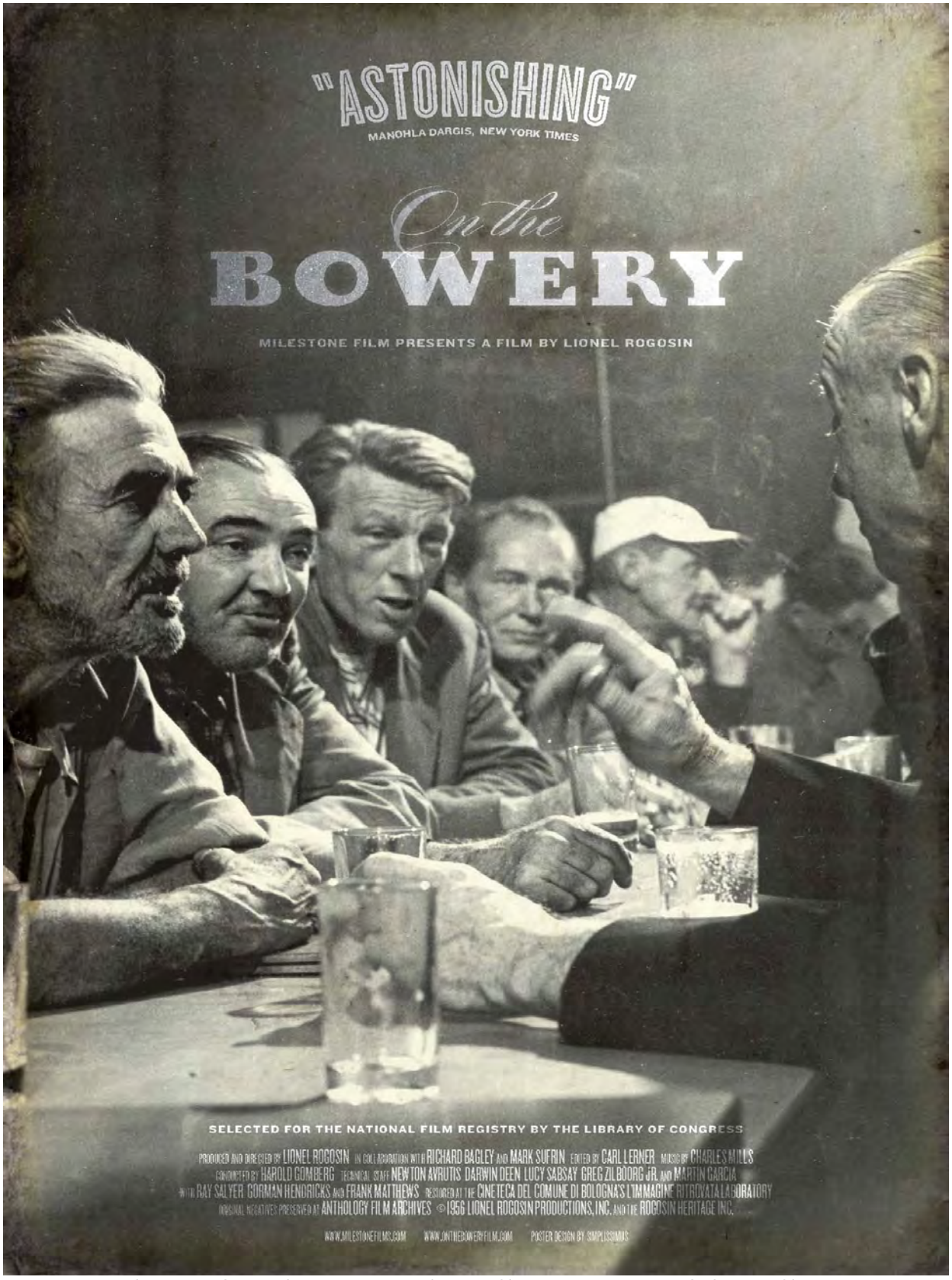

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A Milestone Films release

ON THE BOWERY

1956. USA. 65 minutes. 35mm. Aspect ratio: 1:1.33. Black and White. Mono. World Premiere: 1956, Venice Film Festival

Selected in 2008 for the National Film Registry by the Library of Congress

Winner of the Grand Prize in Documentary & Short Film Category, Venice Film Festival, 1956.
British Film Academy Award, "The Best Documentary of 1956." British Film Festival, 1957.
Nominated for American Academy Award, Best Documentary, 1958.

A Milestone Films theatrical release: October 2010.

The restoration of *On the Bowery* has been encouraged by Rogosin Heritage Inc. and carried out by Cineteca del Comune di Bologna. The restoration is based on the original negatives preserved at the Anthology Film Archives in New York City. The restoration was carried out at L'Immagine Ritrovata laboratory.

The Men of *On the Bowery*

Ray Salyer
Gorman Hendricks
Frank Matthews

Dedicated to:

Gorman Hendricks

Crew:

Produced & Directed by .....Lionel Rogosin
In collaboration with.....Richard Bagley and Mark Sufrin
Technical Staff .....Newton Avrutis, Darwin Deen, Lucy Sabsay, Greg Zilboorg Jr., Martin Garcia
Edited by.....Carl Lerner
Music.....Charles Mills
Conducted by.....Harold Gomberg

The Perfect Team: The Making of On The Bowery

2009. France/USA/Italy. 46:30 minutes. Digital. Aspect Ratio: 1:1.85. Color/B&W. Stereo. Produced and directed by Michael Rogosin. Rogosin interviews by Marina Goldovskaya. Edited by Thierry Simonnet. Assistant Editor: Céleste Rogosin. Cinematography and sound by Zach Levy, Michael Rogosin, Lloyd Ross. Research and archiving: Matt Peterson. Photoshop: Elliot Rogosin. Score by Jeff Gardner and music by Charles Mills from *On The Bowery*.

Synopsis

On the Bowery chronicles three days on New York's skid row, the Bowery.

It is morning and outside the Majestic Bar, the Arcade Bar and Restaurant and the Old Dover, men are passed out on the sidewalk. Some drunks pass the bottle as others sleep on park benches until rousted by the cops. In the shadow of the Third Avenue El, policemen round up ill-dressed men and load them into a paddy wagon,

Ray, a railroad worker with suitcase in hand, walks down the street and into the Round House Restaurant Bar and Grill where a group of drunks are arguing loudly. Ray pulls up a stool and orders a beer. One of the patrons comes over from the table where he is drinking with a group of men, chats about working on the railroad and invites Ray to join him and his pals. Ray does and buys a bottle of muscatel for the group. The men drink and reminisce and even break into a wobbly chorus of a sentimental old song. Gorman joins the table as the other men drift off — as he observes — as soon as the bottle's empty. Ray asks Gorman about getting a day's labor since he's now broke. Gorman suggests that Ray sells some clothes from his suitcase instead. Ray says that he needs money for a drink and flop [bed] for the night. The pair head out.

On the street they open Ray's battered suitcase and look through his meager belongings. Gorman spots a pocket watch, but Ray says that it is not for sale. On the Bowery, men mill around, trying on hats and glasses, examining merchandise and transacting business deals. A man in a straw hat offers Ray some money for a pair of pants.

Back at the bar, Ray buys a beer for himself and a muscatel for Gorman. Ray mentions he wants to save some money for a flop, but as they evening falls, the pair stagger from bar to bar. Finally, Ray passes out on the sidewalk. When Gorman can't rouse him, he takes Ray's suitcase and heads to a SRO [single room occupancy] hotel nearby. He tells Walter, the night clerk that he needs a bed and puts up Ray's case as collateral.

The morning light reveals men sprawled on the sidewalks and asleep in the doorways of the Bowery. Ray is still passed out on the metal doors of a storm cellar, while nearby Frank, a bearded man sheltered under a piece of cardboard gets dressed, puts on a jaunty nautical cap and moves his pushcart out into the street. Ray awakens and asks Frank where he can get a job. Frank tells him on the corner of Houston Street and leads him there. Meanwhile, as the bartender pushes open the security gates at the Arcade Restaurant, a crowd of men stumbles in.

On Houston, Ray and other men stand waiting for truckers to pull up, looking for day laborers. Ray jumps aboard a small panel truck. On the street, men and women sit around, drinking. At the bar, Frank and Gorman meet up. Frank tells Gorman that he wasn't on Riker's Island but on Hart's Island [another correctional facility, no longer in use] and that the food and work weren't too bad there. Now Frank picks up and sells cardboard, metal and rags from his pushcart, but he plans to get cleaned up and ship out to the South Seas one of these days. Gorman says that he has a job taking over the kitchen at a midtown apartment hotel and needs some help. But Frank heads out to his pushcart and his bottle. Gorman does head uptown where he panhandles passersby.

Gorman returns to the Bowery, walks into a bar and orders a "muskie." He goes to the large sitting room of his flophouse where men smoke, read the newspaper and play dominoes. One player tells Gorman that he doesn't hear from his family — he just lives on his pension and sits on a park bench. Gorman replies that it sounds like a quiet normal life, and that he'd like that too.

After unloading crates all day, Ray sits on a Pepsi cooler downing a bottle of pop. Gorman joins him and invites him for drink. Ray tells his friend that he plans to go to the Bowery Mission for the night so he can try to stay out of the gin mills and won't be tempted to drink. Gorman says that he is heading over to the Confidence Bar.

Ray joins the long line of exhausted-looking men outside the Bowery Mission. After they file in and sit in pews, the Reverend George L. Bolton speaks to the assembled about his 28 years on skid row and his own experiences as "the product of a rescue mission." He tells them: "I dare say there isn't a man here today who started out to end up

on the Bowery. The Bowery of New York… One newspaperman stated that it is the saddest and maddest street in the world. Maybe that is an understatement." He calls on the men to accept Christ and some do approach the stage and repent.

After the services, the men line up for soup, bread and coffee. Ray asks the man in front of him about the mission. He is told that for the first night, men sleep on the floor, but that they can stay a week and go out during the day. After they have eaten, a man from the mission explains the rules: they must stay in all night, bathe, have their clothes fumigated, wash their underwear and shave. Most of all, they cannot come back into the mission if they have been drinking. As the men spread newspapers on the floor and lie down for the night, Ray sits and watches. After the lights go out, he gets up and walks out of the Mission.

The barroom is full and noisy as Ray joins Gorman for a drink. Gorman reminisces about working for the *Washington Times* and *Washington Herald*. He tells Ray he "had a yen to study medicine" and became a "damned good surgeon and internist." Ray replies, "I'll tell you one thing. You might have been as good as you say. But me, I only care about one thing," as a downs a shot. Ray says that he was born in Kentucky and raised in North Carolina. He had a twin brother who decided to join the army, so he joined up too. A woman drinking at a nearby table joins the men and soon Ray has his arm around her and is buying her drinks. Their drunken conversation mixes into the din of shouts, fights and non-sequiturs.

Ray and his date stagger down the street arm in arm. He turns to go into another bar and she pulls him on. Ray pushes her away and she walks off. Two guys follow Ray, beat him up and take his money. He collapses on the sidewalk.

The third morning dawns. Gorman sleeps fully dressed on the bed in his cubicle at the SRO, an empty bottle on the floor beside him. Ray is passed out alongside the trash in an alley. Three bums have wrapped chunks of Sterno [a fuel made from denatured and jellied alcohol linked to many deaths from methanol poisoning] in a handkerchief and are squeezing it to make "canned heat," which they pour into a battered paper cup and drink. When they hear the cops coming, they scoop Ray off the sidewalk and help him move on. At the flophouse, Gorman, promising to pay the two-day's rent he owes, talks Walter into letting him reclaim the suitcase. Gorman takes Ray's pocket watch out of the valise and sells it at a shop with a sign announcing "We Buy All Merchandise."

In the bar, Ray sits at a table. He looks pretty bad. Gorman brings him a drink, but Ray says no thanks. "You know the story. I came in after working all summer. Started drinking that mess. One thing led to another. Drank a lot. Spent a lot. Wound up in that alley over there with nothing in the world." He tells Gorman he wants to try to get to Chicago to "make my last stand out there." He can't say he won't drink, but he does say, "I'm going to try not to." Gorman promises to give him some money if a friend he is expecting shows up. Ray leaves and Gorman goes to the john where he peels bills off the bankroll he got from selling Ray's watch.

Gorman follows Ray to the street corner and tells him that they guy he was waiting for had come by and paid him. He offers Ray the money to help him get out of town. "Get off this Bowery," he tells him, "and stay off the place." Ray replies, " If I ever run into you again I'll give it back. But if I don't I'll pass it on to somebody else." "Good luck to you boy," the older man tells him.

Back in the bar, the drunks discuss how they gave Ray a "squeeze of heat" and a coffee to get him back on his feet that morning. Gorman boasts that he helped him get out of town. "He'll be back," another replies.

Out on the Bowery, Frank surveys an army of ravaged faces.

Lionel Rogosin

January 22, 1924 - December 8, 2000

"Reality – Life is Film" (Lionel Rogosin in a 1955 note)

As an independent producer, director and distributor, Lionel Rogosin was one of the founders of the New American Cinema movement. This informal group of filmmakers, including Morris Engels and Sydney Meyers, sought to create a cinema free from the economic and structural shackles of Hollywood and to discard standard conventions of plot and structure. Inspired by Robert Flaherty and the Italian neo-realists and equipped with lighter, more portable cameras, sound recorders and lighting, these directors shot on the city streets and focused on real life. One filmmaker who was strongly influenced by this movement was maverick filmmaker John Cassavetes, who said, "To tell the truth as you see it, incidentally, is not necessarily the truth. To tell the truth as someone else sees it is, to me, much more important and enlightening. Some documentaries are fantastic. Like Lionel Rogosin's pictures, for instance; like *On The Bowery*. This is a guy who's probably the greatest documentary filmmaker of all time, in my opinion." A *Newsweek* critic called also called Rogosin "a man of profound humanism."

Rogosin experienced fascism firsthand as a soldier in World War II and vowed that he would continue to fight against it whenever and wherever he saw the threat of it reemerging. He wrote, "This was the conviction that caused my anguish and indignation about apartheid in South Africa and racism in the United States." Rogosin decided to make films that expressed his political activism — he exposed oppression before it became fashionable and his subject matter was groundbreaking. His unique filmic approach brought him acclaim, but his empathy for the downtrodden combined with a desire not to dramatize their plight, made it difficult to find financing for his film projects.

Born in New York, Lionel Rogosin (ro' geh-sin) was the only child of Israel and Evelyn Vogedes Rogosin. His father, a poor Russian immigrant with little education, started a sweater factory in Brooklyn at age 18 and made his first million by the next year. Lionel grew up in the wealthy (and primarily non-Jewish) New York suburb of Port Washington, Long Island and was expected to join the family business. He went to Yale to study chemical engineering, but before graduating, he volunteered to serve in the Navy for two years during World War II.

Upon his return, he joined his father's successful Beaunit Mills, by then the industry leader in producing rayon fabrics. During this time, Rogosin traveled to war-torn Eastern and Western Europe as well as Israel.

> *The end of an experiment. I decided to join Beaunit Mills Inc. my father's corporation for several reasons, which originated on the bridge of my ship AMC 94(Auxiliary Mine Sweeper) during a hurricane in Charleston harbor in 1945. Standing there in the calm between storms I meditated about my existence and the state of the universe.*
>
> *I knew that I would soon leave the Navy and I felt I needed to formulate a plan for my future life. WWII had left me shaken and disturbed, I was aware of the holocaust and the horror of nuclear weapons that had been dropped at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and I was not overjoyed by those events although we were told that nuclear weapons had ended the war with Japan. I was skeptical about that reasoning and after some examination I don't believe it was necessary. My reasoning then was that after such disasters going back to a normal existence was absurd. If everyone did not dedicate his life to profound changes in society and the cause of peace at least I would do so.*
>
> *I wasn't sure how to proceed with this vision but I decided to be practical which meant to eventually join my father's business in order to have a financial base from which to function.*

Rogosin quickly became president of the textile division but was unsatisfied with the work. Influenced at an early age by the film *All Quiet on the Western Front* as well as his experience in the war and later travels, he was

convinced that he needed to take a more active role in society. “I got restless, so one day I wandered along the Bowery with a camera, and there you are… Of course, it wasn’t as simple as that.” He had seen the images of the Holocaust and terrible racism in his own country, and after a brief stint as an assistant on a short film by Roger Tilton about square dancing, he decided to confront these ills with a camera.

In 1954 Rogosin resigned from Beaunit Mills and invested his own money — an estimated $60,000 — in the production of *On The Bowery*. Although it received the Grand Prize for documentary at the Venice Film Festival and was nominated for an Academy Award, the film also had detractors. Many mainstream critics could not see past the film’s rejection of Hollywood production values and actors. They considered the storyline weak (no formal plot), the cinematography gritty (scenes of real squalor and poverty) and the acting rough. Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* described *On the Bowery* as “sordid and pitiful.” But others recognized *The Little Fugitives* and *On the Bowery* as signs of the emergence of a new cinematic art form. Interestingly enough, Rogosin claimed not to have seen an American film for many years prior to his making of *On the Bowery*. “I was isolated at that time… you have to understand that above all, I’ve been inspired, motivated by life and not by films.”

In 1956, Rogosin married Elinor Hart who, under her married name, became a well-known dance critic in the 1960s. With confidence based on the reception of *On the Bowery*, Rogosin decided to take a real chance. For several years he had considered making of a film protesting apartheid. Meeting the secretary of the NAACP, Walter White, and the South African writer Alan Paton (*Cry, the Beloved Country*), he decided that this was something he *had* to do. It was an incredibly courageous act of filmmaking and defiance. Taking his young, pregnant wife with him (their eldest son Michael was born during the making of the film), Rogosin entered South Africa on a tourist visa.

The couple lived in the country for a year, making friends and important connections, while observing the government system of oppression. Even though film equipment had become more lightweight and portable, it was still impossible to film without the authorities discovering them. So they applied for a permit to film — on different occasions presenting their project as a travelogue to promote South African tourism or a documentary celebrating the music of the country. After many bureaucratic delays, hostility and the great danger of being discovered, authorization to film was granted and they quickly gathered together a cast and crew. The plot was written with the guidance of two young anti-apartheid Africans, Lewis Nkosi and William “Bloke” Modisane, who also appear in the film. Also appearing in the film was a very young, very beautiful singer, Miriam Makeba.

After making the film, Rogosin helped Makeba flee South Africa and supported her financially to promote her career in Europe and the US. In New York after a performance at the Village Vanguard, she met Harry Belafonte who convinced her to break her contract with Rogosin and took her under his wing. Makeba later resented Lionel’s original involvement and his contribution to her success was unjustly forgotten.

As with *On the Bowery*, Rogosin’s “aim was to induce the actors to add their own experience, poetry and understanding to my bare outline, thus giving flesh and substance to the structure of my brief, intense period of observation of their lives and problems.” Shooting in secret in restricted areas, or in public under the police’s noses by posing as a travelogue director, Rogosin and his crew spent their entire time terrified of being discovered and facing the consequences. Fearful that the South African film labs would realize their true intentions, the filmmakers smuggled the raw footage out of the country and developed in the States, where Carl Lerner edited the film. Rogosin finished shooting and returned to New York, leaving cinematographer Emil Knebel to shoot additional footage as needed. Just as Knebel was finishing up, the South African government heard stories of the film and asked him to leave the country.

Taking its title from an African National Congress slogan, *Come Back, Africa* premiered at the 1960 Venice Film Festival, where it received the Critics Award and great acclaim, but it still faced some of the same criticisms that had faced *On the Bowery*.

Finding no attractive distribution deal for *Come Back, Africa*, Rogosin took a ten-year lease on the Renata Theater and spent $40,000 to renovate and convert it into a film theater. The re-named Bleecker Street Cinema became *the* place to exhibit art and political films for the next twenty-five years. (Rogosin sold the theater in 1974 to Sid Geffen.) *Come Back, Africa* opened on April 4, 1960, barely a month after the infamous Sharpeville massacre. The film received some rave reviews and *Time* magazine chose it as one of the ten best films of the year.

In September 1960, Rogosin became one of the twenty-five filmmakers who joined together as a "free and open organization" called the New American Cinema Group. (Though at the signing of the group's manifesto, it was reported that Rogosin — who was supposed to bring the food — did not show up.) At the time, he was busy preparing his next film — a protest against the horrors of war and a plea to promote peace. The film, three years in the making, became *Good Times, Wonderful Times*. Inspired by Joan Littlewood's production of *Oh What a Lovely War!*, the film combined archival footage of 20th-century war, film of the nuclear devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and an scenes from actual trendy London cocktail party. The conversation from the party reflected the apathy and hedonism of most of the people at the time. At one point, a guest actually observes, "If one looks at the world, war is one way of keeping the population down." Once again, critics regarded Rogosin's film either as a masterpiece or overly difficult. But *Good Times, Wonderful Times* was a success on college campuses and the film was one of the first to oppose the Vietnam War and helped inspire the antiwar protest movement.

Once again finding it difficult to distribute a film that was before its time, Rogosin set up a distribution company. Originally called Rogosin Films banner, later named Impact Films, the new company promoted itself as "an internationally acclaimed collection of controversial features and shorts."

Devoting his energy to his distribution company and distracted by the collapse of his marriage (the couple had three sons), Rogosin did not complete another film until 1970. Rogosin initially considered *Come Back, Africa* as the first part of a trilogy that would include a parallel study of racism against blacks entitled *Come Back, America* and a final section on a newly independent country, such as India. However, with his money depleted, he produced instead a one-hour documentary, *Black Roots*, featuring five activists. Their sometimes horrifying, sometimes humorous stories about growing up in white America were played against images of young blacks filmed on the streets of Harlem and music by John Coltrane, Ray Charles, Jimi Hendrix and James Brown. After receiving mixed reviews once again, Rogosin went on to film *Black Fantasy*, featuring one of the activists from the previous film, musician Jim Collier. Based on Collier's stream of consciousness monologue, Rogosin strove to create something equivalent to James Joyce's *Ulysses*. His next film sought to complete his *Come Back, America* series with *Woodcutters of the Deep South* (1973). This film focused on black and white workers struggling to overcome their own racism to organize against the Gulf Coast pulp and paper industry. All three films stripped cinema pretense away to create a direct, immediate cinema of social protest.

Rogosin's last film was *Arab-Israeli Dialogue,* made in 1974. Again, starting out with a more ambitious project, he instead created a spare 40-minute film of a dialogue between Palestinian poet Rashid Hussein and the Israeli journalist Amos Kenan. Shot in two afternoons and combined with footage that Rogosin had shot in Israel in 1953, the film is a meaningful plea for peace and understanding.

Rogosin spent the next sixteen years trying to develop new projects, including a musical feature based on Paul Gauguin's autobiographical book on Tahiti, *Noa Noa* and a police movie written by John Briley, *The Big Apple*. Through it all, he remained devoted to a cinema of truth and meaning. After his death, he was buried in the Forever Hollywood Cemetery — an ironic end for one of cinema's great independents.

On The Bowery (1955–1956)

All italicized quotes are from Lionel Rogosin's unpublished memoirs, courtesy of Michael Rogosin

Making On the Bowery taught me a method of molding reality into a form that could touch the imagination of others. The total reality of a community or a society is so vast that any attempt to detail its entirety would result in nothing more than a meaningless catalogue of stale, factual representation—-a

result which I call 'documentary.' Flaherty's great work has no more to do with 'documentary' than great poetry has to do with the factual report of a sociologist.

On The Bowery was the first of Lionel Rogosin's award-winning films, garnering the Grand Prize for Documentary at the 1956 Venice Film Festival, the British Award for Best Documentary and nomination for an Oscar® as best documentary.

From the beginning, Rogosin's style as an independent filmmaker was straightforward and compassionate. His films were made "from the inside," showing subjects in their normal surroundings and allowing them to speak in their own words. By choosing ordinary people caught up in universal problems — homelessness, alcoholism, racial discrimination, war and peace, labor strife, and poverty — Rogosin made his points poignantly. Interestingly, he chose the Bowery and its inhabitants as his first subject — intending to reveal the reality of people who were drinking away their lives in an attempt to escape from it.

Rogosin hired some cinematographers and started shooting test footage of the Bowery. But he quickly became disenchanted with their work fired them all. He sought out James Agee to write a script; their meeting at the San Remo Bar included heavy drinking and ended with an agreement that they would work together. Sadly, this never happened as Agee died of a heart attack on May 16, 1955 at the age of 42.

At the White Horse Tavern (the other favorite bar of writers, artists and filmmakers on Hudson Street — just around the corner from Rogosin's apartment at 96 Perry Street), Rogosin met Mark Sufrin, a young Greenwich Village writer. Sufrin had just returned to the US after working on documentaries in Israel and he became excited about working with Rogosin. The director described Sufrin as a "highly intelligent, freelance writer, aggressive and volatile, full of ingenious ideas." So the pair embarked on shooting a 16mm film without a script. When they decided that they should change to 35mm, Sufrin convinced Rogosin to hire another White Horse Tavern regular, talented cameraman Richard Bagley, who had shot Sidney Meyer's *The Quiet One*. Exploring the experiences of a tortured young African-American boy in Harlem, *The Quiet One* was a revelation to filmgoers and directors from the day it premiered in 1949. Written by James Agee, with contributions by Helen Levitt and Janice Loeb, it signaled the birth of a new cinema that soon included the likes of Morris Engel (*The Little Fugitive*) and Rogosin.

When I started thinking about a cameraman Sufrin suggested Dick Bagley who was considered a Village genius, I rejected that idea at first because I had seen and heard Dick in the White Horse. He was as raucous as a wounded crow and I was unimpressed but I later decided to see his work and after a screening I decided that his eye was superior to his oratory. He then came to my flat where I showed him film I had taken myself. I could tell that the material grabbed him and he said what do you want to do. The walls of my room were covered with Rembrandt portraits, I pointed to them and replied, "THAT." He immediately knew what I meant. I suspected that his affinity for the subject was connected to his alcoholism. He immediately said this material is too good for a short film. You have to make a feature. Before I answered I had agreed because I had been thinking the same thing for weeks. I feigned doubts because of the cost and risk but I quickly agreed with him and we were off. I remarked that the biggest risk you took was being born, after that it was downhill.

He was wilder then any of the Bowery cast. After the first few days of shooting, the chief protagonist Ray Salyer said, "this guy drinks more than I do." I was appalled after the first day's shooting at his alcohol consumption and thought, my God I've got an alcoholic on my hands. I held my breath and waited for the first day's rushes. They were perfect so from then on I never looked back. During the shooting I discovered that Bagley and I had a visual rapport that was uncanny. We rarely discussed the photography; I just indicated the subject and it always turned out as I imagined it. During the day Bagley rationed his Gin and Tonics and when we came together every evening he let down the floodgates until 3 AM. The next day he would greet the sun like a half drowned Robin, so sick I thought he might die but

after an hour or two he was ready to go again. We both had a passion for the film and it turned out to be an artistic love affair.

By the 1950s, documentary film pioneer Robert Flaherty had become the major influence on American independent cinema. Young filmmakers saw his poetic reality films such as *Nanook of the North* and *Louisiana Story* as a model to express the social ills of the day on film. Critics would call today call this practice, "docudrama." But in the postwar period the use of set-up scenes and situations were seen as tools employed in a search for "the essence of truth" and the result was considered pure documentary. Rogosin was particularly influenced by Flaherty's *Man of Aran*. So, on the advice of his mentor, Rosalind Kossoff (owner of art film distributor A.F. Films and a former associate of John Grierson at Canada's National Film Board), the first thing Rogosin did was to follow the famed documentarian's methods by immersing himself for six months (along with Sufrin and Bagley) in the world of the Bowery drunks. Also inspired by Flaherty, Rogosin dedicated himself "to film those who have been forgotten, to film from the inside, and to film with respect, clarity and tenderness."

When they did plan to go out shooting again, Bagley insisted on a script. So the team went to Rogosin's apartment and spent five hours coming up with a rough outline based on the three characters' lives.

"What we wanted was to extract a simple story from the Bowery itself… Not a 'typical' or 'symbolic' story, but an essence of the truth of the place to expose (not dramatize) the hopelessness, the aimless dread and fear of such lives — without an arrogant sentimentality or too-generous morbidity on our part… Our actors were taken from the street, and would speak their own argot… We went into the bars, two at a time, unshaven, dressed in Bowery clothes, feigning drunkenness, forced to swallow glass after glass of the foul, flat beer they serve. Sitting in the midst of the agitated ferment of drunks, we became part of the smell, the gargoyle faces, the sleeping and retching, the whole agonized disturbance." — Mark Sufrin, *Sight & Sound*, Winter 1955–56

Using a lightweight Arriflex camera and a tape-recorder, the three men began to film.

We had our framework of street scenes but our outline didn't include dialogue. Our intention was to improvise which I didn't know how to do but I discovered the way on the set when I realized that Gorman, Ray, and Frank had many personal stories and anecdotes, which they could easily recall. I began to realize that as long as I stuck to the incidents of their lives the dialogue would remain believable and spontaneous. I had developed a method of improvised dialogue, which I used in my future films.

They discovered their main character, a forty-year-old itinerant railroad worker by the name of Ray Salyer, who had just turned up on the Bowery after a drunken weekend. Still fairly young looking but weathered by the years, he was the perfect combination — a man perpetually down on his luck but not yet totally lost. As Sufrin wrote: "Standing on a corner where the younger men looked for a day's work on passing trucks, we spotted what looked like a perfect choice for one of the main characters — physically he was all that could be asked. When we approached and talked to him, we were amazed and delighted with the almost exact duplication of his own story to ours. If this seems a little juvenile or naïve, permit me to explain. It is one thing to 'write' a role and then cast it — even with a non-professional. It is quite another to give a man a specific age, appearance, occupation, sectional origin, a set of circumstances then to walk to a street corner and say 'that looks like him' and then discover that he is precisely what you said, right down to the sum of money (almost to a dollar) he earned and threw away drinking."

For the other character they chose Gorman Hendricks, a longtime Bowery mainstay who claimed he had once worked for the *Washington Herald*. During Rogosin's early wanderings through the Bowery, Hendricks had been his guide. Grizzled and in bad health, Hendricks still had a glint in his eye and an intelligence behind it. "With the other leading character it was the same story, although some of the features of his shrewd and alcoholic fantasist's personality were pieced out scene by scene." During the filmmaking, Hendricks seemed to be gaining a lot of weight. He dismissed it with a promise that he would cut down on his eating.

One day I noticed that Gorman had suddenly become severely bloated. I then took him to the doctor who discovered that he had developed cirrhosis of the liver and told me that anymore drinking of alcohol would be fatal. I felt that, as a confirmed alcoholic Gorman wouldn't have the determination to stop. A few days later we had dinner together and Gorman told me not to worry because he would not let me down and that he would stop drinking. I was both touched and amazed at his dedication to our project. I now felt that motivation could be a powerful deterrent to overcoming alcoholism. From previous information and experience I thought it was nearly impossible for someone to voluntarily stop drinking.

So Hendricks gave up his "forty to fifty glasses of beer" a day habit and for the rest of the production (about seven weeks) he followed the doctor's orders. After the film was completed, the filmmakers promised to keep paying him wages until they found him a job.

Gorman stopped drinking until the completion of the film and then sadly began again. He no longer had anything to live for. A few days after the completion of the film I received a call from the police informing me that Gorman had been found dead in a bar on the Bowery with my card in his pocket. I was shaken by the news. We had formed a close bond of affection and friendship.

Gorman Hendricks was 64 years old. Rogosin dedicated the film to him and paid for his burial (January 27, 1956, Rosehill Cemetery in Linden, New Jersey, grave number 807, section 70). As for Salyer, he did appear on talk shows and was reputedly offered a $40,000 contract after the films's release. He turned down the offer with the explanation: "I just want to be left alone… There is nothing else in life but the booze."

Others were chosen to be technical assistants. Darwin Deen who had started out as a soundman in documentaries, was moved to assistant cameraman. Hired by Rogosin, he was enamored of Baley's work and was influenced by the experience for the rest of his career.

Although the plot was to cover a three-day period in the life of the character, the actual shooting took place from July to October of 1955. While some scenes were staged, the rest of the film was shot in an early *cinéma vérité* style, recording the action on the streets and in the bars and the Bowery flophouses. Several times during the course of the shoot, members of the "cast" were arrested and would come back with haircuts or new clothes. Rogosin started giving his characters letters requesting that the police contact him immediately if any of them was picked up. This was not to be the only problem that the police presented to the director. Their battered old car — filled with four poorly dressed men, filmmaking equipment and boxes — was frequently stopped by the police for questioning. And several times while a scripted scene was being shot outside, police would come by to break-up the crowds. Yet it was only after the police stopped them to search for illegal drugs and a few days later (this time involving patrol cars and many officers) for stolen merchandise that the crew finally decided to become official. Going through a lot of red tape, they obtained a shooting permit.

Sufrin wrote: "The bulk of the film was shot in the midst of the hottest summer in the history of New York… After a few weeks of long hours couched like duck hunters under the searing steel top of the automobile, our physical energies began to deteriorate and the strain to tell in almost constant fatigue and short tempers. We recognized what was happening, but because of the nature of the film and the way it was necessary to shoot, dedication, enthusiasm and nervous energy displaced the grievances."

Upon completion of the shooting, the three men struggled to come up with a form for all their footage. Richard Bagley had the first hand at editing but Rogosin considered his choices "illogical." They then hired the famed photographer/filmmaker Helen Levitt to edit the film. She had been part of the team that made *The Quiet One* and had also filmed the highly influential *In the Street.*

An even more unfortunate decision was selecting Helen Levitt as the editor… Personally I didn't find any rapport with Helen, she was austere and taciturn and never spoke to me regarding any of the scenes…

We then had the first screening of a rough cut — a hilarious disaster. The audience left the screening room in a state of bewilderment… When I spoke to Dick that night, he was very imperious and talked as if it was his film. He said we have a lot of work to do, implying that he would supervise the editing. I felt threatened by his attitude and decided that I had to remove Dick and Helen from the cutting room. I arrived early next morning and locked them out. Surprisingly there was very little uproar although Dick must have been disturbed. We had lived this production night and day for four months and it had become an artistic love affair, he was my closest friend during this period but I realized he was ruining the film and wouldn't collaborate. His primary collaboration as cameraman was over.

Rogosin met Carl Lerner, an experienced Hollywood editor who had come back east to work after being blacklisted in Hollywood. (His last credited work had been in 1950 on *So Young, So Bad*.) The fact that Lerner was not only hired but also given on-screen credit further indicates Rogosin's independent ambitions. According to the team of filmmakers, Lerner's first job was to edit the shots back together and start all over again.

Our first difficulty was after he had screened all of the material; he said I'm not sure that we can save this project. I thought he was absurd and I was intensely annoyed with his lack of faith, I was so convinced of the power of the material that I was sure that On the Bowery *was destined to become a great film. I think Bagley shared my enthusiasm. At that time I felt that it was interesting that others could not see the potential of the material that a creative artist senses.*

During the early days of the editing we discovered that the dialogue of the film was quite muddy which meant that the film was unsalvageable but we requested the lab to make reprints from the original and discovered that the quality was adequate. That caused me a moment of panic.

Finally we completed the editing. The whole process was agonizing and I was relieved that it was over.

Ironically, just as Rogosin's team started making *On the Bowery*, New York City approved plans to take down the elevated subway tracks that had perpetually cast the impoverished area into darkness. At times, the wrecking crews from above would inadvertently shower sparks from their acetylene torches on the cast and crew. At another point, the planned widening of the street began and mounds of dirt disrupted their continuity. The crew had to wait until the new pipelines were laid, the dirt shoveled back on, and the streets repaved. There were real fears that the tracks would come down before they finished the film and ruin their continuity. Sufrin predicted, "In the end, it would mean death to skid row… in this last (and probably only) record of an infamous place." Fifty years later, there still are remnants of the old Bowery, but now as boutique hotels take over where flophouses once existed, it is indeed a changed landscape.

The morning after the last day of shooting, the three men gathered together for a late breakfast, happy to have finished shooting but with a strange "sense of guilt." Sufrin wrote that he had gone through "a profoundly moving experience — and now I had escaped that frightening place. *They* still remain."

In the spring of 1956, during the making of the film, Rogosin's life changed once more.

I made a momentous decision and married Elinor Hart. I'm aware that it was a crucial decision but I have decided to leave it out of this narrative.

She was to travel with him to Europe for the premieres. *On the Bowery* made a great impression in Eastern Europe and England. The newly formed Free Cinema in London, founded by Lindsay Anderson, Lorenza Mazzetti, Karel Reisz, and Tony Richardson, invited Rogosin for their second program as they considered that they shared the same preoccupations and goals for a new independent cinema.

Out (1957)

Based on the reputation gained on his first film, Rogosin was chosen to direct a United Nations Film Board short called *Out*, a documentary about the plight of refugees fleeing to Austria from the aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. The film was conceived on November 28, 1956, filming began December 3, and the answer print was screened January 4, 1957. *Out* was produced by legendary British director Thorold Dickinson (*The Queen of Spades* and *Hill 24 Doesn't Answer*) and the script was written by the Pulitzer Prize-winner John Hersey (*Hiroshima* and *The Wall*). This rarely seen film will be on Milestone's upcoming video release, courtesy of the United Nations Film & Video Archives.

Come Back, Africa (1958–1959)

In 1958, Rogosin tackled the subject of apartheid. *Come Back, Africa* was shot on location in Johannesburg, its content unbeknownst to the government officials of South Africa, who believed he was filming a musical travelogue.

The film focuses on the tragic story of a Zulu family trying desperately to stay together and survive the harsh and contradictory rule of apartheid. Bringing together some of South Africa's best-known radical intellectuals, Rogosin shot both documentary footage and fictional drama. *Come Back, Africa* is an indictment on the brutality of the system. It was selected by *Time Magazine* as" one of the Ten Best Pictures of 1960." "I'm a political filmmaker, and the effect of the film on people who see it is still strong today as when I made it" said Rogosin. The film also launched the career of singer Miriam Makeba. Recognizing her talent, Rogosin signed her to a contract and arranged for her to leave South Africa by bribing officials.

Bleecker Street Cinema (1960)

In spite of the attention that *Come Back, Africa* received abroad, Rogosin was unable to find a commercial outlet for it in the US, and as a result, he decided to open his own showcase for independent films and revivals. Taking a ten-year lease on the Renata Theater in Greenwich Village, he spent $40,000 to renovate it and renamed it the Bleecker Street Cinema. On April 4,1960 Rogosin premiered *Come Back, Africa* at the Bleecker. He ran the cinema until 1974. It was to be one of the chartered cinemas of the group of filmmakers who met in New York and became the "New American Cinema group".

New American Cinema (1960s)

On September 28, 1960, Lionel Rogosin, Jonas Mekas and 21 other filmmakers, became the founding members of the New American Cinema group. They created a manifesto emphasizing personal expression, rejection of censorship and the "abolition of the budget myth." Their statement was simple: "The Official cinema of the world has run out of breath. It is morally corrupt, aesthetically obsolete, thematically superficial, and temperamentally boring." Rather than a cohesive collective, the New American Cinema became a diffuse band of New-York based filmmakers, photographers, painters, dancers, actors and artists. They met frequently at the Bleecker Street Cinema in its early days, to discuss, as Jonas Mekas wrote, "dreams and problems of independently working filmmakers. Several small committees were created in order to explore the financing, promotion, and distribution of our films."

Good Times, Wonderful Times (1964)

Good Times, Wonderful Times was Rogosin's plea for humanity against war and fascism. To create the film, he traveled for two years to twelve countries. In each country he visited Rogosin obtained permission to use footage from their war archives for his film. *Good Times, Wonderful Times* was released in 1964, at the height of the Vietnam War. In the film, a London cocktail party's mundane chatter is interspersed with graphic wartime footage, satirizing the tragic irresponsibility of modern man. It won the Cine Forum Award as the official British entry for feature film at the 1965 Venice film festival.

Artists Protest and Case against the Networks (1965–1967)

As well as producing and directing films, Rogosin was actively involved in trying to improve and change the world around him. In 1965, while working on *Good Times, Wonderful Times,* he interviewed Bertrand Russell and supported his work against the war in Vietnam. At the same time, Rogosin organized the British Artists' Protest which resulted in a full-page statement against the Vietnam War, published in the *New York Times* on August 1, 1965 and was endorsed by 36 leading British artists and intellectuals ranging from Peter O'Toole to Kenneth Clark. He also helped organize the European Artists' Protest with James Vaughan in December of that year.

Black Roots, Black Fantasy, Woodcutters (1972–1974)

Rogosin turned his talent to support black liberation, producing and directing *Black Roots* (1970. 60 minutes), *Black Fantasy* (1972, 78 minutes), and *Woodcutters of the Deep South* (1973, 85 minutes). These three Rogosin films, which have been widely seen on European television, are practically unknown to the American television audience.

Black Roots, set in the intimacy of a small cafe, films five individuals as they exchange biographical anecdotes and make music — a compelling and honest distillation of black history and culture.

Black Fantasy is a personal account of one man's conflict in love and life, based on the true experiences of Jim Collier, a young black American musician married to a white woman.

Rogosin filmed *Woodcutters of the Deep South* in the backwoods of Mississippi and Alabama. It is the story of poor black and white working people organizing themselves against corporate exploitation — as seen through their eyes.

Arab-Israeli Dialogue, Bleecker Street Cinema and Impact Films (1974–1978)

Arab-Israeli Dialogue was to be the last film produced and directed by Lionel Rogosin. Produced in the basement office of Impact Films, located beneath the Bleecker Street Cinema, it was made on a shoestring budget.

That same year Rogosin sold the Bleecker Street Cinema to Sid Geffen. This cinema had become a legend in the history of New York and many filmmakers received their education there, watching a wide-ranging program of classic films and cutting-edge works from Kenneth Anger, Joris Ivens and many others. Despite financial stress and difficulties Lionel Rogosin kept the Bleecker Street Cinema running for fourteen years during what was considered its heyday.

Case against the Networks (1976–1978)

On September 18,1973, Lionel Rogosin met with Edith Tiger of the National Emergency Civil Liberties Foundation and raised questions about the Fairness Doctrine, the First Amendment and access for independent filmmakers to the media.

In 1976, the NECLF made a study of the right of filmmakers to access public programming. This study was based on information that television was engaged in a form of censorship by refusing to show films made by independent filmmakers, especially on controversial subjects.

In 1977, the NECLF testified before the Subcommittee on Communications of the House of Representatives on the lack of diversity in commercial broadcasting and again on the lack of access to the independent documentary filmmakers.

In 1977, Lionel Rogosin and the National Civil Liberties Union filled an *amicus curiae* brief in the Supreme Court on behalf of the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting.

In 1978, they filed suit on behalf of 30 prominent documentary filmmakers. The citation of this case was Levitch vs. NBC, CBS and ABC. It was an antitrust suit, filed in the Southern District of New York. The suit was heard in 1981. The action called for $180,000,000 in damages. Judge Kevin Thomas Duffy at the District Court level said the suit had standing and that they could proceed with it, but on very narrow issues. The NECLF and filmmakers appealed his decision and lost in 1983. Although the courts decided against this suit, in the public arena they won. The networks were now showing works of independent producers — not enough, but more than they ever had.

Impact Films (1966–1978)

Impact Films was another groundbreaking initiative to distribute important work unavailable elsewhere, including films from Czech New Wave, to universities and cultural organizations. Rogosin started Impact Films in 1966 in order to distribute the films he was showing at the Bleecker Street and others. It became an organ for anti-war and civil rights films.

In the words of the company's catalog: "Impact Films is proud to present its catalog of documentary, experimental and feature films, including some of the world's finest socially and politically conscious cinema". Impact Films represented hundreds of films, many of which eventually found their way into the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In 1978, Rogosin sold Impact Films.

Exile and Unfunded/Unmade Film Projects

Never without an idea or a film project, Rogosin hired novelist V.S Naipaul in the 1960s to collaborate on a West Indian film called *A Flag on the Island*. It was never made but later became a book. In the 1970s, two projects were particularly dear to Rogosin: *Noa Noa* (based on the life of Paul Gauguin) and *The Big Apple* (about police brutality in the city) written with Jack Briley (screenwriter for *Gandhi*). Neither project was produced. *Bitter Water*, dealing with the Navajo Indians, was also unfundable and never produced.

Hoping to find more support abroad — financial and otherwise — Lionel Rogosin went to Brazil. In 1983 he began working with the screenwriter Leopoldo Serrana on a feature length musical comedy called *Viver*. Unable to raise enough money, he returned to New York at the end of 1985. Shortly thereafter, he moved to England, where he continued to develop his ideas and present film projects. He lived in London for many years with little support except from Nicholas Kent and the Tricycle Theatre.

Disillusioned and ill, Rogosin returned to Connecticut. Later, he moved to Los Angeles where he kept writing essays and scripts. In the last 15 years of his life, Rogosin wrote about many subjects, including a wide range of essays and book projects.

Lionel Rogosin died on December 8, 2000 and was buried in the Forever Hollywood cemetery on Santa Monica Boulevard in Los Angeles.

No Support

Although Rogosin's films were featured at retrospectives at New York's Museum of Modern Art, the Centre Georges Pompidou, and were screened by several European television stations and festivals, the filmmaker received little support for his proposed projects. One of his plans was "a series of films for television that would trace the evolution and history of the forces of war and peace since 1914, not just as a series of dramatic events, but as an investigation of the causes and motivations behind these destructive explosions in human affairs." While in Los Angeles Rogosin continued to work with London-based filmmaker Malcolm Hart on a project to create an internet-based website for peace.

Although after *Arab-Israeli Dialogue*, he was never able to make another film, Rogosin left scripts, essays, an autobiography, several book projects as well as his films. They all bear testimony to the legacy of his life — to his unswerving commitment to his ideals. Rogosin was way ahead of his time, politically and in his perceptions, and we are still catching up with him today.

With the restoration of his films and his sons' work to explore his archives, the time has come to recognize Lionel Rogosin's important contribution as a "Visionary American, humanitarian and filmmaker."

The History of the Bowery

The Bowery is the name of the street and small neighborhood in the southern portion of Manhattan. The neighborhood's boundaries are East 4th Street and the East Village to the north, Canal Street and Chinatown to the South, Allen Street and the Lower East Side to the east and Bowery (the street) and Little Italy to the west.

Bowery Street was first known as Bowery Lane prior to 1807. Today it runs from Chatham Square in the south up to Cooper Square. Originally a Lenape Indian footpath that ran the length of the island, the name Bowery comes from an antiquated Dutch word for "farm." In the 17th century the road ran from Fort Amsterdam at the tip of Manhattan to the homestead of Peter Stuyvesant, the last Dutch Governor of New Amsterdam. The Bowery's first residents were ten freed slaves and their wives near today's Chatham Square around 1650.

The Bull's Head Tavern on the Bowery was where George Washington stopped for refreshment before riding down to the waterfront to witness the departure of British troops in 1783. Leading to the Post Road, The Bowery rivaled Broadway as Manhattan's main thoroughfare and remained so as late as 1869.

The Red Bull Tavern was purchased by John Jacob Astor and with the help of other of New York's wealthy famies, it was turned into the Bowery Theatre in 1826. It was the most stylish theater in New York. Across the way the Bowery Amphitheatre was found seven years later, specializing in equestrian shows and circuses. By the time of the Civil War, the mansions and shops had given way to low-end concert halls, brothels, beer gardens and pawnshops. At the same time, the first of the flophouses appeared like the one at #15 Bowery in which the composer Stephen Foster lived in 1864. Stephen Crane's first novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (published in 1893) concerned a poor family living in the neighborhood. Theodore Dreiser closed *Sister Carrie*, set in the 1890s, with the suicide of one of his main characters at a Bowery flophouse.

The Bowery, which marked the eastern border of the slum of "Five Points" (portrayed in Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York*), had also become the turf of one of America's earliest street gangs, the nativist Bowery Boys. In the spirit of social reform, the first YMCA opened on the Bowery in 1873; another notable religious and social welfare institution established during this period was The Bowery Mission and Young Men's Home, which was founded in 1880 at 36 Bowery by Rev. Albert Gleason Ruliffson. Since 1909, the mission has been at 227-229 Bowery.

By the 1890s, The Bowery was a magnet for sporting men as a center for prostitution that rivaled the Tenderloin, and for bars catering to gay men and some lesbians at various social levels.

In 1919 the Third Avenue El ran above the Bowery, darkening its streets and sending the real estate values plummeting. This was when the Bowery became the real skid row. When prohibition eliminated all the cheap saloons littering the street, the New York Times predicted that the Bowery would turn a new leaf. But the depression sank the fortunes of its residents even further into destitution. Hollywood made them famous as the Dead End Kids and Bowery Bums, but life was far more grim for its inhabitants. The tearing down of the El while Rogosin was filming *On the Bowery* should have been the beginning of a new era for the Bowery, but time seemed to stand still for this impoverished neighborhood for many years.

The area *did* have a kind of cultural revival starting in the 1960s and '70s with new residents such as Quentin Crisp, William S. Burroughs and Cy Twombly moving in. And in the 1970s, CBGB became *the* place for new bands and the birth of punk rock. It's end in 2006, when the owner couldn't extend his lease, marked a turning point for the Bowery.

For that same year, Avalon Bay Place opened as the street's first luxury apartment complex and more followed. This did not come without a social cost as the last flophouses — and their residents — were driven out by rising real estate values. The Sunshine Hotel became famous as one of the last remaining flophouses but it too, soon closed. Boutique hotels and upscale restaurants have continued to take over the area. Today, the area bears little resemblance to the Bowery that Lionel Rogosin and his two colleagues so long ago portrayed.

At 308 Bowery, the Bowery Cultural Center is dedicated to researching, documenting and preserving the history of the Bowery.

Chronicle of Apartheid

His next film, *Come Back, Africa*, was perhaps his most challenging to make. It was filmed in 1959, decades ahead of the abolition of apartheid in South Africa, while Rogosin's crew worked in secret after getting permission from the government to make a harmless musical. And although *Come Back, Africa* contains the songs of a then-obscure singer named Miriam Makeba, it is anything but a light, frothy musical.

One of the first documentary films to deal with the harsh realities of apartheid, the picture tells the story of a Zulu family that is forced out of its village by famine. The family moves into a crumbling cottage on the outskirts of Johannesburg and learns the grim realities of city life, restrictive pass laws that limit the husband's ability to find work, and continual police harassment.

Critics again responded positively to the film. Time magazine selected it one of the top 10 pictures of 1960. A New York Post critic wrote: "If you want to see and understand South Africa, there is no better way than this picture of Johannesburg."

In the mid-1960s, Rogosin turned his attention to horrors of warfare, with the antiwar documentary "Good Times, Wonderful Times."

Released in the United States in 1968, the film defused the sensory overload of the continual Vietnam War images being shown at that time because Rogosin framed his war footage around scenes of a cocktail party in London. "War is inevitable," one woman at the party says. " . . . If one looks at the world--war is one way of keeping the population down."

A Newsweek critic called it "a passionately pacifist document, an indictment of human indifference to inhuman destruction, a call to action, a warning and a punch in the soft underbelly of society."

Rogosin, who spoke eloquently against the Vietnam War, and his film were popular attractions on college campuses in the late 1960s.

Later films included "Black Roots, Black Fantasy," "Wood Cutters of the Deep South," which dealt with racial injustice in America and, finally, "Arab Israeli Dialogue" in the mid-1970s.

Rogosin also supported experimental and avant-garde filmmaking as the owner of the Bleecker Street Cinema in New York's Greenwich Village, one of the most prominent film art houses in the nation. Rogosin sold the theater, which he opened in 1962, in the early 1970s and it finally closed in 1990.

Influential Abroad

At the time of his death, Rogosin was working on an oral history of anti-apartheid revolutionaries in South Africa.

In an interview with the New York Times some years ago, Rogosin noted that his films were more influential around the world than in America.
"It's funny, but internationally my films are well-known," he said. "And even influential. *Come Back, Africa*, for example has been shown all over Africa . . . and I've been told by African filmmakers that it influenced and started the whole cinema movement there.

"That's rewarding, to know that you've influenced an entire continent's movie making."

Rogosin is survived by another son, Michael, of Angers, France; and three grandchildren.

Interview with Lionel Rogosin

By Eric Breitbart, *Sightlines*, Summer/Fall, 1987. Courtesy of the author.

Could you tell me about your background?

I was born in New York City; but when I was fairly young, we moved to Port Washington [on New York's Long Island]. It was suburban, but there was the Bay and the Sound. I did a lot of fishing and boating. When I became a film person, I changed my interests from nature to cinema.

Do you see nature and cinema as opposites?

No, I see them as very close. For me, cinema is a way of seeing nature. It's like being a painter. It's just that I don't see landscapes — I see people. I'd love to make a film about the sea, though. That's one of my dreams, but I've never come close to it. It's such an incredible subject for cinema.

When you were growing up, did you think you would become a filmmaker?

No, I didn't have the slightest idea. I had seen Flaherty's *Man of Aran* when I was very young — about 12, I think — and I was very excited by it. The film inspired me. I would say that was the beginning, though I wasn't conscious of it. It's interesting that the film is about the sea. Of course, it's also Flaherty. He was an important filmmaker for me.

When you started making films, were you conscious of being part of a documentary tradition?

Yes, though I don't like the word documentary. It's an inaccurate word. I don't know why Grierson ever used it. To call a documentary "the creative expression of reality" just doesn't make sense. Creative expression of reality is *not* documentary, which means document, or fact. Even cinema vérité, which is not my kind of film, is a better choice of words. It's not so deadening as "documentary." Let's just say that when I started, I was working in Flaherty's and De Sica's "direction." I'd seen the neorealist films after the War, and what I was aiming for was to fuse the two genres — Flaherty's poetic films and the fictional narratives of the neorealists — which is what *Come Back, Africa* is, hopefully.

So, one day you decided to become a filmmaker?

Pretty much. I was working in a corporation, and I'd accumulated enough money to make *On The Bowery*. It was a self-financed, low-budget production.

What was a low budget in those days?

About $30,000.

It was shot in 35mm?

Yes, I had two of the best people in New York for my first film — Dick Bagley shot it, and Carl Lerner cut it. Bagley wasn't as well known as Lerner. Bagley didn't do many films, just a few commercials and industrials. He

lived in Italy for a long time. He also drank a lot. Five years after he shot *On The Bowery*, he died of alcoholism, at 37 or 38; so he was very close to the subject of *On The Bowery*. I knew he was a heavy drinker; and after the first day, I knew he was an alcoholic. But we screened the rushes and everything was in focus, so I said OK. He did a beautiful job.

How long did it take to shoot the film?

Three months. It took six months to edit. It should have taken three, but we messed everything up trying to edit it ourselves. None of us knew what we were doing, until I hired Carl Lerner. The poor man had to reassemble the footage before he could do anything.

Did you have a script?

We had an outline of two pages, that was enough to give it some direction. I really just shot it off the top of my head. I knew the subject so well, I didn't need a script since I'd spent six months observing on the Bowery. I knew Flaherty had spent three years in Aran, and a lot of time with the Eskimos. That's the primary thing for that kind of film — to spend a lot of time on-location with the subject.

Did you have an idea of an audience, or how you would distribute it?

I was very naïve about distribution. I knew *The Quite One* and *The Little Fugitive* had been made and shown theatrically, so I figured I would do that. The budget was extremely low, so I didn't expect much. *On The Bowery* was a *learning* film, then I would make *Come Back, Africa*. I didn't expect *On The Bowery* to be successful, or to get the kind of acclaim that it did; nor did I think it would be so difficult to get any sort of income or distribution. I worked like hell and, at the end of three years, there was nothing, in terms of income.

Did you self-distribute On the Bowery*?*

I started it. I took it to Venice where it won the Grand prize; and it also won a British Academy Award. I got a British distributor who offered me a $3,000 advance and then changed his mind. Another distributor offered to do it for no advance and 50 percent. Then I opened it here at an art cinema — the 55th St. Playhouse — with Cy Harvey, who started Janus. It played for a month, which was very good for that kind of film. We got good publicity, except for an attack by *New York Times'* critic Bosley Crowther. He really hated the film. Harvey said I was finished, that the review killed the film. I think he was wrong. I don't think it could have had any distribution around the country anyway. *On The Bowery* just had no commercial appeal. Most distributors saw it, threw up their hands and said, "Who's going to show this?" It was shown on CBS-TV's *Omnibus*, and that was that until I got in on 16mm. Leo Dratfield took it for Contemporary Films, and got some bookings. He really did a good job for independent filmmakers.

You really pre-dated the whole wave of independent filmmaking, didn't you?

There were a few of us — Shirley Clarke, Sidney Meyers, Jonas Mekas, Emile de Antonio. We started a group around 1960. It was so anarchistic, it was doomed to failure. About 50 of us got together in a room in New York. We issued a manifesto and, within six months, the group fell apart. Then Jonas started the Film-Makers' Coop, which did pretty well, relatively speaking. Around the same time, I started the Bleecker Street Cinema. I wanted a theatre for myself and for other filmmakers. It was useful for filmmakers for awhile, for ten years maybe.

How did you raise the money for Come Back, Africa*?*

I didn't make any money from *On The Bowery*, but I had something of a reputation, so I was able to raise about two-thirds of the money. It was also very inexpensive. Filming in South Africa cost very little, except for travel.

Did you consider yourself a radical filmmaker, someone who wanted to promote social change?

That was my aim… Unfortunately, *Come Back, Africa* has never been shown on television here. If we had a consistent television outlet, we could have continued to make films. By "we," I mean all the filmmakers making social films, from 1960 till today….

You've logged over 30 years experience as an independent filmmaker. If you were going to give advice to filmmakers today, what would it be?

First, I'd have to say that I don't have any easy answers. I don't have any choice. I can't stop trying to make films. If I could write novels, maybe I would do that. It's a tough question. Maybe living in another country is important. It helps you see clearer. You need experience with life. You can't be an artist if you only know your art… There's a passage from Dostoevsky that means a lot to me: "Man is an enigma. This enigma must be solved. And if you spend all your life at it, don't say you have wasted your time. I occupy myself with this enigma because I wish to be a man." I'm not saying that every filmmaker should think of that, and make it his aim; but it's a pretty incredible concept.

Richard Bagley

(New York Times obituary February 28, 1961)

Richard Bagley, a freelance motion –picture photographer, producer, director and scriptwriter specializing in documentary films, died in Bellevue Hospital on Saturday after a long illness. He was 41 years old and lived at 53 Horatio Street.

Perhaps the most celebrated film Mr. Bagley helped to create was the poignant documentary masterpiece on the rehabilitation of a so-called delinquent boy, "The Quiet One," made in the late Nineteen Forties. He was its cameraman.

Another film in the documentary category with which Mr. Bagley was connected was "On the Bowery," produced and directed by Lionel Rogosin in association with Mr. Bagley and Mark Sufrin. This "skid row" picture, photographed by Mr. Bagley, was praised by Bosley Crowther for its candid photography.

Mr. Bagley was known for his sardonic wit as well as his sensitive employment of the movie camera. He was born in Chicago and was a still photographer for The Chicago Times before he became a combat Army motion-picture photographer in World War II in the Pacific area.

Later he did combat motion-picture photography for the Israeli Government in the Israeli-Arab war in 1948 and during the Korean conflict for the United Nations.

He photographed "Textures and Finishes," which Howard Thompson of The Times called in 1957 "probably the most strikingly imaginative industrial short subject ever filmed in the United States," for the Aluminum Company of America. Another short motion picture photographed by Mr. Bagley was "Any Given Minute" made for the Greater New York Fund. This won the Freedom Foundation Award in 1958.

Motion pictures Mr. Bagley produced, directed and filmed included "Within a Story," a dramatic story, and "The Vigil," made in Italy.

He photographed "Land of Promise," a film shown on television on behalf of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations. He did other television film photography including movies for the British Broadcasting Corporation and in this country.

Mr. Bagley held an option on "A Child's Christmas in Wales," a Dylan Thomas prose poem and had planned to produce and film it. His work won him awards in this country and abroad.

Surviving are his widow, Mrs. Eugenie Claessens Bagley, daughter of the late August Claessens, former national chairman of the Social Democratic Federation and onetime Socialist Assemblyman from this city; a daughter, Mrs. Lyn Huebner of New York, and his mother, Mrs. Helen Charley of St. Petersburg, Fla.

Carl Lerner

(New York Times obituary, August 28, 1973)

Carl Lerner, who edited some of America's best-known films, died Sunday in University Hospital after a long illness. He was 61 years old and lived at 33-60 21st Avenue, Long Island City, Queens.

Mr. Lerner's credits included *Klute*, with Jane Fonda; *The Swimmer*, with Burt Lancaster; *Requim for a Heavyweight*, with Anthony Quinn; *Middle of the Night*, with Kim Novak and Fredric March; *The Fugitive Kind*, with Marlon Brando and Anna Magnani; *The Goddess*, with Kim Stanley and Lloyd Bridges, and *12 Angry Men*.

He had directed commercial and industrial films, and was director and editor of *Black Like Me*, starring James Whitmore.

Mr. Lerner had taught film technique at City College, New York University, the School of Visual Arts and other institutions, and had written many articles on the subject.

In an article in *Film Comment*, he said:

"The most characteristic aspect of film is its inherent flexibility…. Film is marvelous — you can move it, you can change it, you can make juxtapose it, you can make it slower, you can make it faster…

"The editor is obviously of enormous importance, and his function varies from film to film. Essentially, the editor is an interpreter of the film, is the interpreter of the material that has passed through the camera. He exercises a great influence on the final character of the film, but not nearly as great as what happens in front of the camera."

Mr. Lerner was born in Philadelphia, where he received B.A. and M.A. degrees in 1933-34 in theater arts from Temple University. He worked in summer stock while in college and later in community theater activities in Philadelphia and New York.

But his interest turned to films, and he hitchhiked to the West Coast and became an apprentice in the editing department of Columbia Pictures. He rose rapidly to assistant, working with top editors in Hollywood, then left to freelance.

He assisted Danny Mandel on the award-winning *Best Years of our Lives*, he was the last of several editors called in on Howard Hawks' *Red River* and soon afterward was summoned to New York to edit a Paul Henreid vehicle, *So Young, So Bad*.

After several low-budget mystery films, he began working on the type of assignments he had been seeking. He went on to do Franchot Tone's *Uncle Vanya*, pictures for Sidney Lumet and David Susskind and by Paddy Chayevsky. He worked with Lionel Rogosin in *On the Bowery* and *Come Back, Africa*.

Mr. Lerner was a charter member of Film Editors Local 776. Survivors include his widow, Dr. Gerda Lerner, a historian; a son, Daniel, and a daughter, Stephanie.

Charles Mills

Charles Mills, born in Asheville, North Carolina in 1914, was a classic American composer who studied with Aaron Copeland and Roger Sessions. Mills played in jazz bands from age 17. He was commissioned by Dimitri Mitropoulos to compose work for New York Philharmonic Orchestra in 1951. Mills's principle works include six symphonies; piano concerto; flute concerto; *Theme and Variations* for orchestra; oboe concertino; and many chamber works, some involving jazz groups. His other film scores include Stewart Wilensky's documentary *Village Sunday* in 1960 and *Tracks in the Sand* from 1962. He was a Guggenheim award-winner for his music. Mills died in New York in 1982.

Ray Salyer

Very little is known about Ray Salyer except that he was born in Kentucky and was a sergeant in the Army during World War II. When he enlisted at Fort Bragg, NC in 1941, Salyer wrote that he had attended three years of high school, had worked as a carpenter and was separated from his wife and children.

During the filming of *On the Bowery*, Rogosin offered to pay for Salyer's education, new clothes and room and board if he stayed sober. However, as Salyer said in his *Today* interview, "Some people like to hunt, some like to fish. I like to drink."

> *The NY press was very exercised about the interest of the Hollywood studios in Ray Salyer and we got a great deal of publicity about that. RKO expressed an interest in Salyer because although he was a Bowery man he did have some intrinsic star quality and was quite cinematic. When I asked him if he was interested in an acting career he seemed indifferent. By that time we had become friendly and spent time together, in the back of my mind I might have hoped he would give up total dependency on alcoholism. He quickly discouraged that optimism when he described his existence. He told me he would acquire several gallons of Gallo Muscatel wine which he would take to his flophouse room and consume and, after several days of isolation he would then replenish his stock. This routine left little initiative for a film career and when the Studios learned of his alcoholism they lost interest.* [from Lionel Rogosin's unpublished autobiography]

An article in the March 20, 1957 issue of the *Stars and Stripes* (the newspaper of the US armed forces), entitled "Bowery Drunk Snubs $40,000 Contract," quoted Salyer (from a story that had run in the *New York World Telegram and Sun*):

> "I don't want the $40,000… I just want the Bowery and to be left alone. There isn't a man living who can drink all day alone and spend more than $10. I'm a loner, see? I've got my little room on the Bowery. I lock myself in with my half gallons of wine and I go on a week's bender. Now and then I eat a can of beef soup. Now and then I bum a day's work to get money for the booze… There came a day in my life when I knew what I was doing but I was no longer capable of doing what was right. Maybe you don't know what I mean. Or what it does to a man who starts to drink. It has nothing to do with morals. It has to do with certain tensions, like some awful disease, and these tensions come and you say — 'The hell with life. The hell with hope. The hell with all meaning… I came down to New York's Bowery because it's the only place in the world where they're really tolerant of the drunk. But I've been in jail here. They've tried to straighten me out. But I don't want to be straightened out. I'm not the typical alcoholic, not the compulsive alcoholic who wants to snap out of it… I drink because there's nothing else in life but the booze… Just see that I have a few bucks for the wine, eh? Spend that forty thousand on somebody who can really use it."

The article identified Salyer as a 42-year-old alcoholic who said that he had once been married with children but had turned to the Bowery after leaving the Army at the end of World War II.

One night, Salyer told Darwin Dean that he had enough. Dean said that the next day Salyer just hopped a train and wasn't heard from again.

In preparing the release of *On the Bowery*, Milestone Films was contacted by Ray's nephew, Mark Salyer, who was able to fill in some details of his uncle's troubled life:

> "A quick summary of the little I know — Ray was a twin. He and his identical brother Roy were the eighth and ninth children in a family of twelve children that made it past infancy. My father was the twelfth.

Ray's father Shanklin Salyer was a "Circuit Rider" Methodist Minister and farmer, and had a reputation for being extremely tough. Even though he was only 5'6" he was called Mr. Salyer from about the age of ten. All the boys were expected to at least as tough — feuding was a real and present danger in early 1900s Appalachia. Ray and Roy got into so much trouble using their very identical looks to get out of things that Granpa had their names tattooed on their legs at about 10 years old. When they were drafted for World War II they were split up. Because Roy had bad feet he stayed, but Ray went into infantry.

Here is where the stories get vague because Ray's drinking was an embarrassment to the family. I was told that he was a big hero and that he was in the first waves of D-Day and went all the way to Berlin at the end of the war, and that was why he drank and wound up on the Bowery, trying to find oblivion from the horrors of war. But I cannot find his name on any of the list of Medal recipients.

I was told that Ray turned down an offer and that he stayed on the Bowery and died there, again vague stories. I have been researching and have read newspaper stories that say he was offered $40,000. In 2010 dollars that is what? $500,000 maybe $750,000?

What ever happened in World War II it left him permanently screwed-up. My father said he returned still the charming, witty, engaging guy he had been but with a deep sadness in his eyes, and he couldn't drink enough to make it go away."

It still remains a deep mystery of what happened to Ray Salyer after the film.

Ray Salyer on the Way From Here to .....?

By Dan Balaban, *Village Voice*, March 27, 1957

"I suppose you want to know what motivates an alcoholic?" Ray Salyer, star of *On the Bowery*, spoke with serious dignity. It was surprisingly clinical phrasing from a man who shook hands with the big, hard-palmed grip of a laborer. It was a surprisingly aware question from a man billed as "an authentic Bowery character," an obvious euphemism for Bowery Bum.

He had a stein of beer in front of him. "You know I only drink beer in public," he had said, smiling, to Richard Bagley of Horatio Street, the photographer of *On the Bowery*…. He'd already had quite a bit to drink. But you only knew that if you knew him well, or if you were told. His eyes were clear. Well-built, 6 feet tall, he looked in top condition. He had a long, handsome, rugged face. He looked very much like Gary Cooper would look in a blue pin-striped suit, white shirt, and tie. He kept drinking as he talked, but it didn't seem to affect the way he held himself together.

"Look!" Salyer said. "If you want to know about me, why don't you put that notebook away and we'll talk." He finished his beer and ordered another. He began sketching out his history, leaving many gaps. He was born in Kentucky and raised in North Carolina. "I worked on farms as a youngster, but not for pay. For my father. I don't think I care to talk about it."

He is 40 years old. He first came to New York in 1935, when he joined the Coast Artillery and was shipped to Fort Slocum. After he served his hitch and was honorably discharged, he did not return home. "I made a mistake," he said. "I tried out my legs in alien territory."

In 1941 he enlisted again. He was sent to Iceland, England, France right after D-Day, then across to Europe to the Elbe, where his corps met the Russians. He was discharged in 1945. After 11 months as a civilian he reenlisted and was discharged after only two years. The circumstances of this discharge was unclear. "I have nothing to hide," he said. "I've never changed my name." Then he said feelingly: "I loved the Army."

Another beer. He drank with unhurried, inexorable rhythm. Out came the notebook. Why did he like the Army?

"Why I loved it would take more paper than you got in your notebook." The comment was not unfriendly, but final.

For a time he went to the Upholstery Trades School at night, on the GI Bill. During the day he worked as a machine operator in a zipper factory. He quit in 1950 and started talking shape-up jobs. "I hate to go to work on a schedule. Once I get there, I like it." He worked as a laborer, loading trucks at various terminals, and as a gandy dancer – straightening out ties, keeping tracks in shape – in railroad camps. He still has no apartment but lives in a room on the west side of Greenwich Village.

The stories were that his performance in *On the Bowery* had brought him Hollywood offers, and that he had refused them. Was this true?

"I've had a couple of offers," he replied. He drank some more beer. "I've never considered myself an actor. I've never had the ambition to be an actor." He finds pride in hard labor, and he values the freedom to come and go as he pleases. "You know the song about the gandy dancer?" and he sang:

The gandy dancer is a railroad man
His work is never done.
With a pick and a shovel and a willing hand
He makes the railroad run.

"That's all I remember," he said.

But the glamour and attention obviously appeal to him. Although he explains that he acted in the picture because "I got as much as I could have made as a laborer," he feels strongly loyal to Lionel Rogosin of Perry Street, the producer of *On the Bowery* as the man to whom "I owe all this."

He is on contract to Rogosin, but is undecided whether he will devote himself to acting as a career. The work comes easily to him and he likes it. He is warmed by the public admiration. But there also hangs over him the uncertainty of the heavy drinker, the man who is afraid to build up hope. "The issue," as he said, "is in doubt."

"I had my first drink February 19, 1937." The place was Panama and he was in the Coast Artillery. He drank heavily from the beginning. "I drank more than any man you ever knew. But I still performed my duties, carried out all my details."

"Look!" he said. "I want to make one thing very clear." His tone was quietly emphatic, almost menacing. "I am not of the Bowery. I've never been on the Bowery except when I've had money, when I was going to drink and didn't want to be in places that would embarrass me." It wasn't until three years ago, he claimed, that he began losing control of himself while drinking. That was when he hit the Bowery. "I would start drinking in uptown bars," he said, "and when I felt myself starting to go I would head downtown, where no one I wouldn't want to would recognize me. I had a position to maintain."

What position? Did he mean his idea of himself?

Did you see the picture?" he asked. "When a man drinks so much that he falls asleep in the street, he can't look at himself in the mirror in the morning. And he doesn't want other people looking at him."

"It's up to me," he reflected, talking of what he was going to do about his drinking. "When a man starts drinking, there's no agency, there's no person that can help him. He has to do for himself."

What about the motivations of an alcoholic? He had begun on this theme. He was reminded that we hadn't discussed it.

Salyer thought awhile. Then he said: "Lindbergh had his *Spirit of St. Louis.* Who have you got?"

He left it that way. Dick Bagley came over to the table. More beer was ordered. They started to talk about the picture. Bagley and Mark Sufrin, West 12th Street, who wrote the story line, first saw Salyer on the Bowery one Monday morning. He was sitting where the trucks came in, waiting to pick up a job. He had spent $150 on a weekend binge and was flat broke.

"You have to expect all kinds of unusual offers when you're waiting for a truck," Ray Salyer said. "When Mr. Bagley and Mr. Sufrin asked me if I wanted to act in a picture, I thought: 'What are these jokers up to?' But I figured I could handle them, so I want along. When they said they were taking me to meet Mr. Rogosin, I thought: 'Oh my God! There are three of them.' I thought that if I couldn't' handle them I was perfectly willing to go to the hospital trying."

We laughed. "I didn't think the film would get any further than the can," Ray continued. "At the first part I was uninterested. But as it went along I had to go along with the feeling of Mr. Bagley, Mr. Sufrin, and Mr. Rogosin. They were doing a good job. After I saw the enthusiasm of these men and understood what they were trying to do, we knew that we were friends. Our relations were perfect."

"He was the best natural actor I ever worked with," said Bagley. "No matter what shape he was in, when the clapboards came down he was on. But between shooting – Man!" He turned to Ray. "Remember the time you went after Mark and I had to hold you back?"

The last beer was ordered. "I have to leave now," Salyer said. He drank his stein standing up. Bagley told him that another interview had been arranged with a CBS man for 3 o'clock, the next afternoon. "Can you make it?" he asked. Ray said he'd be there.

I came down the next day to sit in on the interview. Salyer never showed up.

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Milestone Film & Video

Milestone enters its twenty-first year of operations with a reputation for releasing classic cinema masterpieces, new foreign films, groundbreaking documentaries and American independent features. Thanks to the company's work in rediscovering and releasing important films such as Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep,* Kent Mackenzie's, *The Exiles*, Mikhail Kalatozov's *I Am Cuba*, Marcel Ophuls's *The Sorrow and the Pity,* the Mariposa Film Group's *Word is Out* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Bon Voyage* and *Aventure Malgache*, Milestone has long occupied a position as one of the country's most influential independent distributors. In November 2007, Milestone was awarded the Fort Lee Film Commission's first Lewis Selznick Award for contributions to film history. In January 2008, the Los Angeles Film Critics Association chose to give its first Legacy of Cinema Award "to Dennis Doros and Amy Heller of Milestone Film & Video for their tireless efforts on behalf of film restoration and preservation." And in March

2008, Milestone became an Anthology Film Archive's Film Preservation honoree. In 2009, Dennis Doros was elected as one of the Directors of the Board of the Association of the Moving Image Archivists and established the organization's press office in 2010.

In 1995, Milestone received the first Special Archival Award from the National Society of Film Critics for its restoration and release of *I Am Cuba*. Manohla Dargis, then at the *LA Weekly*, chose Milestone as the 1999 "Indie Distributor of the Year." In 2004, the National Society of Film Critics again awarded Milestone with a Film Heritage award. That same year the International Film Seminars presented the company its prestigious Leo Award *and* the New York Film Critics Circle voted a Special Award "in honor of 15 years of restoring classic films." Milestone/Milliarium won Best Rediscovery from the Il Cinema Ritrovato DVD Awards for its release of *Winter Soldier* in 2006 and again in 2010 for *The Exiles*.

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Milestone Would Like to Thank the Following:

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