

An American Pastoral



© Auberi Edler



Les Films d'Ici Méditerranée and Les Films d'Ici, with the collaboration
of Arte France, present

An American Pastoral

France, 2024

PRESS NOTES

A film by
Auberi Edler

World Premiere
International Documentary Festival in Amsterdam 2024

International Competition
Best Directing Award for Auberi Edler



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SYNOPSIS

An American Pastoral chronicles the struggle within a rural central Pennsylvanian community over the future of their public schools, where a vitriolic debate over books cloaks a more fundamental question: the future of our secular democracy.



Nestled in a valley among Lancaster County’s rolling farmland, Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania has all the charm of small town America. But behind this bucolic veneer lies a fracture in the making.

Change has come to Etown. And nowhere is it more apparent than at the local school board meetings. Like schools across the nation, these once sleepy public meetings have become a toxic theater of grievance. After months of vitriolic debates over Covid-19 restrictions, budget priorities, and library books, four of the five long-serving Republican incumbents have chosen retirement over the prospect of further death threats, intimidation, and likely defeat at the polls.

In this red district, a grassroots movement of far-right dominionist Christians have followed Steve Bannon’s precinct playbook: seizing control of the local Republican committee and securing three school board seats in the last election. With five seats up this cycle, just two seats would secure the far-right’s control over the board and usher in a new, theocratic vision for Etown’s public schools.

An American Pastoral chronicles the struggle of engaged citizens to determine the future of their local public schools. In 2023, voters will choose between three slates: one endorsed by the Democratic party and two competing Republican lists.

In this off-year election, turnout will be low. In this divisive climate, voter education is more important than ever.

After many months of campaigning, the choice is now up to voters. The mandate of those elected to the school board is four years: an eternity. At stake—and everyone here knows it—is the future of public education. At least to start with.





DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Auberi Edler

Elizabethtown. I discovered the town on a frigid February night. After months of probing from afar, I was finally there. My camera concealed to protect it as much from the drizzle as from potentially hostile passersby, I remember standing on the deserted main street, interrupted only by the occasional pickup roaring through.

For 30 years, my personal and professional life has been closely tied to the United States. Yet the images of the Capitol attack on January 6, 2021 shook me to the core. How could I have lost sight of the despair and anger of a large segment of Americans? How long had I passed over the country's vast countryside, its sleepy small towns and abandoned industrial areas? How had the temptation of theocracy, of conservative values from another era, spread so quickly and taken such deep root?

Etown, as the locals call it, is like thousands of small American towns. It, too, is emblematic of the civil and moral divide now plaguing the United States.

The atmosphere is tense, poisoned by fear of the "other," often just a familiar neighbor. Mistrust has devolved into all-pervasive paranoia, rendering communication impossible.

That's what I was contemplating that February evening as I looked out over the heart of this small town, awash in rain, where I knew no one, where every door was still closed to me.

It took time - so much time - to allay fears, to work around enduring hatred. It was through exchanging and listening that invaluable connections were made, by offering everyone, from Christian fundamentalists to progressive Democrats, what they can no longer afford each other: respect.

I discovered generosity where I least expected. And the film's completion hasn't changed that.

An American Pastoral is one of those films that leaves its mark on the filmmaker, like a stitch in the side. A part of me remains in Etown.

Auberi Edler
October 2024

DIRECTOR'S BIO

Auberi Edler is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and cinematographer, based in Paris.

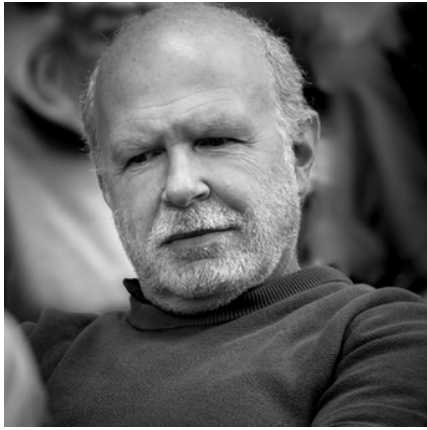
Following a career with France's largest public television network, France 2, as a war reporter, New York bureau chief, and co-director of the news department, she chose to dedicate herself fully to documentary filmmaking.

For the past 17 years, she has written and directed many documentaries, which have been distributed worldwide. Her films focus on social fractures, world politics as well as cinema and photography.

Her most recent filmography includes *1968, Photographic Acts*, exploring the enduring symbolism and politics captured in iconic images from that pivotal year, *Clean Torture: An American Fabrication*, awarded an Etoile de la SCAM in 2020, which reframes the atrocities committed during the War on Terror within a 70-year history of state-sanctioned experimentation, *American Laundry*, awarded an Etoile de la SCAM in 2024, set in a predominantly Latino, working-class suburb of Chicago, exploring the themes of immigrant life, labor and the pursuit of the American Dream. Her latest film, *An American Pastoral*, chronicles the struggle within a rural central Pennsylvanian community over the future of their public schools, where a vitriolic debate over books cloaks a more fundamental question: the future of American secular democracy.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

- 2024 - *An American Pastoral*
- 2022 - *American Laundry*
- 2019 - *Clean Torture: An American Fabrication*
- 2018 - *1968, Photographic Acts*
- 2018 - *Cathy at War*
- 2018 - *Jacquotte et les dockers*
- 2015 - *Il était une fois... Rosetta*
- 2014 - *Land of Dust*
- 2014 - *Il était une fois... Le Havre*
- 2013 - *Il était une fois... Une Séparation*
- 2012 - *L'Équation de l'amour*
- 2011 - *L'île*



PRODUCER

Serge Lalou

After studying veterinary medicine and traveling extensively, Serge Lalou joined the team at Les Films d'Ici in 1987. Since then, he has produced over 500 documentaries and feature films, some of which have won awards at major festivals such as Cannes, Berlin, and Venice. In 2014, Serge Lalou founded Les Films d'Ici Méditerranée with Anne-Marie Luccioni, a production company based in Montpellier, dedicated to discovering and supporting emerging regional talent, producing and co-producing their work to promote them both in France and internationally.

Feature documentaries

- 2024 - *An American Pastoral* by Auberi Edler
- 2021 - *Notturmo* by Gianfranco Rosi
- 2020 - *Yiddish* by Nurith Aviv
- 2018 - *Dead Souls* by Wang Bing
- 2016 - *Fuocoammarre* by Gianfranco Rosi
- 2015 - *Between Fences* by Avi Mograbi
- 2015 - *Chacun sa bonne* by Maher Abi Samra
- 2014 - *We're Still alive* by Carmen Castillo
- 2013 - *La Maison de la Radio* by Nicolas Philibert
- 2013 - *Once I Entered a Garden* by Avi Mograbi
- 2011 - *Michel Petrucciani* by Michael Radford
- 2011 - *Translating* by Nurith Aviv
- 2010 - *We were Communists* by Maher Abi Samra
- 2010 - *Nénette* by Nicolas Philibert

Fiction features

- 2023 - *They Shot the Piano Player* by Fernando Trueba, Javier Mariscal
- 2020 - *Josep* by Aurel
- 2020 - *Last Words* by Jonathan Nossiter
- 2019 - *I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians* by Radu Jude
- 2018 - *Una questione privata* de Paolo et Vittorio Taviani
- 2017 - *Orpheline* by Arnaud des Pallières
- 2014 - *Le vertige des possibles* by Vivianne Perelmutter
- 2013 - *Michael Kohlhaas* by Arnaud des Pallières
- 2008 - *Waltz with Bashir* by Ari Folman
- 2009 - *Burried Secrets* by Raja Amari
- 2009 - *Parc* by Arnaud des Pallières
- 2003 - *Adieu* by Arnaud des Pallières



AN AMERICAN PASTORAL

A film written and directed by
Auberi EDLER

Cinematography
Auberi EDLER

Sound
Lumia PERNICIARO

Editing
Barbara BASCOU

Produced by
Serge LALOU

Associate Producer
Perrine FEMINIER

Original Music
Siegfried CANTO

Sound Mixing
Nathalie VIDAL

Color Grading
Graziella ZANON

LES FILMS D'ICI MÉDITERRANÉE

Les Films d'Ici Méditerranée is a production company founded in Montpellier in 2014. Born from the vision of Serge Lalou and Anne-Marie Luccioni, partners at Les Films d'Ici in Paris, its mission is to discover, produce, and co-produce projects led by authors living and/or working in Occitanie or Mediterranean basin countries.

Les Films d'Ici Méditerranée seeks to support these creators locally in France and internationally. From documentary to fiction and animation, the aim is to foster a diverse and rich range of creative works. This company also aims to contribute to the development of skills and production resources to produce regional works that stand alongside the best in national and international production.

ABOUT MEDIAWAN RIGHTS

A Paris-based independent distribution company, Mediawan's catalogue offers hundreds of hours of high quality and diversified documentaries, with a strong focus on History, Arts & Culture and Current Affairs programs. They distribute, finance and co-produce programmes for the international market and are looking for ambitious and compelling projects with a global appeal. Their recent titles include *Soundtrack to a Coup D'Etat* directed by Johan Grimont, *Flavor of Iraq* directed by Léonard Cohen, and *Nuclear Now* directed by Oliver Stone.

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