

# John Marshall

December 27, 1986

Peterborough, New Hampshire

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John Marshall discovered filmmaking as a teenager in the early 1950s, when he and his family participated in a series of expeditions to study the !Kung San people of South West Africa. His first film, *The Hunters* (1958), is considered an ethnographic classic. In the 1960s Marshall studied anthropology at Harvard and Yale. While a graduate student, he shot and co-directed *Titicut Follies* (1967). During parts of 1968-1970 Marshall lived with and filmed the police in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. From the Pittsburgh material he constructed eighteen “sequence films,” ranging in length from 3 to 90 minutes. In 1978 Marshall returned to Africa and to his filming of the !Kung. Broadcast on PBS as part of its *Odyssey* series, the reflexive *N!ai, Story of a !Kung Woman* (1980) is Marshall’s most accessible and most widely seen of more than two dozen !Kung films. In the 1980s Marshall became an advocate for the new nation of Namibia, helping draft its constitution, heading economic development projects, and forming the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia. His last shoot in Namibia coincided with the new millennium. Twenty-first century footage was included in Marshall’s magnum opus: *A Kalahari Family* (2002). This five-part, six-hour series summarizes and concludes the Marshall family record of the Ju/’hoansi [!Kung] over five decades (1950-2000) and is distributed by DER (Documentary Educational Resources), a company Marshall co-founded in 1968 and directed for many years. Marshall died of lung cancer in April 2005.

When we talked with Marshall at the Marshall family home in Peterborough, New Hampshire on December 27, 1986, he was between trips to Namibia, where he continued his advocacy work on behalf of the San. As the interview began, Marshall addressed what to him was a central and personal concern about his engagement in the *Titicut Follies* venture: the conflict that arose between Marshall and Wiseman when Marshall and his wife, Heather, resigned as directors from the Bridgewater Film Corporation, during the period when the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was initiating its attempts to prevent the film from being exhibited.



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QUESTION: Why did you withdraw from your association with Frederick Wiseman?

MARSHALL: We can record this. The reason—should I just say it? Will you put it in?

QUESTION: Yes.

MARSHALL: The reason I resigned is in the deposition that I gave in the lawyer's office. And it was—what I said was that I didn't know what Fred had said to various people. I didn't know the obligations he'd undertaken, with respect to the film or with respect to the state, or the institution at Bridgewater, or Charlie Gaughan.<sup>1</sup> I didn't know what he'd said. And Heather and I were holding the bag on the corporation. We were the majority of this corporation and, in theory, if it was a real corporation, we would have to say "yea" or "nay" as to whether the film was to be released or how or what was to become of it, and I didn't want to be in that position not knowing all the facts. And I had, besides that, a personal reason—that I didn't know what would happen about some of the people who had been in the film. In these hearings with that guy Robey,<sup>2</sup> they are basically being evaluated to see if they're crazy, or sane enough to stand trial. And I thought, you know, what if it gets around and somebody who's going to be on the jury someday sees them in the film and thinks they're crazy or they make a bad impression on the juror and they go in the slammer when they shouldn't or the lawyers say, well, you know, we'll never get a fair trial in Massachusetts for these people and they just keep putting it off and putting it off—putting their trial off. In Bridgewater, you go there and stay there until you are adjudged competent to stand trial and it's a way of putting people away forever. It's one of the glaring loopholes, in our country anyway, in which you can be incarcerated, and you go to jail, basically to jail, without ever meeting your accusers, without every going before a court, before God and the people. And I thought, well, hell, if somebody has to spend another three years in Bridgewater because their trial keeps being postponed because of a film, that seems a little extreme. So the real reason was I just didn't know, and that was in my deposition. I think they didn't ask me to come to court because, on the one side, Fred's lawyers would be afraid I'd just tell the truth and, on the other side, because they knew I didn't have any—I thought the film was a good film. I thought it should not be changed or varied or censored.

QUESTION: How did you first get interested in film and get started as a filmmaker?

MARSHALL: Well, I started by default. When my dad retired from Raytheon, he wanted—it's an implausible story—but he wanted to get to know his son. He'd been very busy during the period of the Second World War, and he wanted to get to know his son. And I'd always wanted to go to Africa. I used to read books about Africa, exploring in Africa. A book called *Jock of the Bushveld* by Percy Fitzpatrick. So Dad bought a lot of Air Force maps of South [West] Africa. He'd been down in Cape Town the year before, in 1949, to see if he could sell a harbor guidance radar system to the Cape Town Port Authority and he'd met some people and one of the people he met was a guy named Van Zyl, a doctor, a surgeon in Tygerberg in Cape Town. He was going looking for the lost city of the Kalahari. You know, every empty

place, there's always a lost city and an excuse for taking a trip, having an expedition. So Dad asked him if we could join the expedition and Van Zyl said, "Sure." So we brought these maps out and Dad persuaded him that the thing to do was to go where the roads all end and that was in the Kalahari Desert, in the middle of southern Africa, the Kaokoveld. Dad wasn't too convinced about a lost city, but he was the kind of guy who wanted to accomplish something or find out something or do something. He was that kind of guy. And he went to the Peabody Museum<sup>3</sup> and we talked to a guy named J.O. Brew, who was head of the Peabody at the time, and Joe said, "Yeah, the thing that you can do, if you go down there, is to look for 'wild bushmen.'" Because there were these rumors and conjectures that in the Kalahari Desert you could still find people who lived by gathering and hunting and if you could find people who lived by gathering and hunting in the plains of Africa, you had a window on the Pleistocene that nobody had ever dreamed of. And so we went looking for "wild bushmen," with this expedition to find the lost city. We got to a place called Kai Kai and Van Zyl took a final assault in the morning to find the lost city and we all waited at Kai Kai while the doctor and his brother the senator went out to find the lost city. And they came back and said that the Herero had moved it during the night. So we didn't find the lost city, but Dad met two guys name /kwi !gumsi and a guy named //aon//oro. /kwi's dead, but //aon//oro is still alive. And Dad asked them, if he brought the family back, same time, same place next year, would you be here, would you take us to meet your families, who they explained lived by hunting and gathering purely. And that was the last thousand people in Africa who did. And that was in a place that came to be called Nyae Nyae. And so that's where we started these studies of Tschu-Khwe. And Dad gave the family various jobs. We tried to find an ethnographer who wanted to go, or a graduate student who wanted to go and study daily life of hunter-gatherers on the plains of Africa. We couldn't find one. Isn't that incredible? We went through Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Chicago, and a couple of other places that Dad called up and talked to people and said, "Who wants to start this study?" Dad said he'd back them for a long time, for an in-depth, long-term study, because he thought that would be unique, and nobody responded. We got an archeologist for a few months. So the result was that Dad said, "Okay, Lorna, you're going to do the ethnography; Elizabeth,<sup>4</sup> you're going to write a book; John, you're going to do the movies." So that's how I got into film. And then I made films about the Tshu-Khwe. And the first film that we produced was a film that Mother edited in 1951 and it was called *Bushmen of the Kalahari*.<sup>5</sup> It really shows the Tshu-Khwe people, a thousand of them, in this Nyae Nyae area living the way they had lived for at least 20,000 years. Their direct ancestors are known to have been living there a thousand years ago. Human habitation is known to go back to 20,000 years and the presumption is that it's Tshu-Khwe and their ancestors with some environmental differences. The environment of wet-dry, wet-dry periods fluctuates. And they found poison, maybe 6,000 years ago, 4 to 6,000. That changed their technology. Little points with poison. They used big bows and big points for bleeding, without poison. When they had poison, they could use little

points and changed their strategy. But I mean those are the same people. And after that film, the next one was *The Hunters* [1957], and then I just went on.

And I went to graduate school in anthropology at Yale and then at Harvard. And then we got a big grant from the National Science Foundation, Educational Division, to make films. When you go to make a documentary film, you know, you arrive in a place and you have an experience, and you take pictures, and the film comes out of your experience. And I went twice in '50-'51, and then in '52 when we were shooting *The Hunters*. I didn't know very much about the Tshu-Kwe. I just began to speak Tshu-Kwe and spent all the time hunting, or most of it. And I was 18, 19 and wow, you know, you go off. I mean the best years of my life, the happiest I've ever been, without any question. It was a pretty wonderful experience for a kid of that age in a place like that with people like Tshu-Khwe, damned decent, good-to-be-with people.

QUESTION: Were you, in effect, making up ethnographic filmmaking for yourself at that point?

MARSHALL: I never studied film at all. I did *The Hunters*. And then, you know, I got to know people more. I went back and looked at the film and said, "Hey, that's romantic." That gives the impression of people spending enormous amounts of energy and time hunting, and the real economy is the other way around. The real economy is based on gathering. Not only the economy is based on gathering, but all concepts of land ownership, all the rules of land ownership, all the basis of the social organization of the people, groups, bands, all flow from gathering, and from stable, fixed, reliable sources of food and water.

QUESTION: But not visually dramatic?

MARSHALL: Well, I think it could be. It didn't seem to a kid of 18 who went off in the dawn of the Pleistocene that gathering was the same as hunting, you know.

If you make a distinction between images that you want and pictures that you get, this was images that you want, rather than pictures that you get from what people are really doing and saying. So I thought that the way to have Tshu-Kwe act and speak for themselves in the film was to do events, rather than a story line. *Hunters* is a story.

And so, I shot for event. We had a guy through 1955 named Daniel Blitz, who was a protégé really of Raytheon and then with Sanders Associates, a company which was at the cutting edge of electronics in the sixties. And Danny just figured out a way to do sync in the field. But it wasn't mobile. So we shot sync in 1955. You know the history of Ricky [Leacock] and Penny [D.A. Pennebaker] and [Robert] Drew and those people, and the history of the mobile Accutron, crystal sync system that you could put into an Auricon self-blimp camera. So we just shot sync without sync in '55, '56, '57, '58.

QUESTION: It wasn't mobile because it was big, or it was plugged in, or—

MARSHALL: Danny's system was the same principle that it laid a signal on the track. It was the same rate, the speed of the camera. The blimp we had to make it quiet. We had to devise a blimp, which is heavy. You could hold it, but it was cumbersome. So you mostly did it on a tripod. That was *Bitter Melons* [1971].

QUESTION: So you were working then on your ideas of sequence-event filming before 1966?

MARSHALL: Yeah, I was doing that in 1955. Yeah, off and on. I didn't think of myself as a filmmaker. I was going to be an anthropologist.

QUESTION: You worked for NBC for a time, as a cameraman. Did they train you on how network documentary worked?

MARSHALL: Well, I had this friend named Dean Brelis, who's a correspondent and he's a remarkable guy. He was one of I think three of four people who parachuted in to the Montagnard people. He parachuted into the Kuching region during the Second World War. This was against the Japanese. He wrote a manual that's I think still used by the military for organizing guerrilla war. He was a friend, and I was at loose ends at that point, and he said, "Well, why don't you come to work for NBC?" He was going to be in Cyprus, so I said, "Sure." And I filmed there. Those news stories are totally simple. I got a little lecture. Reuven Frank gave me a little lecture. He said, "John, I'll tell you how to shoot these films. They've got to have a beginning; they've got to have a middle; and they've got to have an end." So he just sent me off. I shot for Dean, but those were news stories, you know, not event films or in-depth films. You don't meet anyone in a news story.

QUESTION: And how long did that last?

MARSHALL: Oh, I don't know. About four months in Cyprus and then I worked for them again in Athens the next year. That was 1964, something like that.

I was kicked out of South Africa. I would have gone on with Tshu-Kwe in 1960. I was kicked out in 1958 and then was *persona non grata*. And, despite the fact that Dad had a farm down there, and in Namibia/South West and was known and was respected by people, he couldn't get me in. This was when apartheid was being imposed on Namibia. And they had a whole bunch of laws which added up to saying that white people can't have ordinary social relations with Black people. And, among the laws was a law that said that a white person can't have sex with a Black person. Everybody knew that I was an American. And they cooked up a story that I had a kid by a Tshu-Khwe woman; that didn't get straightened out until 1978. So I went back in 1978. That's when we did *N!ai, The Story of a !Kung Woman*[1980].

And so, I was into film and out of film during those years. I was thinking I was going to be an anthropologist and I did this job for NBC and so forth, but I hadn't thought of myself as a filmmaker. The one thing I did do to teach myself something, which wound up that I didn't teach myself much, because of the situation, was—I worked for Ricky.

QUESTION: Ricky Leacock?

MARSHALL: Ricky Leacock and Penny. I was in graduate school, and I used to travel down to New York for two days a week, but what I wound up doing was writing proposals for them, for a film on aging. They were doing a movie on aging.

QUESTION: So, rather than running camera, you were working on the pre-production?

MARSHALL: Yeah, because they didn't have work. It was after the Time-Life thing, that's when Ricky gave up on this Bob Drew Time-Life stuff and tried to do his own with Penny. 1962 or 1963 it would have been. Very soon after they started.

QUESTION: Could you tell us how you got hooked up with Fred Wiseman and the Bridgewater project?

MARSHALL: I don't know how. Fred just called me up one night.

QUESTION: But you didn't know him?

MARSHALL: No. I'd seen a film he'd made.<sup>6</sup> *The Cool World* [1963], which I liked. Shirley Clarke was a friend of Ricky's. And Penny. All that film group, they all knew each other; hung out together. So maybe through Shirley, or something, I don't know. But, anyway, Fred just called me up. He just said he was doing this film and he said, "Do you want to shoot it?" And I said, "Sure." He had what seemed to be full access to the institution and he had been there. When he was teaching, he used to take his class around to different institutions in the legal justice system. Taking his class down there [MCI-Bridgewater], he knew about "The Follies." And he met this neat guy, Eddie Pacheco. And Eddie told him about "The Follies" and Fred thought, "Hey, this is, this is a flick." He knew Eddie from his visits. That's what I gathered. He had an idea to make a film of the show. It was an annual thing, "The Titicut Follies." And then we went down and visited, and we went through with Eddie, the whole institution, and we began to think about the context of the show, how we could use the show as a kind of vehicle, as a kind of motif.

QUESTION: From the very beginning, then?

MARSHALL: Yeah. And then how would you put it into context? What kinds of things would you film that would put it into context? And what kind of structure would you give the motifs? And at some point, we came up with this idea of using these progressively worse wards.

You meet guys in the wards like that fellow, he'd been in since the Depression, since 1936 or 1937, maybe it was later than that. I don't really remember when he was incarcerated. He joined the ranks of the unemployed in Roxbury, I think. He had an ice cream cart with a little horse or a mule or a pony. And he painted the pony to look like a zebra. And the SPCA [Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals] got on him and he gave some kind of confused account. He wasn't the most articulate guy I ever met. He gave some kind of

confused account at the hearing, and they decided he was crazy and put him in Bridgewater. In the film, he's the guy who sings a song, "My Chinatown," with these two sisters or something in the background singing a pop folk thing on tv in the back. And that was him. He died after twenty years of that.

QUESTION: Could you tell us a little more about that shot? Was he singing that just for you?

That's one of the shots in the film where it's hard to tell whether he was performing for some people, and you were just observing. How did the circumstances of that singing take place?

Do you remember that?

MARSHALL: Well, the whole idea of the film is that the performance goes on all the time. I mean, that's how these people spend their time. I guess to alleviate the desperation of their boredom. They perform. They do their thing. They do it in the yard; they do it all the time. And—so that was what made "The Follies" deep. The deeper follies was that fact; that was the context we came up with. And we sort of half set up the shot and half didn't. You come in with a camera and people just start doing their thing. He started singing. He knew what we were doing and that we were doing "The Follies," and we had this idea that "The Follies" is the whole thing, the whole institution and everybody in it. And so, half and half. I got him to stand when he was doing it. I got him to stand in front of the tv because that seemed like an idea. But, no, I'd say it was half and half. A lot of that stuff is half and half. People would turn on. We'd come out there and, and they'd turn on, because you live in a place like that and this is what you can do. It's half mockery. It's half cynical.

I had an Auricon, one of Mitch Bogdanovitch's Auricons and a Nagra I.<sup>7</sup> It was early along. I had an Éclair NPR, the first Éclair camera. Mine was number 47. So, we had those cameras. Tim Asch shot some stuff during "The Follies."<sup>8</sup> I used the Auricon mostly.

QUESTION: Was that set up by Fred or by you, the fact that you had a second camera during "The Follies"?

MARSHALL: No. I said that we should try to get other shots; that's a big thing on a stage. It's hard to move around all the time and to cover it.

QUESTION: So when he [Asch] was there, you were as well, so you were shooting with two cameras simultaneously?

MARSHALL: Tim Asch helped us, yeah.

QUESTION: Do you remember what film stock you used?

MARSHALL: Oh, God—I know I paid for it. I loaned the company 7,000 bucks to buy film.

QUESTION: Did you get it back?

MARSHALL: No, no. I think it was reversal film. I think Tri-X and Four-X. I think they had Four-X in those days [1966]. We used as fast as possible, because a lot of the wards and “The Follies” were dark. Sometimes we pushed two stops.

QUESTION: Did you ever use lights?

MARSHALL: Yeah, yeah, we used them.

QUESTION: You set up lights?

MARSHALL: Yeah, sometimes, yeah. Just for the performances of “The Follies.”

QUESTION: Did you get rushes back and look at them together, you and Fred and David Eames<sup>9</sup> or—

MARSHALL: Yeah, from time to time, but we didn’t see all the material. We shot a lot. That is characteristic of me. I just shoot flat out when I shoot; and so we had a lot of material. But we wanted that. We wanted at least the option of doing events. It was a story movie. Again, it was image that you want, like that guy singing, wiggling his ears in front of the tv. That’s an image that you think about. That’s an idea. You think it will be a good image to get. When you’re shooting pictures of events, it’s like playing ping pong. You’re not thinking of the image you want. You’re thinking about where you are; what you’re getting and what you’re missing, constantly. And the measure of your success in an event is to compare your pictures with your sound. Your sound is open and runs all the time. That was another thing I used to do, to run the sound all the time, so you know what you missed. And that’s like playing ping pong. You don’t think, “this is an image that I want to get” and then go out and get it. You’re in the middle of an event and you’re just responding. You’re just following an event, like a— what’s the anthropological term—participant observer or something. You’re half part of it and you’re half observing it.

QUESTION: Would you do a lot more close-ups?

MARSHALL: Well, the rule, the rule of thumb is the closer, the faster. In other words, if you want to speed up, you go close. When you’ve taken a long shot, it’s hard to cut it. Close-ups give you shooting speed. They make events go faster. So when you’re falling behind the actual event, when you’re missing too many things which you should be getting, back up. But that’s going to slow your film down, your cut down. When you’re on, when you’re with it, you have this feeling, “I’m on; I’m on.” You know, “I’m getting it. It’s happening; it’s happening. I’m in the right place at the right time.” You can go close and speed it up. But then you run the danger of falling behind, because you’re on this guy and the real thing is happening over here. So you speed up your film with close-ups, but you run the danger of falling behind the event. Or you slow down by backing up, but then you have the problem of cutting in real time, which is slow.



QUESTION: Were you shooting cutaways? And was there a sense Fred was going to eventually edit this film or was it going to be you and Fred or—

MARSHALL: We were supposed to do it together, but that didn't work out.

QUESTION: So as you were shooting you had a sense that you were going to be involved in editing?

MARSHALL: Yes.

QUESTION: Is it like shooting for narrative editing or shooting for—

MARSHALL: Well, you do both. One is event. You shoot for event, in which you try to follow, to record. If you want to be a participant observer of an event, that's what is like playing ping pong. That's just a question of angles, am I getting the right thing? Can I speed it up? Can I go in and make it faster? Am I losing too much—back up and slow down.

QUESTION: So you're cutting in your head as you shoot?

MARSHALL: Well, when you're doing an event and translating an event into film in your head, you're thinking about angles and you're thinking about what's happening over here that I'm not getting and where can I be to keep up with the event. The rule you use, the fact of life that you use is that we're very redundant. We do things about five times; say things about five times, which means you can do it. That's the human thing that makes it possible.

But when you're doing a narrative, a story, then you're trying to do ideas. You're looking for images. You're trying to get images that are evocative or that do something when you see them, that say something.

QUESTION: Was there a real progression, a real change in the way you talked about what you were planning to do? Did you work things out even before you started shooting? Or did you just go there and shoot?

MARSHALL: We went down and visited. And then, you know, we hit it off real well, Fred and I. We clicked. And so it was exciting and fun. We just experienced things together and sometimes all we had to do was just look at each other and we just knew that that was something that we ought to do something with.

QUESTION: And this was even before you started filming?

MARSHALL: Yes. We took a couple of visits. And we just turned each other on. And so, who knows? It was a process of two people, you know, sharing something and very often hitting the same note, ringing the same bell at the same time. And so it was exciting. I couldn't analyze it now.

QUESTION: Did you ever get anything down on paper, for instance, here are some of the things we want to try to get?

MARSHALL: Just a few notes, like the idea of using the progression of the wards. The idea of “The Follies,” that everybody is an actor in “The Follies,” just leaped out at everybody. It was sort of the point of the movie. But we did make a few notes and we talked about making films about institutions, using the fact of an institution with a structure and so forth, and different things happening in different places as a way to go about it.

QUESTION: Rather than following a single person around?

MARSHALL: That’s right.

QUESTION: You discarded that as a treatment? So you actually talked about it and discarded it as a choice as far as structure?

MARSHALL: Yeah, yeah.

QUESTION: Did you ever talk about using a narrator in the classical documentary style of having a voice-over?

MARSHALL: We both didn’t like it.

QUESTION: So you knew from the beginning that you weren’t going to use that?

MARSHALL: That’s right.

QUESTION: Did you shoot interviews?

MARSHALL: Lots of interviews. We did that kind of like a safety net. If you couldn’t hook things together with the pictures and the events and “The Follies” as a recurrent theme, if that didn’t work, then you could always use an interview, but we didn’t want to. We didn’t want to make a talking-head movie. And then the other thing was that there are people expressing themselves in their own way. That was interesting, *per se*. But it was basically to make a movie with existing events, things happening, not trying to explain it. Not try to sit back and explain it. Or have somebody else explain it to you.

QUESTION: You wanted it to be experiential for the audience?

MARSHALL: Yes, like Ricky’s stuff.

QUESTION: Did you talk about the Drew people as a kind of model?

MARSHALL: Yes, that it could be done. And you didn’t have to have a narrator and set ups. Most documentaries were, and still are, just poor theater movies. They don’t do anything. They’re just acted movies with bad actors. You get the guy to say things five times beforehand and then he says it once and says it wrong, but that’s all you have so you give up and you put a talking head in that explains it all to you. And we just didn’t want to do that.

And the fact that you can see a film like *Primary* [1960] or *Happy Mother's Day* [1963], or something, and say, "Yeah, you can make a movie that is not a tv documentary." Make something exciting.

QUESTION: Were you pretty much on your own as you were photographing, as far as making the choices? Did you work out some kind of direction system between the two of you?

MARSHALL: We didn't need to. We clicked. We were in tune with each other; we hit it off. And, I mean, you sort of knew.

QUESTION: How does it begin? Were you just hanging out? Waiting? Does one of you gesture to the other, "Okay, let's get this," and then the sound goes on and the camera starts rolling? How do you decide when to turn the camera on and when to turn the sound on? Was it just either one of you?

MARSHALL: Well, the trip down in the morning, we'd talk about where were we going, what we were going to try to get that day. And we'd know that there were going to be these interviews with Dr. Robey, talking to the people, evaluating the people. And I want to say on the tape that that guy turned out to have done a hell of a good job. He got an awful lot of people out of there and back into the community. And God bless him for it, because that was a bad place to be, in Bridgewater State Pen. So, we'd know that that was going to happen that day. Or we'd think we should do more in the yard. And we began to know people, where they were; what they were likely to do; whether they were going to bathe Bulcock today. We'd chew these things over and then go.

QUESTION: Go find them?

MARSHALL: Yes, find them. Basically, Fred would just say, "Go ahead, shoot." Well, I mean, we didn't even say that. It was just obvious. I'd start to shoot. And we'd follow from there. One thing would lead to another.

QUESTION: Was he seeing rushes?

MARSHALL: We saw some, yes, but, as I say, there was an awful lot of film shot. I don't know whether anybody saw the whole thing, the whole rushes, while the film was being shot.

QUESTION: He was seeing the events, but he wasn't seeing the images in quite the same way that you were, because you were seeing it through the lens. I'm trying to get a sense of where he was at this point.

MARSHALL: We'd look at it. Is it good? Is it something exciting? Does it say something? Does it do something? Is it tedious? Is it boring? Is it shaky? Is it badly shot? Can you hear it? Fred's expression was, "We've got a goodie." Or, we don't. "How many goodies have we got today?"

QUESTION: Were you inclined to agree with him, from a photographer's and an ethnographer's point of view?

MARSHALL: We looked and got ideas while we were still shooting. I don't think we ever went back and did something deliberate to fit. You didn't need to in that film. The place itself had enough internal structure, so that you didn't need to say, "Oh, I've got to cut from here to here. Let's go and film it." A guy opening a door or going into a room or getting into a car and driving away. We just didn't need any of that crap. We did film the final "Follies," the performance, after we'd seen a lot of stuff. And we said we knew that we should wrap it up. But we'd have done that anyway.

QUESTION: So the timing just happened to work out that you had been filming for awhile before "The Follies" occurred?

MARSHALL: They were being rehearsed. The cast was being picked. Eddie Pacheco was stage managing and pulling it off.

QUESTION: When you had finished shooting, how did the editing proceed?

MARSHALL: Well, we looked at stuff and made roughs.

QUESTION: Was David Eames involved in this, too?

MARSHALL: Yes, he was there. We were all thinking about it, responding to the material together.

QUESTION: So, there was at that point no statement from Fred saying, "I'm in charge. I'm the editor." And you're advising him.

MARSHALL: No, no.

QUESTION: You were all editing?

MARSHALL: We were co-directing, in fact. I don't remember if that was ever formally—I think maybe it was. Maybe we did say that it was formally agreed. It didn't seem necessary to formally agree. It just seemed the obvious thing to do. I mean, he respected me as a filmmaker and a cameraman, and I respected him. And, in fact, I think it did work in that film, because after I was kicked out, he did show it to me a couple of times. And I had a thought, like "The Follies" is dropping out of the middle of the movie, pick it up again. Stuff like that. But I didn't cut it.

QUESTION: But you started in on that process?

MARSHALL: Yeah.

QUESTION: Generally organizing it or actually cutting scenes?

MARSHALL: Putting lumps of material together, like sequences together, in an order. Five hours of something. And you look at it and say, “that is going to work or that isn’t going to work” or “that can go from here to here a lot faster.” I have a knack at that. I have a talent for being able to look at material and say, “Hey, you can go from there to there.”

QUESTION: This is in terms of large chunks?

MARSHALL: Well, large or small, I don’t care. “This leads to that.” We both knew how to do it.

QUESTION: He had learned to edit?

MARSHALL: Well, this isn’t editing. This is organizing. This is looking at material, kind of rough. Just, you know, throw up a whole sequence. You get it synced up and throw it up and maybe it’s half an hour long. And you look at it and you can say, “Well, yeah, that can come down to 3 or 4 or 5 minutes, because this is the part that says it, and if you put that there, that’ll lead into the next event.” You do it in your head. And then you keep cutting it down. I couldn’t remember who said what can go where at any specific time.

QUESTION: So this proceeded co-operatively for—

MARSHALL: Yeah, for three or four months.

QUESTION: Can you tell us the story of what happened then?

MARSHALL: Well, he just decided that he wanted to make the movie and—

QUESTION: How was that presented?

MARSHALL: He just asked me to get out of the editing room. I was working for the company that he was working for, OSTI [Organization for Social and Technical Innovation].<sup>10</sup>

QUESTION: Had you worked for them before the filming started?

MARSHALL: No, no. I was at loose ends. I was out of work. And then Fred said, “Come work for OSTI.” The longest thing I ever did with them was a labor mobility study.

QUESTION: Well, here you were, working for OSTI and the editing was going on. Was it as if he had reached a point where he didn’t need you or did you have an argument, a difference over how it was to be edited?

MARSHALL: No.

QUESTION: This caught you by surprise?

MARSHALL: Well, yeah, a little, but it was his movie. I never thought it wasn’t. This agreement about directing and so forth was informal, basically between friends. I wasn’t

going to suddenly insist on some rights. It was his movie. He said, “We’d like to finish. We don’t need you in the editing room anymore. I want to make this movie. I want to make it my way, however.” And I said, “Fine.”

QUESTION: You finished shooting in June?

MARSHALL: Yes. And then we were cutting. We cut that summer and a whole another year. It was being cut downstairs in the building where OSTI was. There was an editing room down there. And, yes, it was a year. It was in the spring of the next year that he said this to me.

QUESTION: But then you were called back to look at some rough cuts, and so there was still an amicable relationship?

MARSHALL: Oh, yeah, sure. I would look at it with a fresh eye.

QUESTION: So this wasn’t really a break, at that point, between you.

MARSHALL: No. It was a little strained. I mean, I felt a little hurt. But, so what? Those things happen, in life and film.

QUESTION: Recalling the tone of the conversations about the film, this was not a soberly contrived social document about conditions at this particular place? It wasn’t a kind of journalism?

MARSHALL: No, it wasn’t supposed to be. It was black humor, black comedy. I don’t think any of us involved in it felt that it should be stand-back tv documentary: This is terrible, now see how terrible it is; or this is funny, ha ha, now laugh. It was supposed to be, it was supposed to be on wings, not on flat feet.

I think there are places in it where he belabors the obvious. He could do it a little less. The film had a structure because of “The Follies,” and we hung the big folly on the little folly. And when you do that, you get into narrative. It’s automatic. Images that you want, rather than pictures that you’re getting.

QUESTION: As in the scene where the force feeding is intercut with the preparation for burial?

MARSHALL: It’s heavy; it’s heavy. I think that it’s a little heavy. But the idea of intercutting—I mean the guy died, you know, being force fed by that ex-Wehrmacht. The guy once told us where he practiced. Kiev, Rostov, Schoten, Tobruk. No, not Tobruk, he wasn’t at Tobruk. But it was the course of the expansion and collapse of the German Third Reich. He hit most of the bases. And here this guy is shoveling this down this man Malinowski’s throat and Malinowski wanted to die. He wanted out. And he did, he got out. The thing itself was kind of heavy. You’ve got to remember that, too. And it was really a bad news thing to do to a guy.

QUESTION: Did any good thing happen as a result of this film you can think of?

MARSHALL: Robey, for example. I didn't exactly know at the time when I saw Robey there.

He went to Shady Hill School, which is where I went. Later, a mutual friend said that his mandate was to try to help people get out. Again, I don't know what happened to Vladimir. I don't know whether he got out.

Charlie Gaughan had that mandate, too, which was to change the place. It had become a dumping ground for an assortment of wretched, miserable, unhappy people, beyond the law. There was no way they could get out. They couldn't go to court and Charlie explained that to us, very early, that that was what they were trying to do, among other things, in the institution. To get people out. And that was what Robey was trying to do. And there were other people trying to do the same thing in other institutions in Massachusetts.

QUESTION: What was your impression of Gaughan?

MARSHALL: He was a good guy.

QUESTION: Do you think he felt as the film was going on that he was going to have the right of censorship?

MARSHALL: Look, I only met the guy twice. And when we talked that didn't come up. I'd like to think that what he thought was that the film, by showing the realities of, of Bridgewater, would help him and others interested in doing something to lance the cyst. And get people who shouldn't be there back in the community, back on the street. That's an impression. We never talked about it. I never had any official dealings with him. He seemed like a good guy to me. Sincere, at least, in his program of trying to open things up.

QUESTION: Were you there at the showing then when Gavin, the Commissioner of Correction, was shown the film in September? Did you go to that?

MARSHALL: Oh, that was the one. I'm sure, because I remember Fred saying, "That's Mr. Gavin."

QUESTION: So you didn't see the film with a group of people until September?

MARSHALL: Until September.

QUESTION: During the actual filming, was there a general assumption that consent had been given, institutionally? That is, you didn't lift up the camera and ask, or get a nod?

MARSHALL: Oh, no; oh, no. Open. Except for the Boston Strangler suspect [Albert DeSalvo]. He was always, as Fred said, "whisked away." That was purely for rights. People had a great deal of money riding on the story. And they had an excellent contract with him, together with people in his family, to tell the story and so the people who owned him didn't want anybody

else to have access to him, so they could have an exclusive splash on how he strangled all those people.

QUESTION: And the general sense was that permission had been granted from the top down? That is, the institution said to its employees, “These people are here making a film.”

MARSHALL: That’s certainly what we felt. Eddie was attached to us, as a kind of guide, but Eddie is Eddie. I mean, he was gung-ho on the film. And I had a feeling that he felt, “Show it,” because, you know, it might shock people and wake people up. You know, and do some good.

QUESTION: Do you remember when people would refuse to be in the film? Guards or psychologists or other people?

MARSHALL: Yeah, yeah, some. We never filmed anybody who said no. And we were obvious. I mean, there was no hidden camera or any hanky-panky. It was right there. Big Auricon camera, big sound rolling, you know, Sennheiser mike, long, long-range mike. I mean, you can’t hide it. You can’t miss it. They knew they were being filmed.

QUESTION: How did you establish or regulate rapport with the people you were filming? Was there a practice of “no eye contact” or was it “establish rapport and be friendly”?

MARSHALL: Well, in the first place, and this was deliberate, the film would be the institution and, in this case, organized by these “Follies.” That was a decision and that means that it’s not about someone or about a small group of people and you don’t get intimate with a small group of people. My own experience in America, for example, when I shot a lot of film about cops in Pittsburgh, well, we lived in the station. We had to know these guys and before I shot down there, we were beginning to be able to get into people’s houses. It was going to be a film about people. A small group, two cars, six guys, alternating, basically only four guys. And that’s a different thing. There you want to meet people. People are what’s important and they provide the structure, the continuity. Getting to know them is what the film is about. We lived with them. Some of us became very fond of each other. I had a very good friend in that film. A strange guy, cop *extraordinaire*. He was a terrible cop and I’d tell him so and he’d argue with me. We’d go get drunk together. Tom was hit with a brick. The Pirates won the World Series and there was a tremendous explosion in Pittsburgh and, among the victims, was Tom’s eye. Some guy threw a brick down and took his eye out. I heard about it through other friends on the force, so I went to see him in the hospital. He looked pretty bad, pretty blue, pretty down. And then, that winter, he smoked his .38. But I mean, those were friends. That was the purpose of that film.

This was different. This was an institution, an abstraction. What you show was what they were doing in relation to this image. Eddie was an exception, and even Eddie doesn’t come off—you know, you never really get to know Eddie. You don’t get to know anyone, basically, in that movie.



QUESTION: But behind the camera was different?

MARSHALL: Oh, yeah, we got pretty close to people. I have another quality, you know, which is part of the way I make movies. Very quickly when I come into a place, I don't know whether it's vibes or whether it's the way I handle myself or what I seem to be thinking; I don't know what it is, but I get into it very fast. I can walk into a domestic argument in somebody's home and start shooting and the whole thing just goes on and happens. I just have a knack at that. It's just a quality, I guess.

QUESTION: And the quality, if I understand you, is not, in your case, invisibility, but presenting yourself as a trustworthy person.

MARSHALL: Something like that.

QUESTION: Some critics have said that the later films get cooler, but that in *Titicut Follies* there is a passion and emotion, a closeness and immediacy. Deac Rossell attributes that to the camerawork.

MARSHALL: That's me. That's the way I am, the way I shoot.

QUESTION: And so you're kind of drawing them to the camera?

MARSHALL: Yeah. "Slick, hey, this is great; hey, this is—"

QUESTION: So you keep your other eye open then?

MARSHALL: Yeah, yeah, sure, all the time.

QUESTION: Do you have a sense of how Fred would behave in relation to that? Was he unobtrusive? Was he charming? Was he being invisible?

MARSHALL: I don't know. All I can say was when we were together, it just worked. I'd sort of barge into places and start shooting, and everything followed.

QUESTION: And you would, then, be in a position that you could converse with people before or after a scene? To be a person to them, not just a—

MARSHALL: Yes, yes. Not a camera coming and interfering with your private life.

QUESTION: Did you ever at that time have qualms about the questions that later arose as far as privacy?

MARSHALL: No, I never did. Because shooting is shooting. I never second guessed myself, you know: "I'll wait. I'd better not do this. Oh, I can't show that. Oh, I mustn't show this. Oh, this is an invasion or privacy. Oh, this is a—." That just gets in the way and makes it impossible. You shoot. You have a relationship with the person you're shooting. Unless somebody says, "No." I've never infringed on that.

QUESTION: Otherwise, you go forward?

MARSHALL: I've never shot anything hidden. I've never shot anything like spying—like when you're a mile away with a long lens and you're shooting somebody, and they don't know whether you're shooting them or the guy next to them. It is a personal relationship, and it is about what's happening; what they're doing and what you're doing and it's about making that film. So, unless somebody says, "No," you just go. Anything else is second guessing and that's the third rule of thumb to me in any kind of documentary filming. You're playing with yourself if you think, "I mustn't shoot this" or "I shouldn't do this" or "Can I get this?" or "Is this right?" or, you know, "Am I intruding?" or so forth and so on. You don't. If you do that, you stand a mile away and you, you simper and peek and you giggle and you titillate yourself and then you go home and say, "Wow, what have I got? Wow." You've got to be there *with* people while you're shooting. Anything else is just your own artifice, getting in your own way.

QUESTION: Was there a standard answer that you give when people asked, "What's this film about?" or "What are you doing?" Or does that arise much?

MARSHALL: Yeah, people ask, sure. You tell them what you're doing. Explain it. I explained it to people in Bridgewater. People who, I suppose, would be considered incompetent to give you consent, I talked to them and told them what the film was about. Just describe it. Say we were making this documentary about the place and the people in it and "The Follies" and—hope it will do some good."

QUESTION: That was always part of it, the "hope it'll do some good"?

MARSHALL: Oh, yeah, yeah.

QUESTION: The way you presented it, the way you thought about it?

MARSHALL: Well, at the time, I think all of us, David and Fred and I, and to the extent that he was involved, Tim, hoped that showing the place would make people think about it. But not, you know, not in a heavy-handed, "Now let's think about the problem of incarceration without trial." That would be another kind of film, a perfectly worthy kind of film, and a very important one to make and, if you had to think of what the most important thing in that institution was, that was it. There are an awful lot of people in that place that shouldn't be there. They've never been before the judge. They've never been before God and the people to tell their story and had somebody say yes or no.

QUESTION: Do you think looking at the film anybody would know that who didn't know it before?

MARSHALL: You mean the way the film finally came out?

QUESTION: The way the film finally came out.

MARSHALL: I think it could have been dropped in, in a felicitous way, a little more. I think that's one of the problems with it. Like Robey's sitting there and he turns to the camera and says, "What we're trying to do is to help see if we can get some of these people out of here, because a lot of them shouldn't be here and under the law they've never been sentenced." But he did that.

QUESTION: That was on film?

MARSHALL: Yeah. I remember him saying that. Sort of an aside, you know, as things were going on.

QUESTION: But that's a kind of camera recognition and observational film plays as if the camera's not there.

MARSHALL: Well, mine don't. My films don't. I mean, I don't think that bothers—You know, that's true. The other is sort of a pretense, that you're not there. You're a fly on the wall. And you're not a fly on the wall. I mean, there's no concealed camera. You're not looking through a one-way mirror. You're not bugging people when they don't know it. You're not setting up an Abscam or something like that. You're in there shooting.

A fourth rule of thumb for documentary is that if people are preoccupied in what they're doing, they are preoccupied in what they're doing. They're not putting on a show for you. They're involved in what's happening. And if the involvement is real, they're not checking over their shoulder or editing themselves in front of the camera. They're involved. It's a real thing. It's a real event. It's different than a media event where you put something up so that, like a lot of tv documentaries, you can tell the minute you see them: This is a media event. These people are set up and they're told to do this or say this, or they're brought together for some other purpose than their own. They're not there because they're involved in what they're doing; they're there because CBS says, "Be there and do it." And that's to me the distinction between documentary, which is people involved in their own lives, and news, news events.

QUESTION: Were you involved in distribution or other post-production arrangements after you left the editing?

MARSHALL: I was involved in none of it. I wasn't involved in that film after I was asked to leave the editing room. We had no say or decision in the film. And I thought of it as Fred's movie

QUESTION: What got you to the point to decide now is the time to write the resignation from Bridgewater Film Corporation?

MARSHALL: If this was a real corporation, if it's for real, then Heather and I are the majority of the corporation, then we ought to know. If we're not, if it isn't a real corporation, then we've been set up. We've been used.

QUESTION: Did you have any contact with Fred after you resigned?

MARSHALL: No. I think we did talk once. I was still working at OSTI and he said, “Take back your resignation.” And I said, “Jesus, you know, I’d like to, but here’s the problem: we’re responsible for something we’re not responsible for. I mean, I don’t know what’s been said to people.” And he said, “Well—.” He fired me.

QUESTION: At the time the Bridgewater Film Corporation was set up, did any of the three of you, you or Heather or David, question why he [Fred] wasn’t part of the corporation?

MARSHALL: No, we knew. He had a problem with paying for another movie and he thought that if he set up a corporation, he’d have some protection for this one. I think he was paying for *The Cool World*, and this was a way to separate the two, so nobody could attach the film. If somebody could do that, it would stop him from doing other movies. How are you going to start off again? How’s a guy going to start off again when everything he does is subject to some greedy soul on the other end of a settlement who says, “I won’t take a dime on the dollar. I want my full measure.” So that was the extent of it.

QUESTION: So the corporation was a convenience to isolate the film financially?

MARSHALL: Yeah, yeah. But the thing is, in a corporation, if it’s real and you’re a real director, you are supposed to know what you’re doing. That’s at least my understanding of the way the law looks at it. They don’t say, “Hey, why did you do this?” And “Who are you helping here?” And “Who are you trying to protect here?” and so forth and so on. They say, “Hey, look, you did this and you’re the director and you’re supposed to know what you’re doing.”

QUESTION: There was a period there where there was speculation that there would be damage suits by participants in the film against the film. And, therefore, the corporation would have been legally, financially responsible for any damages.

MARSHALL: Yes, they would have been responsible. But it’s more than the damage suit, it’s your reputation. After all, somebody said something to some people in the state, in the institution. And if you’re going to go against them, you’d like to know what you said.

QUESTION: Did you ask Fred if he would talk about this to you?

MARSHALL: Well, my mistake was not resigning earlier when I was kicked out of the editing room. At that point, I had no control over anything. My directorship became an empty word. I had no control over what the film said or over what happened to the film. And I just didn’t think. The thought didn’t occur to me. I was naïve.

QUESTION: Was he?

MARSHALL: You would have to ask him. I would not be surprised if he said, “Yeah, I just didn’t know it was going to cause this kind of an explosion.” We just didn’t feel that.

QUESTION: What's your view of the outcome, that is, of the restrictions on the film?

MARSHALL: I don't know. The only qualm I have, the only thing that occurred to me that I guess I'd have liked something to have been done about, was this problem of these guys awaiting trial. You blast the film all over Massachusetts and those guys seem very vulnerable to me because, either a juror sees it and, even if he's asked, when he's challenged on a jury, he says, "No," but he forgets, it's there in his mind. And, later on in the trial, this guy comes up and the guy made a bad impression on him. Or, the other thing more likely it seemed to me that could happen is that lawyers, both the state and the defense lawyers, figure these guys, what would they get? A public defender is basically what it amounts to and a public defender would say, "Well, I don't think we can get a fair trial in this state." And the state would say, "That's true. This film has sort of come out and we've got to wait until the dust settles and then we'll try again," but sends the guy back for another two, three years in Bridgewater. I thought something might, might have been done about that: either don't show it—even if he didn't show it in Massachusetts. Ask the people. Take a few phone calls to find out who's in the movie. To call up and say, "What's the story on Vladimir?" I mean, "Is he, is he going to appear in the next six months?" Whatever. "What's the situation? Is he going before the court, or is he not?" Just sort out a few things like that, and time it accordingly. It didn't matter if it was shown anywhere else. But I don't even know if anything like that was done. I mean, I don't know if anybody called up anybody or asked anybody what's happening with these guys.

Later on, when I was shooting in Pittsburgh, I filmed a guy who was turning information. Somebody could say, "Hey, you know, we just saw you singing to the police." Passions were very high at that time. That was the period when Martin Luther King was killed, and passions were damned high. And I thought, "Well, hey, this could be bad for this guy," so I dropped it. I recut the film. I made another movie, just because of that. So, it's a serious thing. And I do think you have a responsibility at that level, in that way, to people who are in your movie. Not to shooting. You know, you don't have to do anything to the shooting. Not to cutting. You know, you cut it for yourself. But, ultimately, for example, you wouldn't, you may not show that in Pittsburgh. I never showed those movies ever—

QUESTION: Your Pittsburgh police films have not been shown in Pittsburgh?

MARSHALL: Oh, they've been shown to the cops. But not to the general public, no. Not until years and years later.

QUESTION: And you control the distribution through your company?

MARSHALL: Yes. But if somebody else is going to distribute it, you explain to them: "Look, let's not show this in Pittsburgh for three years." And, generally, a good distributor can see that. There are things you can do. It's not hopeless. And I think you do have a modicum of responsibility about that. But I have no idea what the discussions were regarding the *Follies* in that respect.

QUESTION: How do you place Fred Wiseman as a filmmaker?

MARSHALL: He's become sort of a cult figure. Who else has been successful in getting documentaries like that on the air? There aren't many people who do. It's not a beaten path. And I think that's a real achievement to just do that. And the only other films I've seen are [*The*] *Cool World*, and I don't know how much of that is Shirley or how much of that is Fred. I've never talked to either one of them about it, so I have no idea. And then what? *Law and Order* [1969]. And that seemed kind of distant, remote to me. I mean comparing stuff like I shot in Pittsburgh, it seems to me, yes, you can get intimate, and you can get close, and you can get real people doing real things. That seems very, very far away. Kind of a montage. And what else did I see? *Meat* [1976], which I thought was boring. This is just a personal preference—I like to meet somebody in a movie. I like to know people when I see a documentary. And I just don't feel that you know anybody in his films. See what I mean—voyeur. But, you know, *The Cool World* didn't seem voyeur to me. It seemed right in there. I haven't seen the others, so I don't know. But I think doing this kind of documentary and getting it shown is a real achievement. A major achievement.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Gaughan was Superintendent of Massachusetts Correctional Institution-Bridgewater at the time of *Titicut Follies*.

<sup>2</sup> Ames Robey, M.D., was a psychiatrist and Medical Director at MCI-Bridgewater in 1966.

<sup>3</sup> The Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology is a Harvard Museum.

<sup>4</sup> Lorna McLean Marshall was Laurence Kennedy Marshall's wife. Elizabeth, later Elizabeth Marshall Thomas, was their daughter.

<sup>5</sup> The film was also known as *Kung Bushmen of the Kalahari*. It is currently distributed by DER (Documentary Educational Resources) as *First Film*.

<sup>6</sup> Wiseman was the producer of *The Cool World*. Clarke was the director.

<sup>7</sup> "I have Mitch Bogdanovitch in New York putting together an Auricon that's been silenced and cut down and made lighter so we can shoot candidly so the characters don't hear the clicking and clanging and are not aware that we're shooting." Robert Drew in an interview with P. J. O'Connell. P. J. O'Connell, *Robert Drew and the Development of Cinema Verite in America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 63.

<sup>8</sup> In 1968 Tim Asch and John Marshall founded DER, a non-profit production and distribution company. Asch became a distinguished ethnographic filmmaker and the Director of the Center for Visual Anthropology at the University of Southern California.

<sup>9</sup> David Eames was a third man on the crew, changing magazines, etc.

<sup>10</sup> In a resume from 1973, Frederick Wiseman lists himself as Treasurer of OSTI, Inc., "a consulting company, 1966-70." Cited in U. S. Congress, Senate. Committee on Labor and Public Welfare. National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Amendments of 1973, 1065.

**Suggested Citation:** Benson, Thomas W., and Anderson, Carolyn. "John Marshall." *Making Documentary Film: Frederick Wiseman and His Collaborators*, Penn State Libraries Open Publishing, 2024, pp. 9-30. <https://doi.org/10.59236/wiseman1>