

America, Fuck Yeah!

Contributed by MATT COKER
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Manners, shock value, traditional values and freedom of speech all collide in *Fuck: A Fuckumentary*

A title like *Fuck: A Fuckumentary* should fill plenty of Edwards Island seats for its April 23 screening as part of the 2006 Newport Beach Film Festival. When enough people discover it's a film with such talking heads as Steven Bochco, Pat Boone, Ben Bradlee, Drew Carey, Chuck D., Billy Connolly, Sam Donaldson, Janeane Garofalo, Ice-T, Ron Jeremy, Alan Keyes, Bill Maher, Dave Marsh, Judith "Miss Manners" Martin, Michael Medved, David Milch, Alanis Morissette, Tera Patrick, Dennis Prager, David Shaw, Kevin Smith and Hunter S. Thompson—in probably his final filmed interview—all coming together to discuss the word fuck, it should be a guaranteed sellout.

But there's oh so much more to Steve Anderson's documentary. Mixing those and other one-on-one interviews with archival footage, man-on-the-streets and clever animation by Bill Plympton, *Fuck* gets at why fuck has so much power.

Hyperbole? No fucking way, dude. Not when one falsely slipped fuck during a live broadcast can bring down a television network. Not when mommies drive their Voyagers off cliffs upon hearing little Johnny unleash his first fuck from the car seat. Not when the word's long and steady creep into everyday culture has been used by some misguided souls to deny you your constitutional rights.

"A lot of freedoms in this country are being eroded, especially with the FCC and religious right having their way with George Bush in office," says Anderson, who is battling the lingering effects of the flu as he speaks on the phone just before stepping onto a plane for yet another film festival. "Freedom of speech is something that always needs to be debated. If not, it could slip away.

"It's like Lenny Bruce says in the film, that if you can't say fuck, you can't say fuck the government. You can't say fuck George Bush, fuck whatever. It's an opinion we have a right to express, and I don't want to have that right taken away from me."

Just a breezy 93 minutes long, *Fuck: A Fuckumentary* is every bit as entertaining as it is informative, which is probably why it's already become a proven winner on the film-festival circuit since its November debut.

"It caters to them because it's a little edgy, and festivals try to be a little edgy," says Anderson.

Depending on the company you keep, fuck can be part of casual conversation or it can be the ultimate exclamation point to a particularly heated exchange. As the old George Carlin routine went, fuck somehow changed along the way from being solely a crude way to describe sexual intercourse to a synonym for great violence, death even. Of course, Carlin took that notion to far more hilarious extremes, changing a standard line from old TV westerns to, "We're gonna fuck you, sheriff. But we're gonna fuck you slow."

Anderson's film makes similar, seamless shifts from the sexual to the violent and back to the sexual again (and even the violent sexual, as porn star Tera Patrick and her husband, Biohazard singer and Oz star Evan Seinfeld, are only too happy to share while describing their various coital positionings). Perhaps *Fuck*'s greatest public service is dispelling the old wives' tales about the word's origins. Surely you know folks who will swear on a stack of Bibles that fuck is an acronym for Fornication Under Consent of the King or For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge. Not true, not true.

But describing all things fuck over footage and 'toons is one thing. How the hell did Anderson get all these celebrities to appear in his documentary?

First, you have to know more about him. Anderson worked at the PBS station in his native Rochester, New York, for several years, racking up seven national awards for his documentaries. He moved to California about 15 years ago for a more steady paycheck as a CNN cameraman out of the Los Angeles bureau. Anderson sort of specialized in shooting entertainment events for the 24-hour news channel, something that came in handy when he decided a few years ago to chuck his news career for his true love, filmmaking. The contacts he had made helped get his projects launched.

His first indie feature, *The Big Empty*, starring actor/filmmaker Jon Favreau, didn't lead to a 10-picture deal with Paramount, but it did give him an appreciation for Newport Beach's film festival, which in 2004 bestowed its Outstanding Achievement by a First Time Filmmaker award to Anderson for *Empty*.

But getting stars onboard for a potboiler set in the desert is one thing.

“Well, we did get quite a bit of people questioning it, honestly,” Anderson concedes of the pre-production for Fuck. “Of course, it was called the Untitled F-Word Project a lot of the time, even while we were filming, but we never hid the fact of what it was called.” Since his project put so much import on that one word, he says, “it didn’t seem honest to call it anything but that.”

He says he got past a lot of image-conscious agents and managers thanks to a Rolodex stuffed with celebrities’ home numbers or their most personal contacts, culled from his CNN days.

“I’d call people and say this is what I’m doing, this is a film about this word and freedom of speech and broadcast decency, that we’d kind of put this word really at the center of the debate over free speech. I found that as soon as they heard the word fuck, people had an opinion about it. Four simple letters in one specific order seems to be the tipping point. People on all sides of the issue have opinions about it.”

No one was deceived into appearing in the picture, he maintains, and he assured all participants, even those whose views clashed with his, that any editing would preserve the gist of their arguments.

“Pat Boone was one of the first people to sign up to do the film. You know what you’re getting with Pat Boone. . . . I’m the first to say that my own views on the subject are a little bit to the left, but I made a promise to everyone that their points would get across. . . . Every quote I put in there, that’s what they were.”

That’s especially true of the words mumbled by the good doctor, Hunter S. Thompson, to whom the film is dedicated.

“I’d have to ask Anita, his widow, but as far as I know this was his last filmed interview,” Anderson says. “We filmed it five or six weeks before he died. We spent two days at his compound in Colorado. He’d sleep during the day and get up in the evening like it was supposed to be 6 in the morning to us.

“The first night, he was not feeling well. But the second he went from 9:30 p.m. to 4 in the morning, nonstop. It was really a memorable experience. Just talking on the phone with him before we interviewed him was a trip. He kind of liked the idea of the project and kind of took to us. After a couple of drinks, he just settled right into it.”

Anderson says Thompson got the dedication not just because he passed so soon after the film wrapped, but because the gonzo journalist was “so inspiring. This film was kind of done in the same spirit of what he did.”

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Anderson plans to follow Fuck with a return to feature filmmaking. He has a project tentatively titled Vlad the Impaler (“Imagine if the Coen Brothers did a vampire movie”) that’s generated some sniffs from studios. Unfortunately, all his time these days is going to Fuck.

“It’s kind of hard getting prepared for the next film while promoting this film,” he says. “Once the hard work is over, the hard work starts. I guess I can’t complain. I actually enjoy what I’m doing, and I hope that one of these days I’ll even make a little money.”

He’s also got another little Fuck project going on the side in light of the festival screenings and a planned fall theatrical release by just-inked distributor THINKFilm, which is obviously banking on Fuck following the surprise success of last year’s likewise-profane *The Aristocrats*. Team Fuck is currently tracking how the film gets mentioned on front pages and magazine covers and in film programs. More precisely, they’re logging whether it’s referred to as Fuck, F*ck, F**k, F*** or—swear to God, this has already happened—****.

“The only major newspaper to use the full name uncensored, and I say major because of its size, was in Victoria, British Columbia,” says Anderson, who figures his informal survey results may appear as part of the theatrical release or in future DVD packaging.

Noted in the current version’s end credits is this tidbit: Fuck: A Fuckumentary includes 630 uttered fucks (or fuck variations). But that needs to be appended, Anderson says, because on further review it was discovered that including the number of times the word fuck is seen on screen in written form or heard in songs, the film’s total number of fuck references exceeds 800.

The frank use of fuck has liberated festival audiences, he claims.

“The very fact that people see it allows them to talk about it,” Anderson says. “At the director Q&As, people just love to say it.”

Though the film has been in the can for months, everything fuck-related continues to cross his desk.

“For the past year and a half, I have become the conduit for all things fuck,” he says. “Every friend or business associate passes along a fuck joke or a new fuck-combination word. I’m getting one in my e-mail box right now. It’s proven to be a pretty popular word.

“One thing fuck has going for it is it’s funny. At our screenings, we get raucous laughter. We set out to make it entertaining. We didn’t want some dark polemic about free speech. But in the end, we hope it forces people to think about when it should be used on the radio, when it should be on TV. I’m more conservative than some in that I think there should be limits. It’s something you can say with friends at a bar, but not in church, not at your parents’.”

No, that’d just be fucking rude.

FUCK: A FUCKUMENTARY SCREENS AT EDWARDS ISLAND, NEWPORT BEACH. SUN., APRIL 23, 9 P.M.