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Program companion website: www.pbs.org/thunderinguyana



INDEPENDENT LENS's "THUNDER IN GUYANA" INCREDIBLE STORY OF JANET ROSENGERG JAGAN, FIRST AMERICAN-BORN-WOMAN TO BE ELECTED PRESIDENT OF ANY COUNTRY

Film by Suzanne Wasserman
Premieres Nationally on "Independent Lens"
Emmy® Award-Winning Series on PBS
Hosted by Susan Sarandon
Tuesday, February 22, 2005 at 10 P.M.
(check local listings)

"THUNDER IN GUYANA is a stirring and poignant study of sustained political commitment and its consequences. How an American Jewish woman improbably became the head of state of a decolonizing Latin American nation is the stuff of legend, and director Suzanne Wasserman has made a truly engrossing film that weaves this saga into contemporary history."

—STEPHEN J. WHITFIELD, PROFESSOR OF AMERICAN STUDIES,
BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

(San Francisco, CA) — Suzanne Wasserman, the director of **THUNDER IN GUYANA**, grew up fascinated by photos of her glamorous cousin Janet. She loved to read the newspaper articles and letters her mother collected and hear the family stories about this remarkable woman who, at age 77, became the first American-born woman ever to lead a nation. **THUNDER IN GUYANA** tells Janet Rosenberg Jagan's story, a tale of life-long love,

political campaigns and the struggle to bring progressive policies to her beloved adopted country. **THUNDER IN GUYANA** will be broadcast on *Independent Lens* on **Tuesday, February 22, 2005 at 10 P.M.**

(check local listings).



At 23, Janet, a beautiful nursing student born and raised in Chicago, fell in love with a handsome dental student from a country no one in her family had even heard of. Dashing Cheddi Jagan, born in the tiny colony of British Guiana (Guyana after 1966), on South America's northern coast, was the son of East Indian immigrant indentured sugar plantation workers. Both were involved in radical politics.

They married in 1943 despite the strenuous objections of her Jewish and his Hindu parents. Together they planned to go to British Guiana as socialist revolutionaries to fight for independence. Considered the founders of Guyana, Janet and Cheddi Jagan spent the next half-century as political leaders of the country. In 1950, they founded the multi-racial People's Progressive Party, the first modern political party in the colony. In the historic election of 1953, the first election that provided for universal adult suffrage, Cheddi was elected Chief Minister and Janet was elected the country's first female minister and deputy speaker of parliament. Together they led the first Communist government in the Western hemisphere, creating a firestorm in the press.

They governed for 133 days, until British Prime Minister Winston Churchill deposed them, afraid of the spread of Communism. They both served time in jail and under house arrest. Remaining the most popular leader in the colony, Cheddi Jagan was re-elected and became Prime Minister in 1961. This time, the Kennedy administration intervened, recommending a covert program to reduce their popularity.



The CIA instigated labor unrest, disinformation and race riots that left hundreds dead or injured. During this difficult time, the Jagans feared for their children's lives, sending them to the U.S. for a time. With pressure from the United States, Britain, in 1964, pushed through constitutional changes that made it impossible for Jagan to retain power despite his continued popularity. Forbes Burnham, a former ally of the Jagans who had turned against them, rose to power and ruled with an increasingly dictatorial hand for 28 years. Yet the Jagans continued to fight for Guyana, traveling internationally and speaking out on progressive issues.

Finally, in 1992, in the first free and fair elections in almost three decades, Cheddi Jagan was sworn in as President of Guyana. Sadly, in the winter of 1997, he passed away. Reluctantly, Janet agreed to accept the Presidential nomination of her Party. On December 15, 1997, she was elected President of Guyana. The first foreign born and first woman to serve this role, many consider her the mother of the nation.

Far from being a simple biography of an unconventional woman, **THUNDER IN GUYANA** interweaves the threads of family history, Janet's incredible life story and the complex history of the little understood country of Guyana.

Additional information and/or downloadable photographs from **THUNDER IN GUYANA** are available at www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos.

The companion website for **THUNDER IN GUYANA** (www.pbs.org/thunderinguyana) features detailed information about the film, including exclusive filmmaker Q&A interviews, filmmaker and cast bios and Learn More links and resources pertaining to the films' subject matter. The sites will also feature video previews and a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions.

THUNDER IN GUYANA Credits

DIRECTOR/WRITER/PRODUCER
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
EDITOR
CINEMATOGRAPHER
ORIGINAL SCORE
MUSIC

Suzanne Wasserman
Deborah Shaffer
Amanda Zinoman
Debra Granik
Steve Sandberg
Basya Schechter

AWARDS

Best Documentary, Boston Jewish Film Festival
Best Documentary, Myhelan Film Festival
Cine Golden Eagle Award.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

SUZANNE WASSERMAN (Director/Writer/Producer) has a Ph.D. in American History from New York University. She is the associate director of the Gotham Center for New York City History, at the City University of New York, Graduate Center (www.gothamcenter.org). The Gotham Center seeks to boost the visibility for citizens and tourists alike, of New York City's wonderful historical assets. Wasserman lectures, writes and consults about New York City history, especially the history of the Lower East Side. She has published widely on topics such as the Depression, Jewish nostalgia, housing, restaurant culture, tourism, pushcart peddling, the Jewish silent screen actress Theda Bara and 19th century saloons. **THUNDER IN GUYANA** is her first film. She is also an historical consultant for Ron Howard's production company, Imagine Entertainment.

ABOUT *INDEPENDENT LENS*

Independent Lens is an Emmy Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. Hosted by Susan Sarandon, the acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. ***Independent Lens*** features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community or moment in history, which prompted Nancy Franklin to write in *The New Yorker*: "Watching ***Independent Lens***... is like going into an independent bookstore—you don't always find what you were looking for but you often find something you didn't even know you wanted." Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites, and national publicity and community outreach campaigns. Further information about the series is available at www.pbs.org/independentlens. ***Independent Lens*** is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS, and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts.

ABOUT ITVS

Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the Emmy Award-winning weekly series ***Independent Lens*** on Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting www.itvs.org. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American People.

ABOUT PBS

PBS is a private, nonprofit media enterprise that serves the nation's 349 public noncommercial television stations, reaching nearly 90 million people each week through on-air and online content. Bringing diverse viewpoints to television and the Internet, PBS provides high-quality documentary and dramatic entertainment, and consistently dominates the most prestigious award competitions. PBS is the leading provider of educational materials for K-12 teachers, and offers a broad array of educational services for adult learners. PBS' premier kids' TV programming and Web site, PBS KIDS Online (pbskids.org), continue to be parents' and teachers' most trusted learning environments for children. More information about PBS is available at pbs.org, one of the leading dot-org Web sites on the Internet, averaging more than 30 million unique visits and 380 million page views per month in 2004. PBS is headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia.



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