian community, their views about Biblical prophecy, and how those beliefs affect their day-to-day lives as the End of Days approaches. The film follows Evangelicals in their homes and in their churches, and accompanies a church-sponsored trip to Israel to tour the site where they believe Jesus Christ will return again. Young and old, North and South, Christian and Jew, everybody has their say. What the film does not do is offer its own opinion on any of these people. There are no clichés or stereotypes here. The filmmakers were extremely strict about making what Sacchi called an "anthropological film, not a political film."

The original idea came from a conversation between Sacchi, Muskat, and Dougan in 2006. An Italian who came to the US after graduating from the University of Bologna, Sacchi is able to observe America and Americans from a different perspective. He noticed the very large and still-growing impact Evangelical Christians have on the social, political, and cultural climate of the US. Sacchi also noticed that most people, especially here in the Northeast, were not aware that Evangelicals number in the millions and can be found across the country. The filmmakers saw that there were many possible topics for a film in this area, but they also knew, "as a documentarian, we all know that if you don't narrow down your story and focus on one idea... you go nowhere." Or as Sacchi explained: "We knew that the people would be extremely fascinating for an audience who's not used to thinking in these terms. These are your next-door neighbors. These are tens of millions of Americans who are totally foreign to you." Although not their usual *modus operandi*, they decided to begin making a film in the hope of finding characters as they went along. Sacchi was quick to point out, however, that he does not like the term characters, "these are real people," he said.

Funding the project themselves, the filmmakers found many people from across the country to populate their film. Families and professionals from Oregon, Oklahoma and Connecticut all have prominent roles in the

movie, but as production moved along it became clear that the issue of fundamentalism was still the main 'character' and it would be the issue that was the thread that ran through the film from start to finish.

But, an issue alone cannot produce interesting conversation nor can it deliver exciting visuals. The filmmakers uncovered those crucial elements when they traveled with a Christian Study Group to Israel to see the Holy Land. The group wanted to walk the same ground that Jesus walked and where, they believe, He will return very soon. After reassuring the Evangelical group that the project was indeed an independent documentary and had no partisan political agenda, the crew was able to follow the tour as they traveled across the country of Israel. The relationships between the Evangelical Christians, the Jewish people, and the Muslim world would become the centerpiece of the film.

There were 35 days of production on *Waiting for Armageddon* -- spread over the course of 18 months -- including two weeks in Israel. And then came the edit. Kate Davis handled the editing duties and it took about a year to cut the film. Anyone who has ever been in an edit for a documentary knows that it's there in that dark room that the film you think you're making can quickly and easily turn into something completely different. Fortunately for this film, all the filmmakers were on the exact same page when it came to the final objective. They all agreed that they were not making a film that critiques or attacks, said Sacchi. "We were quite in agreement that it was important [for audiences] to know more about the fundamentalist evangelical mindset in contemporary America." That was the rationale behind each and every cut and dissolve and fade to black.

So far, reviews of the film have been positive and what had begun as a labor of love eventually found substantial outside funding. In September 2006 the film was screened at the IFP Market and received additional funding from The Sundance Documentary Institute and the Fledgling Fund. Since then the film has also received funding from the Foundation For Jewish Culture. In January 2009 *Waiting for Armageddon* closed out the New York Jewish Film Festival with two shows -- one of which sold-out. It seems as though Sacchi and his colleagues were able to make the film they set out to make. "To me, this film should make people think and encourage them to listen. The ultimate goal of this film is to start a conversation."

## The Boston Globe

[http://www.boston.com/ae/movies/articles/2009/03/22/jewish\\_festival\\_has\\_an\\_unlikely\\_focus/?page=full](http://www.boston.com/ae/movies/articles/2009/03/22/jewish_festival_has_an_unlikely_focus/?page=full)

### **Jewish festival has an unlikely focus - Opening film looks at Christian evangelicals**

By Linda Matchan

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Politics makes strange bedfellows, and arguably none could be stranger than the relationship between Jews and this country's 50-million-plus evangelical Christians.

If there's any doubt, check out "Waiting for Armageddon," which kicks off Jewishfilm.2009, the National Center for Jewish Film's 12th Annual Film Festival, at Brandeis University on Wednesday.

It's not just that evangelicals contribute millions of dollars each year to Israel, even as many of them are convinced that the End Times are at hand and most Jews will vanish off the earth when the Rapture happens. Or that many Jews who care about Israel find it expedient to have evangelicals as an ally.

What is most surprising is what you discover when filmmakers who have earned the trust of Christian Zionists let the camera run and really listen. That's when those of us who have only had a sketchy understanding of theological concepts can really start to get how evangelical leaders are influencing the power elite in Washington and shaping policies in the Middle East.

There is something a little jarring about hearing a well-spoken mother calmly state that we're so close to the end of times she doesn't think her kids will graduate from school. Or seeing a tour guide in Israel give his take on the significance of the Holy Land: In order for Christ to return and redeem the planet, Israel must remain in Jewish hands and a new temple must be built on the current site of the Dome of the Rock, an Islamic holy site.

"There's no place for the mosque. It has to be removed," a woman on the tour elaborates.

"Jews are the actors in [evangelicals'] big play," said the film's co-director **Franco Sacchi**. "Jews play a fundamental role in their unfolding of history."

He adds: "The evangelical community is one of the least understood aspects of American culture and one of the most surprising. If you don't understand it, you don't understand this country."

Sacchi, 43, is a freelance video editor and filmmaker-in-residence at the Center for Digital Imaging Arts at Boston University. He grew up Catholic and had no prior interest in religious topics until this one came along; his interest was piqued by an article he read in 2005 about evangelicals in Harper's magazine. After that he began to pay close attention to how often the evangelical movement factored into the news.

"Not a day went by when you wouldn't find an article about them, whether it was about evangelical protests at a Darwin exhibit at a science museum. Or about **Terri Schiavo**. Or parallel tours at the Grand Canyon with an alternative creationist explanation of how it was formed," Sacchi said in an interview in his Back Bay apartment. "This evangelical fundamentalist movement seemed to have such an impact on our cultural landscape."

And yet for all their air time and impact, he didn't know any personally, and had only the sketchiest understanding of their theology, including concepts like the Rapture, the Tribulation, and Armageddon. "They seemed so pervasive and yet it wasn't easy to connect the dots," he said.

Sacchi, who was born in Africa but grew up in Italy, has a penchant for making films about communities of people who aren't well known or understood. His first film, "American Eunuchs," explored the underworld of men who choose to be castrated. Next came "This Is Nollywood," about the struggling, low-profile Nigerian digital film industry. A film about evangelical Christians began to tantalize him. He ran the idea by two friends, **Hermine Muskat** and **Roberta Dougan**, both first-time filmmakers.

"We were questioning what it would take to make a film about this," said Sacchi. But they all wanted to do it; Sacchi decided to direct it and Muskat and Dougan were co-producers. It took about three years and they put up their own money, at first, to get it started until they were able to secure funding.

Later, they got into one of those knotty situations endemic to independent filmmaking when a pair of Sacchi's friends, New York filmmakers **Kate Davis** and **David Heilbroner**, also indicated they were making a film about evangelicals.

"They were thinking of doing exactly the same thing," he said. "So what do you do? You merge. This explains the three directors and five producers. I made the film with a big family."

He adds: "As David would say, there was no blood on the floor. Our friendship is as good as ever."

Sacchi's goal from the beginning was not to make a polemical film about evangelicals but "to listen and understand them. We wanted to open a dialogue," he said. "It could be dangerous to have millions of people who see the world from a completely different paradigm. It's not good for dialogue or peace and understanding."

They interviewed evangelicals across the country, including families, clergy, professors, and other professionals - "impressive men and women who work in significant industries, not wide-eyed radicals," said Brandeis historian **Jonathan Sarna**, who will speak about the film when it's screened at the festival. All were certain that the world as we know it will end with the Battle of Armageddon in Israel and when this happens they will be members of Christ's army. And only one young woman interviewed seemed peeved about the prospect of being "raptured" or lifted into the skies to join Christ while the rest of the world suffers for seven years during Tribulation.

"It doesn't seem fair," she said. "If you're done at 24, then there's only so many experiences you get to have."

The centerpiece of the film is an evangelical study tour to Israel, with Sacchi, et al., following along. One stop on the tour is Megiddo, known to most Israelis and tourists as a site of major importance to the ancient world, but to the evangelicals as a "staging ground" for the final battle.

A film about evangelical Christians may seem like a strange choice for the kickoff film for a Jewish film festival. But, "the Festival is about the diversity of Jewish experience, and is not always from a Jewish perspective," said **Lisa Rivo**, the film's executive director. "This is somebody else's narrative and Jews are central to that narrative."



## **David Heilbroner**

*Award-winning documentary filmmaker*

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### **Evangelicals, Israel, and the End of the World**

It's been just nine years since dooms-dayers expected the new millennium to bring the end of the world, yet the cry of "Armageddon" still rings out. Last month alone, NASA had to allay fears of a 2012 end-of-the-world scenario.

And why not? We all know humans are doomed. Either our sun will explode in a few billion years or God's wrath will consume the planet tomorrow. But few Americans have embraced the coming of the End Times as intensely as the Evangelicals profiled in *Waiting for Armageddon*, a documentary I co-directed with Kate Davis and Franco Sacchi, to be released theatrically in New York City, Providence and Boston in January. In the film, we join Christian Evangelicals on an explosive tour of the future as they see it, from anguish to the sublime perfection of a new world.

There are some 50 million Evangelicals in the US who believe in the literal truth of Bible prophecy. You can argue theological accuracy all you want. This massive block of citizens possesses unshakable belief that the end of the world will be heralded by a series of prophetic events some of which have occurred (e.g. 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina) some of which are ongoing (the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan).

I am not talking about Bible-thumping, street-corner ravers, though one or two do appear in our film. The people we profiled -- from Evangelical leaders to rank-and-file believers -- are for the most part formidable, intelligent, well-educated. And all are fixated upon Israel (the land of Christ's return).

*Waiting for Armageddon* opens with James and Laura Bagg, an attractive pair of 30-something jet-propulsion engineers living in Connecticut. Yes, Evangelical rocket scientists from the Northeast.

"We could be raptured out of this world during this interview," Laura says, referring to a miracle where all good Christians disappear from earth and rematerialize in the clouds as chaos seizes the world. "There will be car crashes and plane crashes. And the people left behind will be asking, 'Are they coming back for me?'"

Then James Bagg explains that, "You see God has a plan for the world and it all centers around Israel."

The Baggs are, in a way, typical. Millions of Evangelicals share one political belief even more sacred perhaps than opposition to abortion or same-sex marriage: The belief that Israel must remain a Jewish state forever.

If that sounds unfamiliar or contradictory, then you've never spent much time listening to Evangelicals. End Times theology declares that the Jewish people must maintain control of Israel and Jerusalem, and retake the Al-Aqsa Mosque (a/k/a the Dome of the Rock), or Jesus won't return. Period. Understand, they are talking about mankind's ultimate salvation. And if that means embracing foretold disasters and wars including the Battle of Armageddon, so be it.

Professor Gary Dickerson from the all-Christian Corban College puts it this way: "I don't look at the wars in the Middle East with the hope that things will work out. We've been told, Israel will experience this distress all the way to the end."

Thus comes the central political reality explored in *Waiting for Armageddon*: that Evangelicals risk creating what the Rev. Barbara Rossing calls "a self-fulfilling prophesy of death and destruction."

This is no small sect. Evangelicals control some 60,000 US radio stations. They meet in 25,000-member megachurches and sit on school boards and legislatures across the country. As the Rev. Mel White, former ghostwriter for Jerry Falwell and Billy Graham and Pat Robertson puts it, "They are everywhere and they are not going away."

Embedded in its dramatic illustration of the End Times, including a Christian tour of Israel, *Waiting for Armageddon* offers an object lesson: That if people believe their God has revealed the ultimate course of history, then nothing, not even war, with all its bloodshed and horror, is to be feared. It's a reality that, whether dealing with the Taliban or the Jews or the Evangelicals or even Sarah Palin, every leader -- religious or political -- needs to understand if true dialogue can take place. Because for a great many true believers, the end of the world is just the beginning.