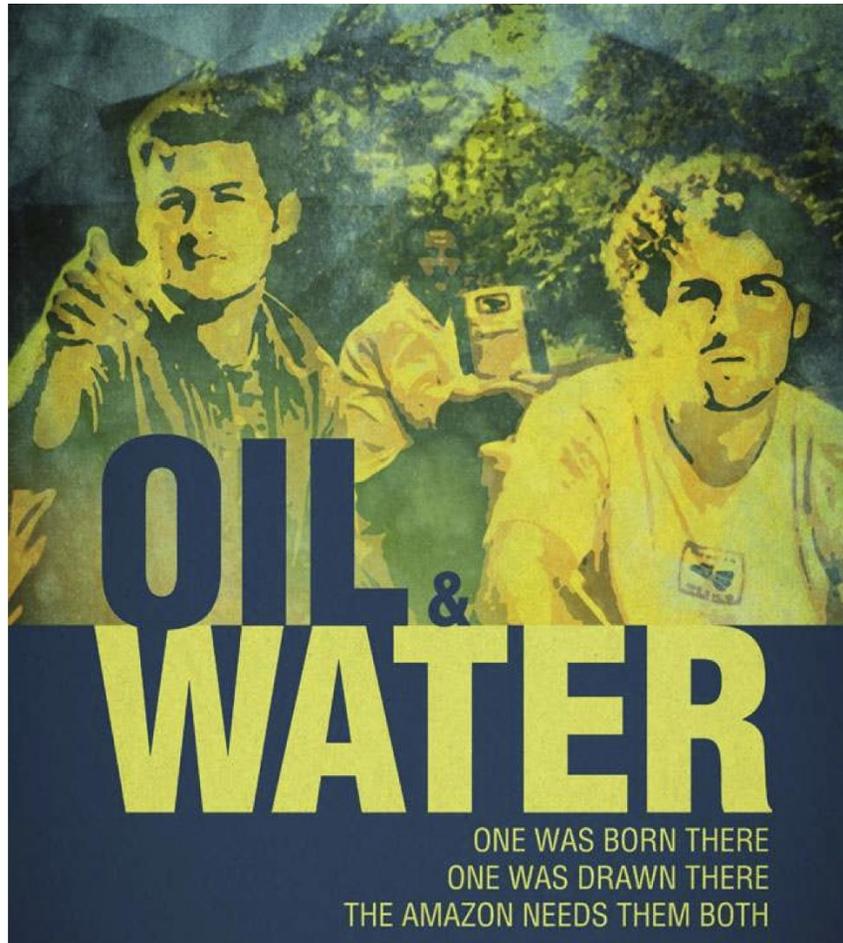


STIR IT UP PRODUCTIONS &
ITVS present

a film by LAUREL SPELLMAN SMITH &
FRANCINE STRICKWERDA



TRT: 55 min | USA | English | Color

World Television Premiere: Sunday, September 21 on the (PBS) World Channel + VOD at
<http://video.pbs.org/program/global-voices/>

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LOGLINE

One was born there. One was drawn there. The Amazon needs them both.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

OIL & WATER follows two boys coming of age in the middle of a toxic disaster. Hugo fights for the survival of his Amazonian tribe, while David attempts to revolutionize the oil industry. Their journeys lead them to explore a more just future for people around the world born with oil beneath their feet.

MEDIUM SYNOPSIS

Most people are well aware of the continuing destruction of the Amazon rainforest, but relatively few people know about the devastation beneath this rich ecosystem in Ecuador. From the early 70s to the 90s, oil companies contaminated vast swaths of pristine jungle by slopping billions of gallons of toxic waste into unlined pits. OIL & WATER portrays this environmental disaster from the unique perspectives of young people at both ends of the spectrum - Hugo Lucitante, from the indigenous Cofan tribe in Ecuador, and David Poritz, from Amherst, Massachusetts. Hugo, sent at age 10 by his tribe to get an American education, graduated from Seattle's Bishop Blanchet High School in 2006. David first became aware of the oil catastrophe while researching a 6th-grade school project and made a commitment ever since to bring justice to the Amazon. This engaging doc follows the two teenagers with their feet in both worlds as their paths intersect over the next six years. While still in college, David fights an uphill battle to establish a "fair trade" certification system for oil production. Meanwhile, Hugo gets married to Sadie, a friend from his American high school, and the couple moves back and forth between his Cofan lands and the U.S. to save up for college. OIL & WATER is a sobering look at the enormous pressures David and Hugo face, but it also demonstrates how two determined people can make a positive difference in the world.

LONG SYNOPSIS

The filmmakers first began filming OIL & WATER in Seattle where they learned about Hugo Lucitante via a newspaper story. When Lucitante was 10 years old, his tribe made a desperate decision. Fearing extinction, the Cofan sent him to be educated in Seattle, in hopes that he would return to lead them into a better future. A decade later in 2006, the filmmakers followed Lucitante as he graduated from Seattle's Bishop Blanchet High School, wearing a crown of parrot feathers and a boar's tooth necklace. They followed Lucitante as he returned to the Ecuadorian Amazon to meet his destiny, armed only with a high school diploma.

David Poritz was just a sixth-grader when he learned of the oil disaster in Lucitante's homeland. With the blessing of his mother, Poritz started a humanitarian aid project that led him away from his home in Amherst, Massachusetts to spend much of his youth in the Amazon. As young teens, Poritz and Lucitante met by chance during a shared canoe ride, and then later, when the pair traveled to tour the damage cause by the 18 billion gallons of oil waste that was dumped on Hugo's ancestral lands. The area's people experience unexplainable rashes, childhood deformities and ballooning cancer rates. OIL & WATER follows the young men back to the U.S., as their lives and the situation in Ecuador get more complicated.



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Lucitante struggles with culture shock, the demands of learning to be a Cofan tribal leader, and becoming a husband. He married Sadie, a Lebanese-American girl and she moved from Seattle to make a home with Hugo in the jungle. Hardship pushed the couple back to the U.S. where Lucitante was forced to shoulder two minimum wage jobs. Through it all, the tribe looks to Lucitante for help fending off oil prospectors pushing deeper into the rainforest. A significant oil deposit lies under Hugo's village, and it's only a matter of time before their world could be lost forever.

While still a college student at Brown University, David launched the world's first international company to certify oil as "fair trade," meaning that it is drilled in a safer and more ethical way. The film also shows David and his seven employees in Ecuador in the early stages of certifying their first customer, Petroamazonas, the state-controlled oil company of Ecuador. David's approach could be a whopping game changer for the oil industry. OIL & WATER explores what could be a revolution as it was being led by a 22-year-old.

Can Hugo become the leader his tribe so urgently wants him to be? Will David clean up one of the world's dirtiest industries? OIL & WATER is an intimate portrait of two young people finding their voices and trying to beat incredible odds.

DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

We once heard a documentary filmmaker say that when you choose an idea for a film, you need to date it a while, and make sure you can fall in love with it. Because you will be eating, drinking and sleeping with it for a long time. It made us laugh, because it's so true. But for us, it's also about how a human story can knock the wind out of you with it's brilliance, and then how it will haunt and nag you until you have no choice but to make your film. That's how we got to making OIL & WATER, which we began filming in 2006.

One morning we found an article in the *Seattle Times* telling the story of a teenager from an Amazonian tribe who was graduating from a local high school. The Cofan tribe of Ecuador, numbering less than 2,000 people, had sent 10-year-old Hugo Lucitante from Ecuador to the U.S. to get a Western education.

We made a few phone calls and by that same evening, we were on our way to the airport with a camera. Hugo's entire family arrived in Seattle to see him march in his graduation ceremony. He was the first Cofan to graduate from an American high school, and their hopes were riding on him.

We learned that an oil disaster had occurred on Hugo's ancestral land, and the situation was so bad that news reports called it a "rainforest Chernobyl." A few months later, we ran across a story about a young American from Amherst, Massachusetts, who had worked on the legal case against Texaco. A class-action lawsuit dealing with the oil disaster had been filed in Ecuador, and teen-age David Poritz had been there to witness it. David's experience on the case led him to do humanitarian aid work in the jungle, and as a teenager he had ventured places only the most seasoned of travelers would go, often alone.

We saw many parallels in Hugo and David's stories. Here were two boys, each with a mythic backstory, who almost seemed to have traded places in the universe. They were taking on a Goliath of our times. Hugo and David were both deeply affected by what had happened in Ecuador, and we wondered if we could tell the story of the disaster through their experience. We like to say that we are from the "Mary Poppins School" of filmmaking and that a little sugar helps the medicine go down. Here was the perfect chance to tell a character-driven environmental story that was hopeful and inspirational.

We started filming David at his high school graduation. David was planning to lead a group of students on a "toxic tour" in Ecuador the following month, and we decided to ask if Hugo could come along. Both boys

were eager to make the trip together, and it turned out they had already met. Hugo remembered his surprise at finding a young American traveling solo in the jungle, and had given him a ride in his canoe.

Shortly before we left for Ecuador, our director of photography let us know he wouldn't be able to make the trip. As filmmakers, we were a team of two producer/directors with years of experience in the field, but little technical knowledge. That was about to change. With our plane tickets in hand and our bags packed, we didn't have time to find a new photographer, so we put ourselves through a quick camera, lighting and sound boot camp and we headed for Ecuador.

Looking back, we had no idea that Hugo and David would become such fascinating young men. We didn't realize just how close the oil companies were to making another assault on Cofan land. And we certainly didn't imagine that we'd be telling the story of a startling effort to revolutionize the oil industry.

We are hopeful that the Cofan will be able to save their culture and their land, and we are in awe of their strength and perseverance. It's been an honor to spend the past eight years following Hugo and David, and we are grateful to them for sharing their stories.

ABOUT THE FILM'S SUBJECT MATTER

Between 1972 and 1992, Texaco and Petroecuador drilled for oil in the Ecuadorian Amazon. With no strict government protections, more than 18.5 billion gallons of toxic wastewater was dumped into hundreds of unlined sludge pits and spilled from pipelines. The oil seeped into the rivers and wetlands of the rainforest, contaminating water the people used for drinking, bathing and fishing. The area's people suffered unexplained rashes and a surge in cancer rates. To date, this is still one of the world's worst oil-related disasters.

In 1993, the first class-action suit against Texaco was filed in a New York federal court on behalf of affected indigenous people and settlers. In the two decades since, a roller coaster of legal judgments and appeals as well as new lawsuits filed by new attorneys has followed. Texaco was acquired by Chevron in 2001, and today, the bitterly fought claims against Chevron remain tied up in U.S. and foreign courts.

Neither the oil companies nor the Ecuadorian government has cleaned up all the contamination. While drilling practices on the ground have greatly improved, oil spills still happen with alarming regularity. And as oil companies prospect ever deeper into the rainforest, indigenous tribes are being pushed to the edge of their territories. By law, all rights to the oil beneath the surface of the rainforest belong to the government of Ecuador, putting tribes like the Cofan on a collision course with big oil, and endangering their very existence.

Q&A WITH DIRECTORS/PRODUCERS LAUREL SPELLMAN SMITH & FRANCINE STRICKWERDA

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced in making OIL & WATER?

We had two amazing characters with stories that were bigger than life. The challenge came in weaving their stories together and doing them both justice. We often felt that we should be making two films instead of one, but at the same time, knew we were on the right track because the perspectives of Hugo and David were so complementary. We had six years worth of footage; there was a lot of great stuff we had to leave on the cutting room floor. But we're very happy with how the film turned out.

How did you gain the trust of Hugo and the Cofan tribe?

The Cofan people seemed skeptical about us at first. They'd had experiences with other film crews where people came in and filmed, and then left with the footage and the villagers never got to see what was created, and I think they felt used and resentful about that. Also, film crews in the jungle are pretty needy. We couldn't survive without our Cofan hosts, and we needed a lot of help finding our way. During our first trip to Cofan territory, Hugo's family sometimes seemed amused or annoyed with us, but mostly they were kind and had a sense of humor. And that came in handy from the start. Laurel and I entered the village for the first time wearing these huge, plastic yellow ponchos. We had been riding in a canoe under the hot sun and rain all day and were wobbly from the travel. The first thing we did was tumble out of the canoe and into the mud. It wasn't our proudest moment, and it wasn't the last time we'd appear to be buffoons.

I think we won the Cofan over because we just kept making the film, and we kept coming back to the village for more interviews. It was a similar experience with Hugo and David who were still teenagers when we first met them. We weren't cool, but they seemed to forgive us for our lack of hipness, and eventually appreciated us because we cared so much about their stories. Our perseverance paid off.

What would you have liked to have included in the film that didn't make the cut?

We would have liked to be able to show more of Hugo's family visiting Seattle and experiencing American culture. Luckily we were able to include this in our theatrical version.

Any interesting anecdotes you'd like to share with regard to the making of OIL & WATER?

Laurel: Every bug in the Ecuadorian jungle got a nice feast when Francine and I came to film. I would cover every part of my body except my fingers on the camera but the sand flies would still end up biting every knuckle. I'm sure the whole village could hear us screaming at night when large bugs perched on our mosquito nets. Showering and using the "bathroom" were particularly harrowing experiences.

Francine: The bugs and heat were serious and just one more reason to admire our Cofan hosts. Without their help and guidance we would have been toast.

What films were/are the most influential on your own work?

Laurel: CANE TOADS: AN UNNATURAL HISTORY (1988) was the first documentary I truly loved. It's educational and hilarious.

Francine: I was inspired to be a filmmaker after seeing Michael Moore's ROGER AND ME, and I loved his show TV Nation. It was just beyond brilliant. Later, Laurel and I had the opportunity to work with John De Graaf and Vivia Boe on their PBS films Affluenza and Escape from Affluenza, and we appreciated their ability to skewer the culture in both a pointed and good natured way. Other favorite films are Judith Helfand's Blue Vinyl, Spencer Tunick's Naked States, and I'll watch anything by Morgan Spurlock.

What advice do you have for aspiring filmmakers?

Laurel: Run away! Just kidding.

Francine: Choose your story and go for it. Find good mentors you can trust to give you honest advice and critiques, but also trust yourself to know the best way to tell your story. Remember it's a marathon and not a sprint. Be grateful and say thank you a lot, because filmmaking is a team sport and you're going to need

help. And never, ever give up.

What impact do you hope this film will have?

We'd like for the film to spark important discussion on controversial energy issues that few in the current political landscape seem to want to address. Many environmental organizations have eliminated their departments tasked with pushing the oil industry to act more responsibly. Their focus has shifted to the fight against global warming, without dealing with the fact that oil will continue to be drilled for some time into the future. Meanwhile, communities - many of them indigenous - will continue to suffer from the lack of comprehensive and responsible energy policies. We would like to find at least one national partner organization to champion the film with hosted screenings targeted at opinion leaders in the environmental movement, as well as government and industry. These screenings and moderated discussions can influence policy and lead to positive social change.

The general public is confused about the oil industry, and doesn't know where to begin to stop global warming. Meanwhile, opinion leaders in the environmental community seem unable to go beyond the line - "No more oil, full stop." Because we all rely on oil, the overall effect is paralyzing and allows for business to continue as usual. We would argue that this is dangerous for people and the environment. We can fill the void by launching a much needed and nuanced debate. David's attempts to create a "fair trade" style certification system for oil and gas may or may not be the way forward, but we believe it's time to have a conversation about the issues he and Hugo bring to the fore in OIL & WATER.

As David's mentor Manuel Pallares says in the film "The stupidest way of using oil is burning it." But it's going to take time to transition away from oil to sustainable sources of energy, and even then, petroleum will be needed because it's used to make products ranging from solar panels and electric cars to pacemakers and contact lenses. We'd like to see the question tackled: what really is a reasonable, safe, and justifiable plan for consuming oil going forward?

OIL & WATER also shows indigenous people and the poor being abused by the oil industry and fighting back. They are exerting sovereignty over their lands, and in ways one might not expect. Some indigenous people want to exploit the resources on their lands, and others don't. In the case of the Cofan nation, Hugo's own tribe, people feel suspicious of all outsiders including environmental groups, government officials and oil companies. They've felt misrepresented and patronized from having their land rights dictated to them. They especially want economic justice. We think this is a rich area for discussion and action, and appreciate how the film may be used to help advocate for indigenous rights.

We believe our film can help broaden the discourse to include responsible oil consumption and extraction, as well as respect for people living atop the oil - from the fracking zones of North Dakota to the jungles of Ecuador.

Lastly, the environmental devastation that occurred in Ecuador could have been avoided. People were harmed and are still suffering. As filmmakers, we think it's important to keep that story alive so that the international community can help.

FILM SUBJECT BIOS

DAVID PORITZ, 25, grew up in Amherst, Massachusetts. He was a sixth-grader when he learned of widespread oil contamination in the Ecuadorian Amazon and started Esperanza International, Inc.—a humanitarian project that sent shoes, education materials, and medical supplies to affected communities in the region. He spent his high school holidays traveling to Ecuador to lead his classmates on "toxic tours". While a college student at Brown University, David launched Equitable Origin—the world's first system to certify oil exploration and production as socially and environmentally responsible. In addition to

his work as the President of Equitable Origin, David recently graduated from Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar. He lives in New York City.

HUGO LUCITANTE, 27, was born into the Cofán tribe of Amazonian Ecuador where decades of reckless oil drilling has contaminated the region. When Hugo was ten years old, his parents sent him to America for an education in hopes that he would return to lead his tribe towards a better future. After receiving his high school diploma, he returned to his village and was elected to be the tribe's Community Development Organizer. Hugo is now back in the U.S. working and attending college. He lives in Seattle with his wife and daughter. His goal is to raise awareness of the Cofán tribe and raise funding for a health clinic and traditional medicinal garden for his village.

FILMMAKER BIOS

FRANCINE STRICKWERDA (Director, Producer) is a principal in Seattle-based production company, Hullabaloo, and an award-winning director, writer and producer of documentary films and Web sites. She co-directed the feature film OIL & WATER for PBS and the acclaimed documentary BUSTING OUT, about American attitudes toward the female breast, which aired on Showtime. In addition to working on local and national shows at Seattle's KCTS Public Television including AFFLUENZA and ESCAPE FROM AFFLUENZA, she produced and executive edited the national PBS Web sites DON'T BUY IT, VIDEOGAME REVOLUTION, and EXPLORING SPACE, and was a senior producer at HealthTalk.com (<http://HealthTalk.com>). She has also created videos for clients including the United Nations, Fortune 500 companies and the Seattle Fire Department. Francine began her career as a reporter for newspapers in Washington and Idaho. She has a degree in communications (journalism) from the Edward R. Murrow College of Communication at Washington State University.

LAUREL SPELLMAN SMITH (Director, Producer) is a two-time regional Emmy Award-winning producer of national and local programs for PBS including THE NEWSHOUR with Jim Lehrer and the documentary FAITH & FEAR: THE CHILDREN OF KRISHNA. She became an independent producer in 2003 and in addition to OIL & WATER she co-directed and produced the women's health documentary BUSTING OUT which aired on Showtime and the Iraq War documentary THE CORPORAL'S DIARY, seen on PBS stations, Al Jazeera English and Link TV. She is also a fan of other people's films and is an annual juror for the News and Documentary Emmy Awards. Laurel grew up in Los Angeles and Kauai before making a home in Seattle with her husband and cat. She graduated from The Evergreen State College, where she studied film and cultural anthropology, pursuing her interest in the latter by traveling to over 100 countries.

FILM CREDITS

OIL & WATER

Written, Produced and Directed by
Laurel Spellman Smith
Francine Strickwerda

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Tracy Dethlefs

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Additional Camera

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