



Tribeca Film in partnership with American Express presents

and Hangover Lounge presents

in association with eyepatch productions

a film by Raymond De Felitta

# BOOKER'S PLACE

## A Mississippi story

(USA, HD, B&W, 91 minutes)

### *Select Theatrical Release*

Los Angeles: April 25, 2012 at Noho 7

New York: April 27, 2012 at Quad Cinema

New Orleans: May 20, 2012 at Chalmette Movies 9

Tacoma, WA: August 14, 2012 at Grand Cinema

Cleveland, OH: October 12 at The Cleveland Museum of Art

Available on VOD April 26, 2012

**Distributor: Tribeca Film**  
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## **SYNOPSIS**

In 1965, filmmaker Frank De Felitta made a documentary film for NBC News about the changing times in the American South and the tensions of life in the Mississippi Delta during the civil rights struggle. The film was broadcast in May of 1966 and outraged many Southern viewers, in part, because it included an extraordinary scene featuring a local African-American waiter named Booker Wright. Wright, who worked at a local "whites only" restaurant in Greenwood MS, went on record to deliver a stunning, heartfelt and inflammatory monologue exploding the myth about who he was and how he felt about his position serving the local white community. The fallout for Booker Wright was extreme: He lost his job and was beaten and ostracized by those that considered him "one of their own." Forty-five years after Booker's television appearance, Frank De Felitta's son, director Raymond De Felitta, takes a journey into the Mississippi Yazoo Delta with Booker Wright's granddaughter in search of who Booker Wright was, the mystery surrounding his courageous life and untimely murder, and the role Frank De Felitta's NBC News documentary may have played in it.

BOOKER'S PLACE: A MISSISSIPPI STORY is also the subject of a full Dateline NBC broadcast hosted by Lester Holt and scheduled to air May 20, 2012, at 7pm.

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

My new documentary, BOOKER'S PLACE: A MISSISSIPPI STORY, is a look back at a heroic act in a small Mississippi town at a time of change and the dangerous repercussions it engendered.

It's the story of an illiterate black waiter named Booker Wright who went on NBC news in 1966 and told the truth about his life in Greenwood, Mississippi. It's the story of his granddaughter, Yvette Johnson, who never knew her grandfather, and her search for the truth about his life and mysterious death.

And it's the story of my father, Frank De Felitta—the man who made the film in 1966 that Booker Wright appeared in—and my desire to find out that film was responsible, directly or indirectly, for Booker Wright's murder.

In a peculiar way, Booker Wright is responsible for the film being made, even though he died in 1973. For without Booker's appearance in my father's film, his granddaughter might not have been moved to investigate his life. And without his granddaughter's desire to uncover the truth about his life, I wouldn't have been tempted into exploring the role my father's film played in his family's life. The somewhat stunning confluence of events that brought this film into being could only have happened in the age of the Internet. Wishing to expose my father's superb documentary work from the 1960's to more people, I posted his 1966 documentary "Mississippi: A Self Portrait" on YouTube. My producing partner, David Zellerford, saw it and was shocked and moved by Booker's stunning speech—so much so that he determined to find out what became of Booker and his family. In so doing, Yvette Johnson—Booker's granddaughter—was finally able to view the piece of film featuring her courageous grandfather (She had heard about the legendary appearance he made on NBC news but the film had been buried in the vaults for years and had remained unseen for four decades until I posted it).

So BOOKER'S PLACE: A MISSISSIPPI STORY became a journey for three creative partners—myself, Yvette and David. All of us had personal reasons for discovering more about Booker's life and why he chose to put himself in the glare of a hostile spotlight. My father's courage in including Booker's speech in his film also had dark ramifications—as we discovered when we began to investigate the circumstances surrounding his murder.

What does a documentarian owe his subjects? Is the truth—spoken plainly and in clear sight of harm—always the right thing to show? Was my father's decision to include Booker's speech—which he knew would have a severe impact on his subject's life—the correct one? What is a non-fiction filmmaker's moral obligation to his subjects and to his audience? All of these questions have been on my mind since I made my first documentary five years ago (TIS AUTUMN: THE SEARCH FOR JACKIE PARIS). I think all significant documentaries raise these issues by the very nature of the form. Certainly when I watch two of my favorites, CAPTURING THE FREEDMANS and GREY GARDENS, I wonder about the subjects' reactions to the films about their lives and how they felt about having exposed themselves so nakedly.

How did Booker Wright feel about what he said in "Mississippi: A Self Portrait"? We'll never know for sure. But when I watch Booker Wright in my father's film, I see a man who—whether he knew it in so many words—understood the power of film and the impact he could have by simply telling the whole truth about how it felt to be a black citizen of the southern United States. I see a man who stared at my father's cameras and didn't blink. I see a man who probably knew very well that he was forever changing his life in the those two minutes it took to speak to the news crew. And I see my father, an intrepid documentarian of the turbulent times he was living in, stepping up to Booker Wright's courageous decision and allowing him the platform to say the unsayable—to speak to an audience that he would otherwise never have had.

Nearly fifty years later, the film and Booker Wright live on.

**FEATURING INTERVIEWS WITH**

Yvette Johnson  
Frank De Felitta  
Vera Douglas  
Katherine Jones

and  
Raymond De Felitta

also  
John T. Edge  
Senator David Jordan  
Marie Tribit  
Benton Johnson  
Margurite Butler  
Walter Williams  
Leroy Jones  
Judge Grey Evans  
Governor William Winter  
Charlot Ray  
Allen Wood, Jr.  
Karen Pinkston  
Alix Sanders  
Silas McGhee  
Hodding Carter III  
Representative Willie Bailey  
Judge Johnnie E. Walls  
Pastor Calvin E. Collins  
Jess Pinkston  
Erlene Smith

## **FILMMAKERS**

Directed by  
Raymond De Felitta

Produced by  
David Zellerford

Co-producer  
Yvette Johnson

Executive Producer  
Steven C. Beer

Executive Producer  
Lynn Roer

Photographed by  
Joe Victorine

Edited by  
George Gross

Original Score by  
David Cieri

Production Manager  
Moitri Ghosh

Associate Producer  
Nicki Newburger

Post-Production Supervisor  
Alessandra Bellizia

Additional Photography  
Joe Russell  
Michael Mayer  
Graham Willoughby

Location Sound  
Orion Gordon

Editorial Consultant  
John Wayland

Music Supervisor  
John Scheaffer

Title Design and Animation by Bionic Media

## BIOS

### RAYMOND DE FELITTA (Director)

Raymond De Felitta was nominated in 1990 for an Academy Award for Live Action Short Film at the 63rd Academy Awards for his AFI thesis short, BRONX CHEERS. In 1995, he wrote and directed CAFÉ SOCIETY starring Frank Whaley, Peter Gallagher and Lara Flynn Boyle, which premiered in the Director's Fortnight section at Cannes. In 2000, De Felitta wrote and directed the indie film TWO FAMILY HOUSE (Lionsgate), which won the Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival along with an Independent Spirit Award nomination for Best Screenplay. In 2003 he directed Paul Reiser's THE THING ABOUT MY FOLKS (Picture House), which received the Audience Award at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival. In 2006, he directed his first documentary, 'TIS AUTUMN: THE SEARCH FOR JACKIE PARIS (Outsider Pictures), which premiered at Sundance and won the Best Jazz Documentary at the Kansas City Filmmakers Jubilee. In 2009, De Felitta wrote and directed the independent hit CITY ISLAND (Anchor Bay), which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival, winning the Audience Award and opening in theaters nationwide to critical acclaim.

### DAVID ZELLERFORD (Producer)

David Zellerford formed Hangover Lounge, Inc., in 2006 with partner Raymond De Felitta as a production company dedicated to digital feature-length works of non-fiction and is currently in various phases of development and production on several feature projects. He was awarded the esteemed Anheuser-Busch/Ang Lee Fellowship for his short films at alma mater NYU where he completed his MFA. His first feature film, FIVE YEARS (Cinemavault), garnered the "Best Feature Film" Award at the Victoria Independent Film Festival (British Columbia, Canada), and has appeared in more than 30 film festivals worldwide. His feature documentary, 'TIS AUTUMN: THE SEARCH FOR JACKIE PARIS (Outsider Pictures) premiered at Sundance and in subsequent theatrical release to critical acclaim. As the Producer of award-winning content that includes feature films and commercial campaigns with eyepatch productions and Ogilvy and Mather, New York, his work has been seen by millions of people on every continent in motion picture frames of every possible size.

### FRANK DE FELITTA (as Himself)

Frank De Felitta is an award winning writer, documentarian, director, producer and novelist. His career in network television began as a writer in the "Golden Age of Television" penning dramatic works for such shows as "Suspense," "Campbell Soundstage," "Tales of Tomorrow" and "Adventure." In the 1960's he moved into documentary filmmaking for network television. At NBC News, he wrote, produced and directed award winning hour-long documentaries, among them "Battle of the Bulge," "The American Image," "The World of the Teenager," "Emergency Ward" and "Mississippi: A Self Portrait." Along the way he garnered several Writers Guild nominations, two Emmy nominations and a Peabody Award. Moving to Los Angeles in the 1970's, he moved into narrative feature filmmaking, penning the screenplays for films such as ANZIO, THE SAVAGE IS LOOSE, as well as writing half a dozen best-selling novels. *Audrey Rose*, published in 1976, spent 22 weeks on top of the New York Times best-selling paperback list and was made into a movie in 1977, for which he contributed the screenplay. Other novels include *The Entity* (also made into a movie) and the cult classic *Sea Trial*.

### **YVETTE JOHNSON (co-Producer)**

Yvette Johnson grew up in San Diego never really knowing but always curious about her Southern roots. She graduated from Northern Arizona University with a BA in Liberal Studies where she started The Booker Wright Project ([www.bookerwright.com](http://www.bookerwright.com)) – a blog where she collects her research and musings about her grandfather and her efforts to understand the place and culture in which he lived. As a direct result of her interest in her grandfather's story, the filmmakers of BOOKER'S PLACE: A MISSISSIPPI STORY decided to join her on her journey to learn about Booker Wright and the two worlds he straddled in Greenwood, Mississippi where he was a waiter in a 'whites only' steakhouse but also owned his own restaurant on the 'black' side of town. She is currently writing a book about her grandfather's life, his death, and how her quest to understand him finally helped her come to terms with her own complicated feelings about race. She lives in Phoenix, Arizona with her husband and their two delightful children whom she has the pleasure of home schooling.

### **JOE VICTORINE (Cinematographer)**

Joe Victorine specializes in Digital Cinema Technology with an industry background as both a lighting technician and a camera assistant (an uncommon, yet deliberate, tact). He brings a lively and always lustrous approach to the shaping of light and shadow. His work extracts the grit and raw human emotion from images that can be solicited only from constant observation, deliberate camera placement, and movement. Joe studied art and film theory at Vassar College, and expanded his expertise through film tech courses at NYU. His extensive knowledge comes from a vast array of work that includes commercial shoots, reality television, narrative storytelling, fashion, music and corporate videos, in addition to his feature work. He is as comfortable in the lullaby cotton fields of the Mississippi Delta, as he is in the fast-paced, run-and-gun scenarios on the streets of New York City. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife and cat, and frequently can be found tinkering with his cameras and bicycles, climbing rocks or practicing yoga, when he's not on a shoot.

### **GEORGE GROSS (Editor)**

George Gross is a New York City-based director/editor. Most recently Gross shot, directed and edited a short film winning top prizes at the NY 48-Hour Film Festival, including Best Film. Gross is finishing up post-production on a comedy pilot called "Breaking the News" about a local news team. Inspired by the documentary process with BOOKER'S PLACE: A MISSISSIPPI STORY, Gross is currently in production of a documentary series called "Why Here Now". The series profiles industrious, driven people, telling the stories of where they live and why. Gross is responsible for bringing the cult-classic film THE ROOM to NYC, which he screened to sold-out audiences for nearly three years. Also, his short story humor book *Clouds That Look Like Dogs* is available at [blurb.com](http://blurb.com).

### **DAVID CIERI (Composer)**

David Cieri is a composer, pianist, and improviser who resides and works in New York City. Most recently, David has been writing and performing music for Ken Burns documentaries, including THE NATIONAL PARKS, THE TENTH INNING, PROHIBITION and THE ROOSEVELTS due to premiere on PBS in 2014. David continues to play throughout the city, most recently performing his original compositions at Carnegie Hall. David has four records that exemplify his interest in exploring the musical spaces between free improvisation and structure. He feels deep gratitude for these life-giving opportunities through music and looks forward to an ever-renewed sense of community into the undrawn future.

**STEVEN C. BEER (Executive Producer)**

Steven C. Beer has served as counsel to numerous award-winning writers, directors and producers. He also represents industry leading film production, film finance and film distribution companies. Steven has served as counsel to numerous multi-platinum musical artists and has worked with high-profile production companies and record labels.

**LYNN ROER (Executive Producer)**

Lynn Roer is the Director of Moving Images, Alternative Content and Events for Eyepatch Productions, New York. BOOKER'S PLACE: A MISSISSIPPI STORY is her second feature documentary to premiere at the Tribeca International Film Festival – In 2004, BROTHERHOOD, a film about life in the FDNY post-9/11, also premiered at Tribeca. She is delighted to be bringing meaningful content to Tribeca film audiences.

eyepatch productions is the independent in-house production company of Ogilvy & Mather, New York.



## MUSIC PUBLISHING

### “Mother and Child”

Composed and performed by David Cieri  
Published by DGC Publishing (BMI)

“Cool Drink of Water Blues” (Traditional)  
Arranged and performed by John Dudley  
Published by Odyssey Productions, Inc.  
On behalf of the Estate of Alan Lomax

### “Meridian Dream”

Composed and performed by David Cieri  
Published by DGC Publishing (BMI)

### “Clarksdale Mill Blues”

Arranged and performed by John Dudley  
Published by Odyssey Productions, Inc.  
On behalf of the Estate of Alan Lomax

### “Five Smooth Stones”

Composed by David Cieri  
Performed by David Cieri, Jay Frederick,  
Josh Sinton and Gilad Ronen  
Published by DGC Publishing (BMI)

### “Goodbye To All That”

Composed and performed by David Cieri  
Published by ICM

### “Meditation 9”

Composed and performed by David Cieri  
Published by DGC Publishing (BMI)

### “Getting Ready To Move Up Stairs”

Published by Odyssey Productions, Inc.  
On behalf of the Estate of Alan Lomax

### “The Clockwise Bride”

Composed by David Cieri  
Performed by David Cieri and Jay Frederick  
Published by DGC Publishing (BMI)

### “Lives and Labor”

Composed by David Cieri  
Performed by David Cieri and Estelle Bajou  
Published by DGC Publishing (BMI)

### “St. Louis Blues”

Composed by P.J. Handy  
Performed by David Cieri

### “Piano Boogie”

Performed by Memphis Slim  
Published by Odyssey Productions, Inc.  
On behalf of the Estate of Alan Lomax

### “Wineglass, Sax, Bass”

Composed by David Cieri  
Performed by David Cieri,  
Rebecca Mahalek and Mike Brown  
Published by DGC Publishing (BMI)

### “Hold On” (Traditional)

Performed by David Cieri  
and Ageless Praise  
Published by DGC Publishing (BMI)

### “God is Good” (Traditional)

Arrangement by Chester D. T. Baldwin,  
Performed by Rev. Kenneth Milton, Sr.,  
Nathaniel Rosebur and Chris Davis  
Vocals by Wanda Young and the New Zion  
Missionary Baptist Church Sanctuary Choir Published  
by CDT Baldwin Songs (BMI)

### “The Silent Run”

Composed and performed by David Cieri  
Published by DGC Publishing (BMI)

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