



A Film by Rachel Boynton

**** Winner of the 2005 IDA Best Feature Documentary Award****

**** Nominated for the 2005 "Truer Than Fiction" Independent Spirit Award****

**** Official Selection at the 2005 South By Southwest Festival****

**** Selected for the 34th New Directors/ New Film Series presented by the Department of Film and Media at the Museum of Modern Art and the Film Society of Lincoln Center****

**** The Charles E. Guggenheim Emerging Artist Award, 2005 Full Frame Documentary Film Festival****

**** Featured Screening at the 2005 AFI/Silverdocs Film Festival****

**** Official Selection at the 2005 Edinburgh International Film Festival****

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RUNNING TIME: 87 minutes **RATING:** This film is not rated

WHO'S WHO IN THE FILM

Jeremy Rosner	GCS pollster
Stan Greenberg	GCS pollster
Tad Devine	GCS advertising consultant
Tal Silberstein	GCS management consultant
James Carville	GCS strategist
Amy Webber	GCS associate
Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada (aka Goni)	Bolivia's presidential candidate
Carlos Mesa	VP candidate
Mauricio Balcazar	Goni's Press Advisor
Manfred Reyes Villa	An opposing candidate
Evo Morales	An opposing candidate and representative of Bolivia's coca leaf farmers

CREDITS

Director/Producer	Rachel Boynton
Cinematography	Tom Hurwitz Michael Anderson Chistine Burrill Jerry Risius
Sound	Sergio Claros Rachel Boynton
Editors	Rachel Boynton Jennifer L. Robinson
Music	Marcelo Zarvos
Sound Editor	Brian Langman
Additional Cinematography	Jeffrey Victor Rachel Boynton
Additional Editor	Massimiliano Santini
Associate Producers	Erin Nesbit Vanessa Moreno Jeffrey Seelbach
Executive Producers	Steven Shainberg Robert Kravis Sanders Goodstein

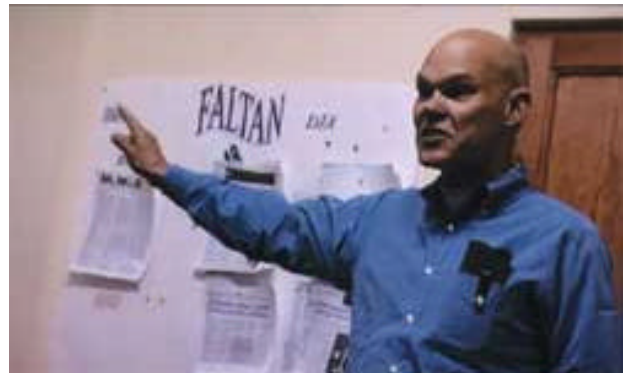
If you want to build a brand, you must focus your branding efforts on owning a word in the prospect's mind. A word that nobody else owns.

- Al Ries & Laura Ries, "*The Origin of Brands*"

For decades, U.S. strategists-for-hire have been quietly molding the opinions of voters and the messages of candidates *in elections around the world*. They have worked for presidential candidates on every continent (in Britain, Israel, India, Korea, South Africa, Venezuela, Brazil, to name a few...) Without the noise of tanks or troops, these Americans have been spreading our brand of democracy from the Middle East to the middle of the South American jungle.

"OUR BRAND IS CRISIS" is an astounding look at one of their campaigns and its earth-shattering aftermath. With flabbergasting access to think sessions, media training and the making of smear campaigns, we watch how the consultants' marketing strategies shape the relationship between a leader and his people. And we see a shocking example of how the all-American art of branding can affect the "spreading of democracy" overseas.

The film follows James Carville, Jeremy Rosner and a team of U.S. political consultants as they travel to South America to help Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada (a.k.a. "Goni") become President of Bolivia. When the consultants arrive, the candidate's prospects for a win look bleak. Goni has been educated in the United States and speaks Spanish with a heavy American accent. He made a fortune in mining -- an industry which, in the eyes of most Bolivians, raped the country for centuries.



He was President of Bolivia from 1993 to 1997¹ so, although he has been responsible for many innovative economic and social reforms, he isn't new. And the people desperately want someone young and fresh to guide them out of the devastating economic crisis. In a country where the majority is indigenous and 70 percent of the population is living below the poverty line, a wealthy, white businessman is a very hard sell.

But the consultants are convinced Goni is the best man for the job. As President before, Goni created a unique form of privatization, attracting foreign investment and using the profits to create Social Security for the elderly and free health care for mothers and children. Goni says he wants to come back and finish perfecting his reforms. His ideas, if successful, could solve one of the difficult problems facing much of the world – how to make market economics work to the benefit of the people. So how can an elite man like Goni, clearly not a candidate with a winning profile, communicate his good intentions to the "common men" who might elect him?

Through a strong message and the right brand.

¹ In Bolivia, no President is allowed to serve two consecutive terms. In 1997, the presidential term of office was changed by the Bolivian Congress from four to five years. Goni served a four year term and stepped down. His successor, Hugo Banzer, was elected for a five year term.

Customers must recognize that you stand for something.

- Howard Schultz, Starbucks

In classic verite style, “Our Brand Is Crisis” is the first documentary to take viewers *into the rooms where the strategies and decisions are made*, giving audiences access to some astonishing realities. We watch Americans employing the same imagery and techniques used to market McDonald’s to change the political future of another country.

And it happens all the time.

HOW THE FILM WAS MADE

Rachel Boynton got the idea for the film in the fall of 2001. She was 27 years old when she began and had spent five years working as a producer on independent documentaries. “Our Brand Is Crisis” is her first film as a director.

Boynton started by writing letters to consultants and setting up informational interviews. Soon she heard through the grapevine that a candidate named Gonzalo (“Goni”) Sanchez de Lozada was planning to run for President of Bolivia, and that he was shopping for a team of American consultants. She was introduced to him through his former American advisors, the ones who had crafted his successful campaign in 1993.

By the end of January 2002, she had official permission to begin shooting. In February she went on her first scouting trip to La Paz. She returned to the United States and organized her first shoot in four days. Boynton was back in Bolivia less than a week after her first trip, with an American cameraman. For the majority of the shoots she recorded sound herself. For the next five months, Boynton flew back and forth between Bolivia, Washington, D.C. and her home in New York City. She worked as a bartender on the side to save production money. Ultimately she shot about 165 hours of material.



Originally Boynton had planned to film three campaigns led by U.S. consultants in three countries and to construct parallel narratives. But events in Bolivia quickly took a dramatic and surprising turn. It became clear that this would be much more than a story about political campaigns, as the consultants, the candidate and the filmmaker were confronted with a disaster the first polls never predicted.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I got the idea for this film when I first heard about a group of Americans (not the ones in the movie) who had run an ad campaign to oust Chilean dictator Pinochet. For two years I'd been looking for the right idea for my first film. I wanted to find a topic that would let me explore America's relationship to the rest of the world, and here it was – political idealism meets the profit motive. What could be more emblematic of us?

So I met with every U.S. political consultant I could find and tried to get access to a campaign overseas. Stan Greenberg was the first person I met from the Greenberg Carville Shrum group. His idealism appealed to me. When you're in a political campaign you have to believe, and he was a true believer. The men working for Goni (Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada), the pollsters in particular, were convinced they were making the countries they worked in stronger democracies by expressing people's views to the leaders, and by helping leaders communicate with the people. And when they spoke about Goni, it was easy to see him as a great visionary, fashioning himself after FDR.

It took me a while to realize the majority of Bolivians didn't see him that way. To Americans, Goni is clearly liberal. Goni privatized Bolivia's economy in the 90's in a way that was unique and very innovative at the time, through a program called "Capitalization". Goni sold half the shares of the national companies and retained the remaining half for the State. He used the profits from the State's shares to create Social Security and free maternal/infant health care for the people. All this seemed well and good. But a major point of contention came over the issue of jobs. Goni swore he created 500,000 jobs through Capitalization. The people said Capitalization cost them jobs and they accused Goni of "selling off the country." (And of course all the statistics remained vague, with each side interpreting them to reflect its own agenda.) So because he favored a market economy (something *we* take for granted), Goni was often described as a right-wing conservative (perhaps our ideals weren't so universal after all).

Ultimately this became, for me, one of the central conflicts of the movie. I always saw the Americans as emblematic of us, and I realized that our "brand" of democracy, like theirs, is very wrapped up in the idea (and the hope) that market economics will bring benefits to the majority. The consultants chose to work for Goni because they agreed with his vision of how Bolivia could thrive – through a certain "brand" of democracy, as Jeremy Rosner says, that's "market-based and modern but with broad benefits." Essentially, they were fighting for progressive capitalism. But the Bolivian people have yet to see proof that a market-based economy will bring them any benefits. The American equation of "democracy + market economics" hasn't proven its worth for the majority. And this conflict isn't unique to Bolivia. It's playing itself out around the world as we speak, from South America to, potentially, the Middle East. Our brand of democracy has promised prosperity and has yet to deliver.

I was also interested in the question, not just of *why* the consultants do what they do, but of *how* they go about doing it. The machinations of Goni's campaign gave me a unique way of looking at how our system works back home. I realized our concept of democracy and our concept of capitalism are so closely intertwined that our technique of political salesmanship – how we sell a candidate – mirrors how we sell any product. In an election, the goal becomes to get voters to "purchase" a candidate, rather than to create dialogue. And without real, substantive, two-way discourse, politicians are left out of touch and the people are left with an insufficient understanding of complicated issues (be they the reasons for selling gas through Chile or the true reasons for going to war in Iraq).

So I never thought of "Our Brand" as a film about Bolivia, and I never thought of it as a partisan movie. At the end of the day, I wanted to make something that would leave people – all kinds of people – thinking and talking and asking themselves questions. How do the simple "messages" we hear all the time – whether they're in political campaigns or Nike ads – affect us? What do we require of a leader in the modern world? What is our "brand" of democracy after all? When we talk about "spreading democracy" overseas, what do we mean? What are we spreading? And if we want democracy (or progressive capitalism) to work, what really needs to be done?

Above all, it was important to me not to portray stereotypes or to rely on easy impressions of the consultants and the candidate. In general, I think it's too easy to blame individuals for what are really *systemic* problems. (It's much easier to point fingers at a scapegoat than to really examine the system the scapegoat represents.) So I didn't condemn the characters. I picked these consultants because I respected them; they were tackling a job that could alter the world in a fundamental way and I thought they were incredibly good at what they did. Essentially, the consultants are powerful in the same way we are powerful as a country; as a nation we are capable of influencing and altering the world. This doesn't make us – as Americans – evil, but it does make us responsible for our actions and for our country's political and economic attitudes around the globe.

But this is my opinion, and I hope viewers will have their own thoughts walking out of the theater. I hope the movie will act as "anti-spin" and reveal something fundamentally true about how the people in the film behave and why they behave that way – and let viewers judge for themselves.

The challenge for me was to do this within the context of an exciting, fiction-like thriller. I wanted the film to pose questions, but I wanted those questions to arise naturally, from the events themselves. I wanted it to feel like an adventure story well told – to be, above all, an exciting movie.

The edit took a little over a year and a half, partially because events kept evolving and partially because it took a long time to figure out how to communicate all the necessary information without narration or too many cards. But I think the election year of 2006 is a good moment for "Our Brand Is Crisis" to come out – an adventure about the all-American art of branding, and about how it effects us and the state of democracy at home and around the world.

**- Rachel Boynton, director
December 2005**

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHY

Rachel Boynton, Director/Producer

“Our Brand is Crisis” is Rachel's first film as a director. Before starting on the project three years ago, she worked as an Associate Producer on several feature length documentaries, including “Well-Founded Fear,” which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and aired nationally on PBS's P.O.V., and the PBS series “People Like Us: Social Class in America.”

She also produced for ARD, a German television station. She received an M.S. in journalism from Columbia University, Graduate School of Journalism, a B.A. in International Relations from Brown University and a Certificate of Political Studies from L'Institut d'Etudes Politiques (Sciences Po) in Paris, France. She is based in New York City.

CREW BIOGRAPHIES

Tom Hurwitz – Director of Photography

Tom Hurwitz has been a cinematographer for more than 20 years, shooting feature films, television and several Academy Award-winning documentaries. His documentary Director of Photography credits include: Harlan County U.S.A (1976), Horsemen of Inner Mongolia (1980), In Our Hands (1984), Down and Out in America (1986), American Dream (1990), Wildman Blues (1997), Paul Taylor: Dancemaker (1998), and My Generation (2000).

Christine Burrill – Director of Photography

Christine Burrill has been shooting documentary films for more than 20 years for PBS, the BBC and others. Her Director of Photography credits include David Riva's Marlene Dietrich: Her Own Song, Kirby Dick's Private Practices: The Story of a Sex Surrogate, and Ellen Hovde's and Muffle Meyer's Sex and Social Dance. In addition, she collaborated with producer Haskell Wexler on the 1971 documentary Brazil: Report on Torture. With Wexler, Bill Yahraus and David Davis she co-founded Focal Point Films, a collective which produced social and political documentary films from 1976 to 1980, on topics ranging from nuclear disarmament to gangs in East L.A., to the Vietnam War. Ms. Burrill has directed several films including The New Maid, Marice, A Portrait of Reginald Stewart, Rosa Marta, and Dichosa Mujer. She also does large photo collage work, which has been exhibited in New York, Los Angeles, Caracas and Brasilia.

Michael Anderson – Director of Photography

Michael Anderson has been working as a director of photography for thirty-three years; he has shot more than eighty projects, and moves fluidly between film and digital video. His award-winning documentary work has been shown on major national television, and in Austria, Switzerland, Great Britain and Germany. His Directory of Photography credits include David Davis' and John Hanig's Song of the Canary (1978), Larry Adelman's The Business of America (1984), David Duggan's and Eric Stange's Love in the Cold War (1991), Marlon Riggs' Color Adjustment (1991) and Elizabeth Thompson's Blink (2000).

Jennifer L. Robinson – Editor

Jennifer Robinson has worked as a freelance editor in New York for several years. Most recently was an editor on Barbara Kopple's *The Hamptons* (2002), a documentary mini-series for ABC. She has also edited numerous shorts, industrial films and music videos.

Marcelo Zarvos – Composer

Brazilian pianist and composer Marcelo Zarvos has written for virtually every medium, from dance to the concert stage, film, television and theater. Recent commissions include the ballet “The Path” for “DanceBrazil,” which received its premiere in 2001 at the Joyce Theater, NYC as well as a new score commissioned by the Guggenheim Museum for their Fall 2001 exhibit on Brazilian Art. Currently Zarvos is composing a new dance score commissioned by Denver based company “Cleo Parker Robinson Dance” as well as a NYSCA commission by the Quintet of the Americas.

Highly active also as a film composer, Zarvos' work has been praised by *Hollywood Variety* for his “...affecting score, which neither drowns out nor underplays the steady sentiment.” Among his recent scores are, “The Door in the Floor,” “Tully,” “Kissing Jessica Stein,” and the Academy Award nominated short film “A Soccer Story,” as well as a collaboration with Eumir Deodato on “Bossa Nova.”

As a recording artist Zarvos released three highly acclaimed albums, *DUALISM*, with saxophonist Peter Epstein, *LABYRINTHS*, which landed on the CD NOW top 10 list of Jazz Albums in 1998 and most recently *MUSIC JOURNAL*.