



S.B. Docs, LLC Presents

Citizen McCaw

Film premieres Friday, March 7, 2008 at 7:30 PM, Arlington Theatre

Study Guide

Note: This study guide is designed as a companion for the feature-length documentary film ***Citizen McCaw***. You may print and duplicate this study guide for classroom use. More information at www.citizenmccaw.com

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About Santa Barbara

Although a region of only about 250,000 people, Santa Barbara County (90 miles north of Los Angeles) has been important to California since the 17th Century when the first few missions were established. Today, the region is known for its inland agriculture and wine country and for the coastal city of Santa Barbara, which has a thriving tourist trade, a bustling entrepreneurial economy, and a campus of The University of California. Coastal mountains and south-facing beaches add to the appeal of Santa Barbara, creating a Mediterranean climate.

The nearby communities of Montecito and Hope Ranch have attracted an influx of wealthy transplants – celebrities like Rob Lowe and Oprah Winfrey and retired business executives.

The area boasts a large number of non-profit organizations and private foundations. Civic involvement is a point of pride for many local residents ... people seem engaged, caring, and willing to work to create the best for their community.

It is against this backdrop that the drama of Citizen McCaw has been playing out.

About the Film

The 85 minute film chronicles events since July 2006, when editor Jerry Roberts and five of his colleagues quit the Santa Barbara News-Press, citing owner and Co-publisher Wendy McCaw's

abandonment of journalistic ethics. McCaw disputes this version of the conflict, and claims she did not violate journalistic ethics, but just wants to run her business as she desires, without interference from employees.

McCaw and dozens of her former staffers have been engaged in a fierce clash of wills that raises important national questions of journalistic ethics and media ownership.

McCaw's attorneys assert that she alone can decide how news is covered. The other side, represented by journalists and community leaders, says that journalism is a public trust, asserting that the publisher must keep out of the news side of the operation.

The film chronicles the twists and turns of community protests, legal maneuverings, a union vote, child pornography allegations, a 25% decline in circulation, a noticeable drop in the paper's coverage of local news and issues, and numerous other events, including a surprise ruling in early January 2008, when a federal labor law judge determined that McCaw's paper had violated federal law by firing eight of her reporters for pro union activities. The paper is appealing the ruling.

Over 80 hours of footage were shot, including interviews with national leaders in journalism. Washington Post Executive Editor Emeritus Ben Bradlee and journalist Ann Louise Bardach appear in the documentary, as do former NBC News reporter Sander Vanocur, Ronald Reagan's biographer Lou Cannon, Harvard's Alex Jones, Boston University's Lou Ureneck, and USC's Diane Winston. The film was shot in high definition in Los Angeles, Boston, San Francisco, and Washington DC and at many landmark locations in Santa Barbara.

About the Producers

The film has been produced *pro bono* by five Santa Barbara residents with long film and arts careers of various types, each of whom felt that the story is important to the Santa Barbara community and its historical record, as well as to the national debate about media ownership and journalistic ethics.

The co-producers of **CITIZEN McCAW** are **Rod Lathim** (a leader on Santa Barbara's cultural scene), **Charles Minsky** (cinematographer: *Pretty Woman*, etc.), **Peter Seaman** (screenwriter: *Shrek the Third*, etc.) and **Sam Tyler**, (PBS documentary filmmaker: *Good to Great*, etc.). **Brent Sumner** of Studio 8 in Santa Barbara is the principal cinematographer and editor. **Hap Freund** (American Producer of a NOVA documentary and Executive Director of Santa Barbara's public and educational access channels) assisted the project in many ways.

Together, the producers have almost 140 years of award-winning experience in various aspects of dramatic, television, and feature film production.

Topics for Student Discussions, Writings

1. Several core principles of journalistic ethics are covered in the film. Two of them are:

- Opinion and news should be separate.
- The publisher should not interfere with the news operation.

Where do these principles seem most apparent to you in the film?

What are some other principles of journalistic ethics that are presented?

Why is it important to the community that these principles are followed?

2. Imagine that you are Jerry Roberts and that you resigned from the paper because you felt that ethics had been violated and that the news operation was no longer insulated from the whims of the paper's owner. Explain at least three reasons that caused you to resign. .

3. Imagine that you are Wendy McCaw and that Jerry Roberts has just resigned claiming that you had violated journalistic ethics. List at least three statements that you would make to rebut Mr. Roberts and show why what you were doing was OK.

4. Why is it important that hometowns have newspapers to cover local news events of all kinds --- government, transportation, business, health care, education, crime, culture, sports, etc.--- and what harm is done to the community when a paper reduces its coverage so that most local news is not covered?

5. Who is your favorite character in the film and why? What are this person's weaknesses?

6. Who is your least favorite character in the film and why? What are this person's strengths?

7. What role did the blogs and other media play in getting the story of this conflict out to the community? Why is this important?

8. When the paper printed the article about a computer with child pornography on it, what were some other ways to handle this issue?

9. What, in your view, is the likelihood that The Santa Barbara News-Press will be able to bounce back and become the vibrant community newspaper that it once was?

10. Why is the story about what has happened in Santa Barbara important to the rest of the nation?

11. If you were Wendy McCaw and you wanted to return the paper back to the position that it had under Thomas Storke, what goals would you set and what are the first three steps that you would take?

12. The first element of a film review is a **condensed plot synopsis**. This is a brief description of the film's plot that probably emphasizes the most important moments of the film without revealing the film's ending. What is the condensed plot synopsis of Citizen McCaw?

13. The second element of a film review is **background information** about the subject and characters, the director and producers, and the production staff of the film. It can also include interesting tidbits about the making of the film. What is the background information for Citizen McCaw?

14. The third element of a film review is **the abbreviated arguments** about the film, which are generally the main focus of the review. This is the section in which the reviewer analyzes and critiques the film. The focus of this segment is to point out what does and does not work in the movie and why. Most reviewers attempt to combine this information with a little background information. For example, if the lighting and composition of the film are particularly dreadful the reviewer will generally take the time to note who the film's cinematographer was - since it's the cinematographer's responsibility to prevent that from happening. What is your analysis/critique of the film?

15. The final element of a film review is reviewer's **evaluation**, which generally includes a recommendation to either see or avoid seeing the film. This evaluation is always based on the

reviewer's arguments about the film and is frequently backed up with his/her comments regarding the film's background. What is your evaluation of the film?

16. Did you think the movie was fair? Balanced? If not what would have made it more even-handed?

17. What do you expect from your local newspaper?

18. Thomas Storke, who owned the News-Press for much of the 20th Century, had as his motto, "To report the news without fear or favor of friend or foe." If you owned a newspaper what would your motto be for the publication?

Source for # 13 -15, David Bordwell from "Making Meaning" ... Google = Film Review Elements.