



P.O.V.

Season 18

Discussion Guide

# Street Fight

A Film by Marshall Curry



[www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov)



## Letter from the Filmmaker

### Dear Colleague,

I've always been fascinated by elections—and by election films. Going behind the scenes to watch the strategizing, crisis management, and spin doctoring, documentaries such as *Primary*, *The War Room*, and *A Perfect Candidate* taught me more about the democratic process than I ever learned in Civics class.

Yet all of those documentaries followed national, mass-media elections. In 2001, I became interested in the mayoral election shaping up in Newark, N.J., and I began to wonder what it's like behind the scenes of a local, urban race, where high-priced media consultants are replaced by foot soldiers, fighting door-to-door.

I had gotten to know Newark ten years earlier, when I'd taken time off from college to set up a literacy project there, and I had fallen in love with the city's unvarnished combination of toughness and warmth. At that time, Mayor Sharpe James had been in his second term, and in 2001, he was going for his fifth. In 32 years, James had never lost a race and was widely considered the most powerful politician in New Jersey—a king-maker whose support had put governors and U.S. Senators into office.

But there was buzz about his challenger, Cory Booker, who people were touting as potentially “the first black President of the United States” (a bit much, I thought, to say about a 32-year-old, first-term city councilman.)

Two dynamic and charismatic candidates, from different generations and widely different backgrounds: What would happen when they got into a ring together? I bought a camera and spent the next five months finding out.

At first, I focused on the many local issues that were being debated: downtown development, school reform and vouchers, community policing, and housing. But I soon discovered that each of these issues was complex enough to warrant its own film, and that—as the pollsters were reporting—ultimately this election would turn less on the question of who had the best housing strategy and more on broader themes: racial authenticity, insider vs. outsider, experience vs. change. (This is not unique to Newark; most elections are decided by such intangibles.)

Among these, it was the racial issues that seemed most important and universal to me. After spending a day editing the scene in which Newarkers ask whether Booker's academic pedigree (he is a Rhodes Scholar and Yale Law School graduate) makes him “less black,” I turned on the TV and saw Barak Obama at the 2004 Democratic Convention attacking “the slander that says a black child with a book is acting white.”

Issues of race seem crucial to politics at this moment and to the future of our country, and our racial attitudes are more powerful and complicated than most of us usually admit. I hope **Street Fight** encourages people to look at those attitudes closely and honestly and to discuss them with one another. I also hope the film will encourage viewers to pay close attention when politicians—of any ethnicity—use race as a wedge.

I also hope the film will remind us that America's democratic system cannot run on autopilot. A healthy democracy “does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability.” It requires vigilance and active participation—from our media and from our citizens.

Thank you for watching the film,

Marshall Curry  
Filmmaker, **Street Fight**



Filmmaker Marshall Curry  
Photo courtesy of the filmmaker



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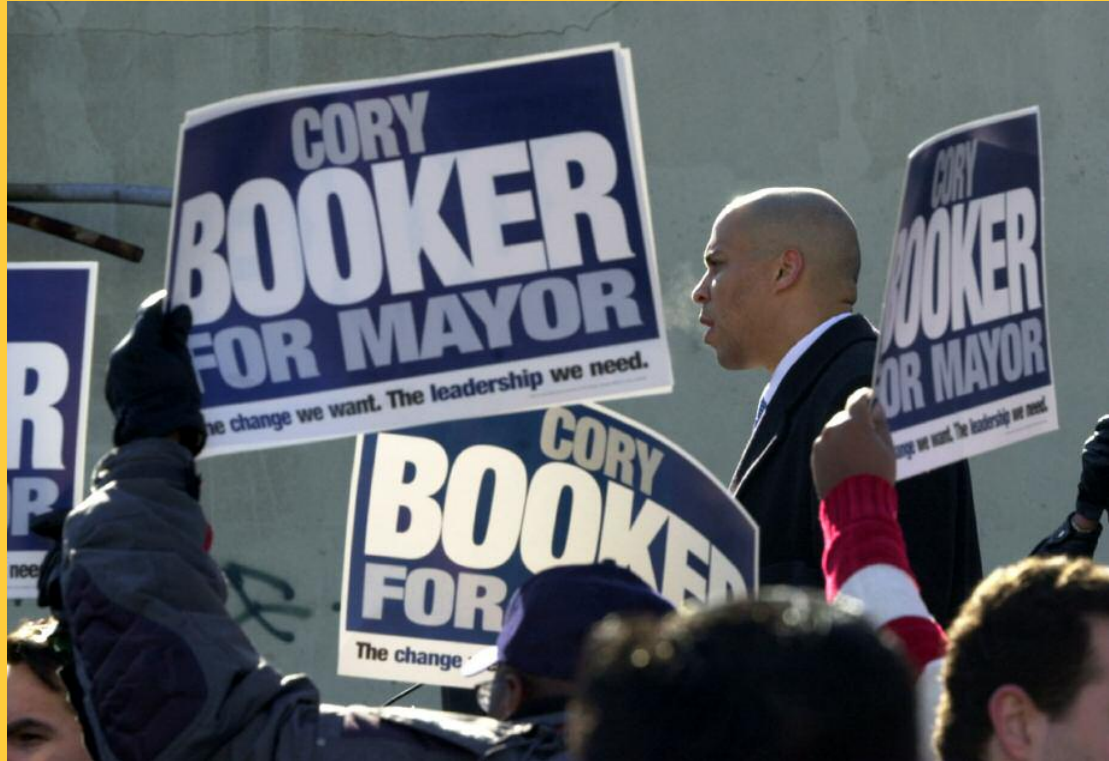
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## Introduction

In 2002, 32-year-old, first-term city councilman Cory Booker challenged 4-term incumbent Sharpe James in the race for mayor of Newark, New Jersey. In addition to typical political rhetoric, the campaigns introduced issues that went well beyond local concerns. The heated contest between two Democrats in a city that is predominantly black (54%) and Hispanic (30%) raised difficult questions related to the health of democracy, the way Americans define race, leadership in the black community, and definitions of party loyalty. **Street Fight**, a feature-length (83 min.) documentary, tracks this unusual and complex election.

Told from the point of view of a Booker supporter, **Street Fight** casts the election as a young idealist's struggle against an entrenched and corrupt political machine. Indeed, Booker's strategies and perseverance despite a myriad of tricks and strong-arm tactics provide inspiration for anyone attempting to challenge a powerful political dynasty or trying to engage young people in the political process.

Cory Booker faced more than intimidation of his supporters. His campaign was also confronted with a series of accusations that highlighted (and perhaps provoked) deep community divisions. In one recurring allegation, James accused Booker of being a Republican, raising the question of how one earns the label of Democrat or Republican and how far one can disagree with portions of a party platform before a party label ceases to have meaning. In the black community, adherence to the Democratic Party line also raises generational ties to the civil rights movement, with "old guard" civil rights leaders from the 1960s



*Cory Booker campaigning for Mayor of Newark N.J. against Sharpe James.*

Photo: The Star-Ledger

and '70s (like James) being challenged by members of a younger generation who don't always agree with their elders about how to make things better for blacks in America.

James also challenged Booker's racial identity, questioning whether or not the lighter-skinned, Ivy League-educated Booker was "really black." That ironic twist on race-baiting forces viewers of **Street Fight** to examine how race is defined in the U.S. and who can rightfully claim the power to define it.

Because it chronicles the ongoing impact of campaign tactics, **Street Fight** is an excellent tool for outreach, even for those who already know the outcome of the election. Its portrait of politics requires viewers to think beyond a simple decision about who to support with their vote, challenging them also to examine their beliefs about democracy, power, poverty, and race.



## Potential Partners

## Key Issues

**Street Fight** is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- **Your local PBS station**
- **Groups that have discussed previous PBS and P.O.V. films relating to race, racism, or politics, including *Chisholm '72*, *An American Love Story*, *Bill's Run*, or *Last Man Standing*.**
- **Groups focused on any of the issues listed to the right**
- **Legislators**
- **Civic groups (e.g., Urban League, NAACP, Rotary, League of Women Voters, etc.)**
- **High school students**
- **Faith-based organizations and institutions**
- **Political Science, Social Studies, Civics, and African American Studies departments and student groups at colleges, universities, community colleges, and high schools**
- **Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as P.O.V.'s national partners Elderhostel Learning in Retirement Centers, members of the Listen Up! Youth Media Network, or your local library.**

**Street Fight** is an excellent tool for outreach because it shows how issues around racial and political identity play out in real life. The film will be of special interest to people interested in exploring or working on the issues below:

- **African American communities**
- **Campaign finance**
- **Campaign reform**
- **Civic engagement**
- **Civil rights**
- **Democracy**
- **Democratic Party**
- **Economic development**
- **Elections**
- **Ethics in government**
- **Government**
- **Housing, affordable**
- **Neighborhood development**
- **Political science**
- **Poverty**
- **Race**
- **Racism**
- **School vouchers**
- **Urban issues / Urban renewal**
- **Voting**
- **War on drugs**



## Background Information

### Newark

Newark, New Jersey, is an industrial city and major commercial port ten miles west of New York City. From the early 1800s through the mid-twentieth century, the city was a successful urban economic center. Between 1900 and 1960, more than 100,000 African Americans looking for economic opportunities and relief from Jim Crow laws moved to Newark from the rural South. At its peak, Newark was home to more than 400,000 residents.

After World War II the Federal Housing Administration guaranteed low-cost mortgages to returning soldiers. However, the FHA redlined nearly all of Newark, sending white soldiers and their families to the almost exclusively white suburbs. Between 1950 and 1967, the white population of Newark dropped from 363,000 to 158,000, while the black population tripled, from 70,000 to 220,000. Newark's current population is just under 274,000.

Despite the enormous reduction of Newark's white population, positions of property ownership and political power did not change. For example, in 1960, 83% of Newark's police force was white, while 60% of its population was black. Increasing poverty and the lack of political power produced growing resentment. In 1967, that resentment exploded into serious race riots that killed 26, wounded 1,100, and caused the city's businesses and wealthier residents to flee. In addition, new interstates dissected neighborhoods, schools suffered for a lack of tax base, and Newark's mostly black and Hispanic population became increasingly poor and socially isolated.

Since 1986, when Sharpe James was elected mayor, Newark's report card has been mixed. The population has stabilized and,



*Woman campaigning for Sharpe James*  
Photo: The Star-Ledger

since 2000, has started to increase. There has been economic development, especially downtown. New housing has been built with an emphasis on low-rise townhouses rather than 1960's-style high-rise "housing projects." However, in 1995 the city's failing school system was taken over by the state. The poverty rate is roughly unchanged, with 28.4% of the population and 25.5% of families below the poverty line. The median income for a household is \$26, 913 and for a family, \$30,781.

(Sources: [www.cornwall.rutgers.edu/pdf/Herman-July%202002-Report.pdf](http://www.cornwall.rutgers.edu/pdf/Herman-July%202002-Report.pdf); [www.67riots.rutgers.edu](http://www.67riots.rutgers.edu); Jeffrey Kraus (2004) "Generational Conflict in Urban Politics: The 2002 Newark Mayoral Election", *The Forum*: Vol. 2: No. 3, Article 7.

[www.bepress.com/forum/vol2/iss3/art7](http://www.bepress.com/forum/vol2/iss3/art7);  
<http://newarknj.usl.myareaguide.com/census.html>



## Background Information



*Sharpe James shaking hands with voters*  
Photo: The Star-Ledger

### The 2002 Mayoral Election

- 43% of Newark's 125,164 registered voters cast ballots in the 2002 election for mayor, an increase from 34% in the previous mayoral election.
- Sharpe James received 53% (28,525) of votes; Cory Booker received 46% (24,757) of votes; Dwayne Smith received less than 1% (538) of votes.
- James won the black vote, with 59% to Booker's 40%. Booker won the Hispanic vote, with 57% to James' 42%, and Booker won the white vote, with 62% to James' 37%.
- James supporters tended to be long-time residents, senior citizens, and city workers. Booker supporters tended to be young professionals and new voters.

- According to his official filed reports, Sharpe James raised \$2.66 million, 90% of which came from within New Jersey. He also received funds from a PAC. Cory Booker raised between \$3-4 million using two separate campaign committees that enabled him to avoid contribution limits and raise a significant amount of money from outside the state.

[Source: Jeffrey Kraus (2004) "Generational Conflict in Urban Politics: The 2002 Newark Mayoral Election", The Forum: Vol. 2: No. 3, Article 7. [www.bepress.com/forum/vol2/iss3/art7](http://www.bepress.com/forum/vol2/iss3/art7)]



## Background Information

### Selected People Featured in *Street Fight*



**CORY BOOKER** grew up in Harrington Park, an affluent neighborhood in northern New Jersey. His parents, civil rights activists, were the first black IBM executives and the first to integrate their white community. Booker was an ALL-

American high school football player, a tight end at Stanford, a Rhodes Scholar, and a graduate of Yale Law School.

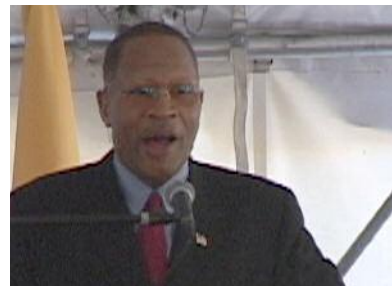
While at Yale, Booker commuted to Newark to work on tenants' rights issues. After graduation in 1996, he moved to Newark and rented a room across from the Brick Towers, a low-income housing complex. Though an underdog, he won election to Newark's city council in 1998. Shortly after that he moved into the Brick Towers.

Booker has garnered attention as a neighborhood activist and reformer: he participated in a 10-day sit-in and fast outside of a crime-ridden housing project called Garden Spires and, in the summer of 2000, bought an RV and parked it in various high-crime intersections in the city to shine a light on drug trafficking and street crime and to show support for neighborhood initiatives.

Since losing the 2002 mayoral race, Booker has been practicing law in Newark and is serving as the president of Newark Now, a grassroots non-profit group that offers advice and resources to tenant groups and community organizations. He is planning another run for mayor in 2006.

[Source: New Jersey Reporter, "The Battle for Newark," January and March 2002]

**SHARPE JAMES** is the longest-serving mayor in Newark's history. He was born in 1936 in Florida but grew up in Newark. He graduated from Montclair State, received his Master's degree from Springfield College, and later served in the army in Germany. He has also been awarded honorary doctorates from Montclair State and from Drew University.



James spent several years as a public school teacher in Newark, where he coached championship track and cross-country teams. At Essex County College, he was the first African American to serve as department chair and athletic director. He also served as president of the Garden State Athletic Conference.

In 1970, James joined with Ken Gibson and ousted the corrupt political machine of Hugh Addonizio from City Hall. Gibson was elected as the first African American mayor of Newark, and 34-year-old James was elected to the city council. James worked to rebuild Newark in the wake of the devastating and polarizing 1967 race riots. In 1986, James ran for mayor against Gibson, who was suspected of corruption charges himself. James has been mayor ever since.

James is credited by many people for reviving Newark, especially by bringing development to the downtown area. Under his leadership, the New Jersey Performing Arts Center was built, and he is currently working to construct a stadium for the NHL's New Jersey Devils. He has won many awards for the city, including awards for livability and for environmental quality, and has transformed Newark's image from one of urban decay to that of a "Renaissance City."

The James administration has also been the target of a series of federal investigations. James' chief of staff, Jackie Mattison, was convicted of bribery, and his chief of police, William Celester, was convicted of embezzling funds.

In 1999, James was elected to the New Jersey State Senate. He simultaneously serves as Newark mayor and as State Senator and is widely considered to be one of the most powerful politicians in New Jersey. Though James has said that this will be his last term, he has not stopped raising money.

[Sources: New Jersey Reporter, "The Battle for Newark", January and March 2002; The Star Ledger, "Gibson Gets Three Years Probation" by William Kleinknecht, November 1, 2002; The Forum, Volume 2 Issue 3, Article 7, 2004; The New York Times, "As Newark Bounces Back So Does Mayor" by Ronald Smothers, January 31, 1998; New York Times, "Victory With a Vengeance: After Loss in Newark, Opponents Sense James's Wrath" by Andrew Jacobs, November 11, 2002; Bergen Record, "Cory Booker Begins Second Campaign for City Hall" by Paul Johnson, May 10, 2005]



## Using This Guide

**This guide is designed to help you use *Street Fight* as the centerpiece of a community event. It contains suggestions for organizing an event as well as ideas for how to help participants think more deeply about the issues in the film. The discussion questions are designed for a very wide range of audiences. Rather than attempt to address them all, choose one or two that best meet the needs and interests of your group.**

### Planning an Event

In addition to showcasing documentary films as an art form, screenings of P.O.V. films can be used to present information, get people interested in taking action on an issue, provide opportunities for people from different groups or perspectives to exchange views, and/or create space for reflection. Using the questions below as a planning checklist will help ensure a high-quality/high-impact event.

- **Have you defined your goals?** With your partner(s), set realistic goals. Will you host a single event or engage in an ongoing project? Being clear about your goals will make it much easier to structure the event, target publicity and evaluate results.
- **Does the way you are planning to structure the event fit your goals?** Do you need an outside facilitator, translator, or sign language interpreter? If your goal is to share information, are there local experts on the topic who should be present? How large an audience do you want? (Large groups are appropriate for information exchanges. Small groups allow for more intensive dialogue.)
- **Have you arranged to involve all stakeholders?** It is especially important that people be allowed to speak for themselves. If your group is planning to take action that affects people other than those present, how will you give voice to those not in the room?
- **Is the event being held in a space where all participants will feel equally comfortable?** Is it wheelchair accessible? Is it in a part of town that's easy to reach by various kinds of transportation? If you are bringing together different constituencies, is it neutral territory? Does the physical configuration allow for the kind of discussion you hope to have?
- **Will the set-up of the room help you meet your goals?** Is it comfortable? If you intend to have a discussion, can people see one another? Are there spaces to use for small breakout groups? Can everyone easily see the screen and hear the film?
- **Have you scheduled time to plan for action?** Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even when the discussion has been difficult. Action steps are especially important for people who already have a good deal of experience talking about the issue(s) on the table. For those who are new to the issue(s), just engaging in public discussion serves as an action step.



## Using This Guide

### Facilitating a Discussion

**Controversial topics often make for excellent discussions. By their nature, those same topics also give rise to deep emotions and strongly held beliefs. As a facilitator, you can create an atmosphere where people feel safe, encouraged, and respected, making it more likely that they will be willing to share openly and honestly. Here's how:**

### Finding a Facilitator

Some university professors, human resource professionals, clergy, and youth leaders may be specially trained in facilitation skills. In addition to these local resources, groups such as the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) may be able to provide or help you locate skilled facilitators.

### Preparing Yourself

**Identify your own hot-button issues.** View the film before your event and give yourself time to reflect so you aren't dealing with raw emotions at the same time that you are trying to facilitate a discussion.

**Be knowledgeable.** You don't need to be an expert on race or politics to lead an event, but knowing the basics can help you keep a discussion on track and gently correct misstatements of fact. In addition to the Background Information section above, you may want to take a look at the suggested websites and books in the Resources section on p. 18.

**Be clear about your role.** You may find yourself taking on several roles for an event, e.g., host, organizer, or even projectionist. If you are also planning to serve as facilitator, be sure that you can focus on that responsibility and avoid distractions during the discussion. Keep in mind that being a facilitator is not the same as being a teacher. A teacher's job is to convey specific information. In contrast, a facilitator remains neutral, helping move along the discussion without imposing his or her views on the dialogue.

**Know your group.** Issues can play out very differently for different groups of people. Is your group new to the issue or have they dealt with it before? Factors like geography, age, race, religion, and socioeconomic class can all have an impact on comfort levels, speaking styles, and prior knowledge. Take care not to assume that all members of a particular group share the same point of view. If you are bringing together different segments of your community, we strongly recommend hiring an experienced facilitator.



## Using This Guide

### Preparing the Group

**Consider how well group members know one another.** If you are bringing together people who have never met, you may want to devote some time at the beginning of the event for introductions.

**Agree to ground rules around language.** Involve the group in establishing some basic rules to ensure respect and aid clarity. Typically such rules include no yelling or use of slurs and asking people to speak in the first person (“I think...”) rather than generalizing for others (“Everyone knows that...”).

**Ensure that everyone has an opportunity to be heard.** Be clear about how people will take turns or indicate that they want to speak. Plan a strategy for preventing one or two people from dominating the discussion. If the group is large, are there plans to break into small groups or partners, or should attendance be limited?

**Talk about the difference between dialogue and debate.** In a debate, participants try to convince others that they are right. In a dialogue, participants try to understand each other and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening to each other actively. Remind people that they are engaged in a dialogue. This will be especially important in preventing a discussion from dissolving into a repetitive, rhetorical debate or getting stuck in a rehash of history (that no one can change) rather than looking at how lessons from the past can inform future action.

**Encourage active listening.** Ask the group to think of the event as being about listening as well as discussing. Participants can be encouraged to listen for things that challenge as well as reinforce their own ideas. You may also consider asking people to practice formal “active listening,” where participants listen without interrupting the speaker, then re-phrase to see if they have heard correctly.

**Remind participants that everyone sees through the lens of his or her own experience.** Who we are influences how we interpret what we see. So everyone in the group may have a different view about the content and meaning of the film they have just seen, and all of them may be accurate. It can help people to understand one another’s perspectives if people identify the evidence on which they base their opinion as they share their views.

**Take care of yourself and group members.** If the intensity level rises, pause to let everyone take a deep breath. You might also consider providing a safe space to “vent,” perhaps with a partner or in a small group of familiar faces. If you anticipate that your topic may upset people, be prepared to refer them to local support agencies and/or have local professionals present. Think carefully about what you ask people to share publicly, and explain things like confidentiality and whether or not press will be present.



## General Discussion Questions

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. If the mood seems tense, you may want to pose a general question and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion.

Unless you think participants are so uncomfortable that they can't engage until they have had a break, don't encourage people to leave the room between the film and the discussion. If you save your break for an appropriate moment during the discussion, you won't lose the feeling of the film as you begin your dialogue.

One way to get a discussion going is to pose a general question such as:

- **If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, who would you ask and what would you ask them?**
- **Did anything in this film surprise you? If so, what? Why was it surprising?**
- **What insights, inspiration, or new knowledge did you gain from this film?**
- **In the next election, what do you think you will remember from this film and why?**



*The Reverend Al Sharpton and Mayor Sharpe James.  
Photo courtesy of "Street Fight"*

## Discussion Prompts

### Campaign Tactics

If you were interested in running for office and were looking for a mentor, and you could choose between Sharpe James and Cory Booker, who would you choose and why?

Based on what you saw in the film, what did you most appreciate about Booker's campaign? What did you least like and why? What did you most appreciate about James' campaign? What did you least like and why?

Consider the accusations below. Which of them constitute substantive issues in a campaign and which deflect attention from more important issues? If you were choosing a candidate, would any of these factors be important to you and why?

- Length of residence (James is a longtime Newark resident; Booker is a relative newcomer)
- Age
- Sexual or gender identity (James calls Booker a "faggot")
- Racial identity (James claims that Booker is white)
- Having a staff member frequent a strip club (Booker's campaign manager is caught in a raid of a strip club)
- Frequenting a strip club (James had been at the same club, but said he only went to the club to see how he might close it down)

Booker has to decide whether or not to respond to negative personal attacks from Sharpe James with attacks of his own. If you were Booker, would you "go negative"? How could a candidate like Cory Booker critique current policy without appearing to be criticizing the city he wants to lead?

In preparation for a televised debate, Booker's media advisor, Jen Bluestein, advises him to speak in sound bites. What do voters gain when candidates speak in short, memorable phrases? What do they lose? If you had been Booker's media advisor, what would you have advised?

James accuses Booker of being a "faggot," being part of a Jewish conspiracy to take over the city, and even being funded by the KKK. What gives these kinds of slurs power? How do such slurs relate to substantive campaign issues (e.g., housing, jobs, education, infrastructure, criminal justice)?

List all the strong-arm or questionable campaign techniques you see in the film. Which of the items on your list are illegal and which are simply unethical? Brainstorm ways that you would respond to such techniques if you saw them taking place in your community.

The film shows examples of municipal workers (housing authority employees, police officers, etc.) apparently acting on behalf of the mayor's re-election campaign. What is the distinction between working for the mayor as head of the city and working for his campaign? What kinds of campaign-related work should municipal employees be allowed to do as an expression of their own political views? What kinds of campaign-related work should city workers be prevented from doing?

Across the United States, when incumbents seek additional terms, they are usually re-elected. From what you see in the film, in what ways are elections tilted in favor of incumbents? What advantages do incumbents have in campaigning that challengers do not share?

How are the campaign tactics used in this election similar to or different from tactics used in other elections that you have seen? Would you say that, on the whole, democracy in America is "healthy"? Give examples of instances where democracy is working well and instances where it is not. What might you do to change the places or situations where democracy is not working well?

Rich McGrath, James's press spokesman, says that Newark politics are "a throwback," similar to the political machine in Boston decades ago. Around the country, many of the political machines that ran cities have become extinct. What kinds of circumstances nurture machine-style politics and what kinds of



## Discussion Prompts

actions, laws, or circumstances lead to their disappearance?

James accuses Booker of being a Republican, in part because Booker disagrees with parts of the national Democratic platform (for example, Booker supports giving school vouchers to poor children). Can Booker be a Democrat even if he disagrees with parts of the national Democratic platform? How much can a candidate disagree with his or her party before party affiliation becomes meaningless or misleading? Are some issues more defining or more of a "litmus test" than others? In your view, which issues are most central to each political party?



*Woman campaigning for Cory Booker.  
Photo courtesy of "Street Fight"*

### Campaign Financing

In this election, each candidate raised more than \$2.5 million dollars for a mayoral race in a city with fewer than 300,000 residents. What is the impact of the need for such large funding levels on democracy? Is it possible for candidates to raise the funds they need and also give adequate attention to issues and problem solving? If you were a candidate, how would you deal with the need to raise funds and the potential conflicts it creates because of the assumption that money buys influence? If you could write rules governing campaign financing, what would the rules be? Would public funding of campaigns help or hurt the democratic process?

Booker is criticized for raising much of his money from outside of Newark. Should a politician be permitted to accept campaign contributions from people or organizations outside of his jurisdiction (i.e., people who aren't able to vote for or against him because they don't live in his ward or city or state)? Why or why not? Would your answer be influenced if you knew that one side used intimidation against the supporters of the opposition, making it difficult for an opponent to raise funds locally?

James is accused of raising much of his money from city workers who fear they will lose their jobs, and from people with city contracts who want to keep those contracts. Should people who have financial interests in the government be allowed to donate money to a campaign? Why or why not?

Though a Democrat, Booker received campaign contributions from conservative donors who agreed with his support for school vouchers. Did this make Booker less of a Democrat? How much funding can someone accept from people who identify with the opposing party before one's own party affiliation becomes misleading?

## Discussion Prompts

### Race and Racism

The filmmaker says that the Newark election was a “battle over the future of black leadership.” Given what you have seen in the film, what do you think that future will look like? What do you want that future to look like? What might you do to nurture leaders who would reflect your values?

Sharpe James criticizes Cory Booker, saying, “You have to learn to be African American, and we don’t have time to train you...” What might he mean in terms of what he thinks Booker needs to learn? Do you agree with James that “you have to learn to be African American?” How might one “learn to be African American?”

What is your reaction to the charge that Cory Booker is not “really black”? What criteria are the people who make this accusation using to determine racial identity? What criteria do you use? What criteria do people use to determine the “authenticity” of other races? What are some of the repercussions of those definitions and assumptions?

How are claims about authenticity of racial identity used, as Booker campaigner Sheria Brown says, to keep black people “separate and divided amongst ourselves?” What are the sources of the tension between different groups of African Americans (for example, between light- and dark-skinned blacks)? Have you seen or experienced that kind of tension? What are its consequences? Have you seen examples of politicians from other racial groups using racial wedges for political gain? If so, describe the impact that the racial wedge strategy has on the community.

Cory Booker acknowledges that he has benefited from the struggles of his parents (who were active in the civil rights movement) and the sacrifices of his ancestors. Nevertheless, he is accused of being “white” by James and his supporters and thus somehow unworthy of claiming this legacy. In your view, what is the best way to honor the legacy of the struggles against slavery and for civil rights? Do you think that Booker reflects or rejects that legacy?

Does the unique legacy of slavery mean that black candidates in the U.S. have a different set of obligations than candidates

who are not black? If so, describe what those obligations are, why candidates should fulfill them, and why non-black candidates should be exempt from them.

Booker represents the first generation of African Americans to be born after the civil rights movement. He, and others of his generation, had significant opportunities that were not afforded to the generations before them. How do you think those opportunities and experiences shaped their views? Is there a difference in the way that different generations view race and politics? In your own community, are there generational divisions on important issues? How might you bridge some of those gaps?

### The Role of Media

Filmmaker Marshall Curry is prevented from filming at Sharpe James events. What rights should media have in terms of candidate access? Should all campaign events be open to all media makers? Does the type of media make a difference (e.g., journalists, bloggers, documentarians, entertainers)? Does someone who is holding public office have different obligations in terms of allowing media access than a private citizen who is running for office? If so, how open to media coverage is a public official required to be?

Media label the strong-arm tactics “rough and tumble politics” or “shenanigans.” Do these labels accurately describe what you see in the film? If you were a reporter, how would you describe the campaign tactics that you see in the film?

When you seek information about candidates, where do you go to find in-depth reporting? Is such reporting available in the media most accessible to you? If not, what might you do to ask for improved coverage?

The film shows a significant difference of opinion within the black community. In your experience, do media generally portray the African American community as diverse? Have you seen instances where media paints the African American community as monolithic? What is the impact of such portrayals?



## Discussion Prompts

### Urban Issues

When you get past the nasty campaign tactics, what issues are at stake in this election? How do the issues raised by these candidates differ from or mirror issues in your own community?

Booker suggests that the \$200,000 paycheck received by Newark's current mayor is too high, as is the pay for city council members. What do your representatives earn? How does their pay compare to similar legislators in other cities or to other employees in your city? Do you think the compensation is fair? Why or why not?

One of the issues raised by Cory Booker is affordable housing. He notes that the city of Newark has destroyed 10,200 housing project units but only built 2,500 units to replace them. What kinds of affordable housing are available in your community? Does the supply match the demand? If not, what actions would you suggest that local officials take to address the problem?



## Taking Action



*Cory Booker talks to a Newark resident.*

Photo courtesy of "Street Fight"

- Name one thing in the film that made you angry. Brainstorm ways that you might have effectively dealt with or responded to the source of your anger. Choose one action from your list that you could take in the next election in your town.
- Name one thing in the film that gives you hope. Brainstorm ways that you might take action to transform that inspiration into action.
- Bring together African American elders and young people to share their experiences and perspectives with one another. Help the generations find common ground and ask each to identify what they can learn (or have learned) from the other.
- Host a pre-election, non-partisan workshop to identify appropriate and inappropriate campaign tactics. Have the group draft a statement outlining those tactics and ask candidates in all local elections to sign an agreement that they will abide by the directives in the statement
- Create a non-partisan, ombudsman-type organization or place where people can report campaign irregularities in local elections. Work with community organizations to decide how to publicize and/or respond to reports received.



## Resources

### Websites

#### THE FILM

##### **P.O.V.'s Street Fight Website**

**[www.pbs.org/pov/pov2005/streetfight](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2005/streetfight)**

The *Street Fight* companion website offers exclusive streaming video clips from the film and a wealth of additional resources, including a Q&A with filmmaker Marshall Curry, ample opportunities for viewers to “talk back” and talk to each other about the film, and the following special features:

##### **NEWARK: A BRIEF HISTORY**

From Puritan stronghold to industrial mecca to one of the poorest cities in the U.S., Newark, New Jersey, has undergone a series of radical transformations. Learn more about what this “Renaissance City” has in store for the 21st century.

##### **A GREAT BLACK HOPE**

Exclusive to P.O.V.: Chicago Tribune columnist Clarence Page puts the campaign in Newark into context with what is going on across the country. Find out why Cory Booker, Barak Obama, and other younger leaders are signs of the changing times.

##### **BLACK MAYORS: NEWARK IN CONTEXT**

The first black mayors of major U.S. cities were elected in 1967. Since the 1970s, nearly every large city in America has had a black mayor at some point over the past 30 years. Find out more about America’s black mayors.

##### **NEWARK AND CORY BOOKER**

**[www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cb\\_25.htm](http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cb_25.htm)** - Transcript of Cory Booker’s remarks to the conservative Manhattan Institute.

**[www.newarknow.org](http://www.newarknow.org)** - Newark Now, the community non-profit founded by Cory Booker after the campaign, provides Newark residents with the tools and resources they need to transform their communities through neighborhood-based associations and tenant organizations.

### What’s Your P.O.V.?

*P.O.V.’s online Talking Back Tapestry is a colorful, interactive representation of your feelings about **Street Fight**.*

*Listen to other P.O.V. viewers talk about the film and add your thoughts by calling 1-800-688-4768. [www.pbs.org/pov/talkingback.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/talkingback.html)*

**[www.corybooker.com](http://www.corybooker.com)** - Cory Booker’s official campaign site provides biographical information as well as Booker’s positions on various issues.

**[www.ci.newark.nj.us](http://www.ci.newark.nj.us)** - The official website of the City of Newark provides statistics, history and other general information. Check the “Meet the Mayor” section for a profile of Sharpe James.

#### CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

**[www.nul.org](http://www.nul.org)** - The mission of the Urban League movement is to enable African Americans to secure economic self-reliance, parity, power and civil rights.

**[www.ncl.org](http://www.ncl.org)** - The website of the National Civic League includes a variety of resources designed to help people increase the level of civic engagement in their communities.

**[www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)** - The website of the non-partisan League of Women Voters provides information about civic participation as well as links to major organizations focused on voting.

#### CAMPAIGN FINANCE / ETHICS IN GOVERNMENT

**[www.publicagenda.org](http://www.publicagenda.org)** - This non-partisan research organization provides a wealth of resources on campaign finance reform, including pending legislation, poll analysis, and more. See especially their issue guide on campaign reform.

Ethics laws are determined at the local level and can be different for federal, state, county, and city officials. You may want to try a search using “ethics in government” and your locality to find the laws that apply to where you live.



## How to Buy the Film

To purchase *Street Fight*  
please visit [www.marshallcurryproductions.com](http://www.marshallcurryproductions.com)



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and entering its 18th season on PBS, the award-

winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running series on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through September, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought over 220 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, P.O.V.'s Borders. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V. is available online at [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov).

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Educational Foundation of America, the Ford Foundation, PBS, and public-television viewers. Support for P.O.V. is provided by Starbucks Coffee Company. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET/Los Angeles, WGBH/Boston, and WNET/New York. Cara Mertes is executive director of P.O.V., a production of American Documentary, Inc.

### **P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education**

P.O.V. provides Discussion Guides for all films as well as curriculum-based P.O.V. Lesson Plans for select films to promote the use of independent media among varied constituencies. Available free online, these originally produced materials ensure the ongoing use of P.O.V.'s documentaries with educators, community workers, opinion leaders and general audiences nationally. P.O.V. also works closely with local public television stations to partner with local museums, libraries, schools, and community-based organizations to raise awareness of the issues in P.O.V.'s films.

### **P.O.V. Interactive** [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, P.O.V.'s Borders. It also produces a Web site for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through community-based and educational applications, focusing on involving viewers in activities, information, and feedback on the issues. In addition, [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov) houses our unique Talking Back feature, filmmaker interviews, and viewer resources, and information on the P.O.V. archives as well as myriad special sites for previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

### **American Documentary, Inc.** [www.americandocumentary.org](http://www.americandocumentary.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying, and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic- engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, on-line, and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

Front cover photo courtesy of "Street Fight"

*Cory Booker talking with voters*

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