



**A FILM BY JENNIFER BAICHWAL**

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**A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE**

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# PAYBACK

A film by Jennifer Baichwal

Margaret Atwood’s visionary work *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* is the basis for this riveting and poetic documentary on “debt” in its various forms—societal, personal, environmental, spiritual, criminal, and of course, economic. Filmmaker Jennifer Baichwal (*Manufactured Landscapes*) strikingly interweaves these (sometimes surprising) debtor/creditor relationships: two families in a years-long Albanian blood feud; the BP oil spill vs. the Earth; mistreated Florida tomato farm workers and their bosses; imprisoned media mogul Conrad Black and the U.S. justice system. With stunning cinematography and insightful commentary from renowned thinkers Raj Patel, Louise Arbour and Atwood herself, *Payback* is a brilliant, game-changing rumination on the subject.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

In all of our documentaries so far, I feel like I am trying to do two things in varying degrees: (i) intelligently translate one medium into another and (ii) explore a question or problem that does not have an easy answer. The shape of the films is elliptical rather than linear—they don't lead to an inevitable conclusion, but create a space to think about something in a way you might not have thought about it before. And they try to do this in a way that makes sense in the medium of film.

I have never adapted a book or lecture into a documentary, and the fact that this one was by Margaret Atwood made the prospect particularly intimidating. She is brilliant, of course, and the book, like the lectures, is dense, rich, chatty, funny and profound—all at the same time. It is a singular voice, fully hers. How do you make that into a documentary? And, the perennial question, “Am I capable of it?”

The first thing I learned, which was a great relief, is that the book isn't about money. That might have been a non-starter for me, even though I forced myself to read at least 5 books on the “crash” beforehand, trying to get familiar with the language of derivatives, futures and CDOs, which wasn't very successful. What it is about is the *idea* of debt— a fantastic, complex riff on all the ways we are governed by owing and being owed in human society and beyond. “I owe you one.” “You owe *me* one.” And so on.

It took about a year of reading the book multiple times, reading or re-reading other books, watching films and then writing numerous drafts of an outline to get to a point where I could imagine what a documentary of *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* might look like. This somewhat nerve-wracking process was aided immeasurably by intense conversations with Ravida Din, my producer (and the one who brought the book to me in the first place) and Nick de Pencier, my husband and cinematographer (who, being my husband, has to engage in these conversations even when he might not want to).

A few things became clear:

— Margaret Atwood is an author, not a subject (much the same way that the photographer Edward Burtynsky is the author of *Manufactured Landscapes* rather than a subject). So it would be a failure of imagination and form for me to treat her like a subject, conduct a conventional interview (“What made you think of writing the book?” “How did you come up with the Scrooge story?”) and have that as the basis of our interaction with her in the film. I went back to the words, *because she is a writer*, I reminded myself, and writers choose their words very carefully. The words from the book became the contextualizing element for the stories that unfold in the film. But then it went one step further: this was originally a *lecture*, not a book. So I went back to the original lectures, which were delivered across Canada in 2008. And hearing the lectures made me realize that the combination of density and humour in the book was very much a result of the original spoken nature of the text. I know this sounds obvious now, but it

wasn't then. The live lectures and her preparing for them eventually became the way her words in the film were delivered.

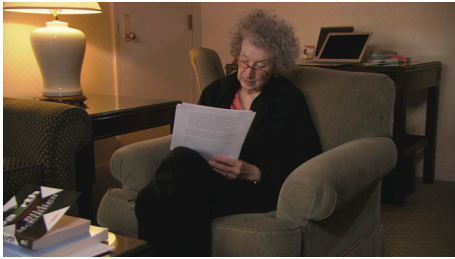
— The ideas she is riffing on in the book had to be embodied in actual, visceral stories. This was crucial to addressing the “intelligent translation” problem: without real situations of indebtedness, the ideas would not come alive in the medium of film. So although none of the four main stories we follow in the film are specifically discussed in the book, the ideas behind them are explored in great detail. Atwood spends at least a chapter discussing the nature of revenge, where “debtor and creditor are joined at the hip.” And we found this to be very much the case in Albania, between blood-feuding families. What does “paying your debt to society” really mean? We found two very different kinds of prisoners to speak to that question. What happens when someone decides to pay back? And what happens when the debt is so great it can't be paid with money? These stories each have an arc of their own, and, like any film with multiple threads, editing them was a long and tortuous process, aided considerably by the formidable talents of editor Nick Hector.

— To help create the space to think about something differently without offering particular conclusions, I had to find a way of bringing in the voices of people who have spent a lot of time considering various kinds of debt. The goal was to have them sparsely interject throughout at a meta-level to open up the ideas, but not devolve into “expert commentary.” This was hard to achieve. But the thinkers were so remarkable-- Raj Patel, Bill Rees, Louise Arbour and Karen Armstrong—that the caliber of their insight achieved that on its own.

To sum up: I read and wrote for a year, shot for a year and edited for a year. I wish I could be more efficient, but I guess if I haven't figured out how to do that yet, I probably won't. I will say that when I showed the film to Atwood, who had seen nothing since the treatment, I was prepared for any argument, because one of the virtues of taking so long is that I literally *tried everything* before reaching the final version. I can't really describe the intense emotions I felt when she saw the film and liked it, but I did have a large glass of scotch immediately afterwards, which helped.

— Jennifer Baichwal

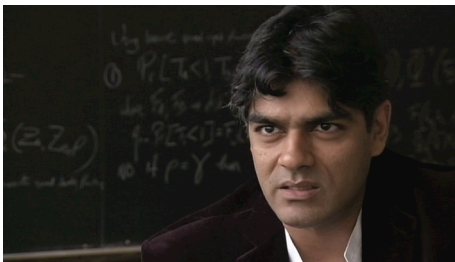
## PARTICIPANT BIOS



**MARGARET ATWOOD** is a renowned poet, novelist, literary critic, essayist, and environmental activist. She was born in 1939 in Ottawa and grew up in northern Ontario, Quebec and Toronto. She received her undergraduate degree from Victoria College at the University of Toronto and her master's degree from Radcliffe College.

Throughout her writing career, Margaret Atwood has received numerous awards and honorary degrees. She is the author of more than 50 volumes of poetry, children's literature, fiction and non-fiction, and is perhaps best known for her novels, which include *The Edible Woman* (1969), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *The Robber Bride* (1993), *Alias Grace* (1996), and *The Blind Assassin*, which won the prestigious Booker Prize in 2000. Atwood's dystopic novel, *Oryx and Crake*, was published in 2003. *The Tent* (mini-fictions) and *Moral Disorder* (short stories) both appeared in 2006. Her most recent volume of poetry, *The Door*, was published in 2007. Her non-fiction book, *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth*, part of the Massey Lecture series, appeared in 2008, and her most recent novel, *The Year of the Flood*, in the autumn of 2009. Ms. Atwood's work has been published in more than 40 languages, including Farsi, Japanese, Turkish, Finnish, Korean, Icelandic and Estonian. In 2004, she co-invented the LongPen™, a system for signing documents remotely.

Margaret Atwood currently lives in Toronto with writer Graeme Gibson.



**RAJ PATEL** is an award-winning writer, activist and academic. He has degrees from the University of Oxford, the London School of Economics and Cornell University, and has worked for the World Bank and the WTO, and protested against them around the world. He's currently a visiting scholar at UC Berkeley's Center for African Studies, an Honorary Research Fellow at the School of Development Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and a fellow at the Institute for Food and Development Policy, also known as Food First. He is currently an IATP Food and Community Fellow. He has testified about the causes of the global food crisis to the US House Financial Services Committee and is an Advisor to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. In addition to numerous scholarly publications, he regularly writes for *The Guardian*, and has contributed to the *Los Angeles Times*, *NYTimes.com*, *San*

*Francisco Chronicle*, *The Mail on Sunday* and *The Observer*. His first book was *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System* (2007) and his latest, *The Value of Nothing: How to Reshape Market Society and Redefine Democracy* (2009), is a *New York Times* bestseller.



**LOUISE ARBOUR** took over as President & CEO of the International Crisis Group in July 2009. From 2004 to 2008, she served as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. In December 1987, she was appointed to the Supreme Court of Ontario, and in 1990 to the Court of Appeal for Ontario. In 1995, as Commissioner of an inquiry into the Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario, she produced a report that accelerated the move towards modern institutions specifically designed to meet the security and programming needs of women inmates.

In 1996, Ms. Arbour was appointed by the Security Council of the United Nations as Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda. After three years as Prosecutor, she resigned to take up an appointment to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Ms. Arbour is a Companion of the Order of Canada (2007) and a Grande officière de l'Ordre national du Québec (2009). She is the recipient of numerous medals and awards, including the Franklin D. Roosevelt Freedom from Fear Award (2000) and the French Legion of Honour (2010). Ms. Arbour received the Council of Europe's 2010 North-South Prize alongside former President of Brazil Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.



**CONRAD BLACK** is a Canadian-born former media mogul, writer and member of the British House of Lords. In 2007, Black was convicted of diverting company funds for personal benefit, a charge he disputes. Before the trial, Black described himself as “an underdog in the crosshairs of the US government, the most powerful institution in the world.” Sentenced to six and a half years in a federal prison, Black was temporarily released in July 2010 after the US Supreme Court limited the scope of a federal fraud law, and is currently serving the rest of his sentence.

In 1972, Black owned 21 local papers across Canada and by 1992 he was the third largest

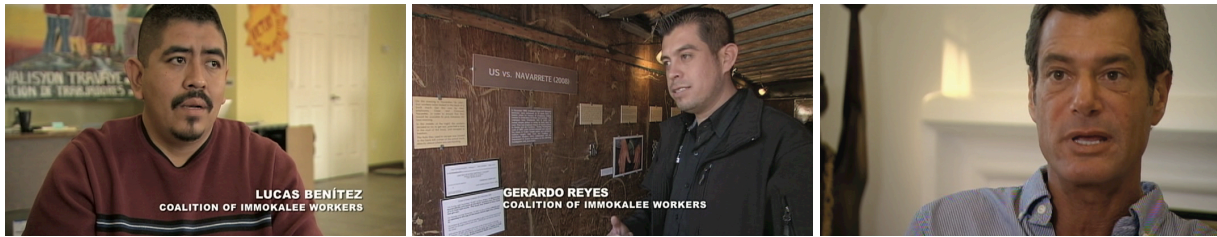
newspaper magnate in the world, controlling Hollinger International, including the London *Daily Telegraph* (acquired controlling interest in 1985), the Fairfax Group in Australia (1985), *The Jerusalem Post* (acquired 1989), Southam Press in Canada (1996), the *Chicago Sun-Times* (1996), and roughly 100 smaller newspapers in the United States. Black has published books on a number of topics, including the 2003 biography, *Franklin Delano Roosevelt: Champion of Freedom*, described by *Publishers Weekly* as “not only the best one-volume life of the 32nd president but the best at any length, bound to be widely read and discussed.”



**KAREN ARMSTRONG**, author, scholar and journalist, is among the world’s foremost commentators on religious history and culture. Her books include the bestselling *A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (1993) and *The Battle for God* (2000), as well as *Islam: A Short History* (2000) and *Buddha* (2001). In February 2008, Armstrong was awarded the TED Prize and began working on the Charter for Compassion, created online by the general public and crafted by leading thinkers in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism and Buddhism. The charter was launched in November 2009 and Armstrong is working with TED and the Compassionate Action Network to build an international network of Compassionate Cities dedicated to implementing the Charter, realistically and practically, into 21st-century urban life.



Much of Professor **WILLIAM REES**’s work is in the realm of human ecology and ecological economics, where Dr. Rees is best known as the originator of “ecological footprint analysis.” Dr. Rees’s book on this method, *Our Ecological Footprint* (1996, co-authored with then-PhD student Mathis Wackernagel) is now available in English, Chinese, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Latvian and Spanish. He is presently supervising several eco-footprint projects ranging from the sustainability implications of globalization to getting serious about urban sustainability. Professor Rees has taught at the University of British Columbia’s School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP) since 1969. His teaching and research focus on the public policy and planning implications of global environmental trends and the necessary ecological conditions for sustainable socioeconomic development.



**LUCAS BENÍTEZ & GERARDO REYES CHÁVEZ, Coalition of Immokalee Workers, and JON ESFORMES, Pacific Tomato Growers**

The Florida-based farmworker organization Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) is a community-based organization made up of mainly Latino, Mayan Indian and Haitian immigrants working in the state of Florida. Its mandate is to advocate for farmworker rights, fight modern slavery practices and help its members develop their skills in community education and organization. Among other milestone events in 2010–2011, CIW signed an agreement with the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange to extend the CIW’s Fair Food principles to over 90 percent of the Florida tomato industry. This watershed moment ended a 15-year impasse and followed the establishment of an unprecedented direct agreement between the CIW and one of the largest and oldest growers in the industry, Pacific Tomato Growers, setting new standards for social responsibility and accountability in Florida’s tomato industry. As a result, the CIW is now working in an era of transformation of farm labor conditions in Florida’s tomato fields. Over the past several years, through the Campaign for Fair Food and anti-slavery work, Immokalee has evolved from being one of the poorest, most politically powerless communities in the country to becoming an important public presence. Three CIW members were presented the prestigious Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award, the first and only time the award has gone to members of a US-based organization. In recent years, the CIW and the Campaign for Fair Food have also received the 2009 Salem Award for Human Rights and Social Justice, the 2008 Sister Margaret Cafferty Development of People Award from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, the 2007 Anti-Slavery Award from Anti-Slavery International (the oldest international human rights organization in the world), World Hunger Year’s 2006 Harry Chapin Self-Reliance Award, the Freedom Network’s 2006 Wellstone Award and the Business Ethics Network’s 2005 BENNY Award.



**CASI CALLAWAY** of **Mobile Baykeeper**, a non-profit environmental group based in Mobile, Alabama. Mobile Baykeeper has over 4,000 members, all with a common interest in preserving and protecting the beauty, health and heritage of the Mobile Bay watershed. Their priorities are clean water, clean air and healthy people, along with responsible government and a healthy economy. Waterkeeper Alliance, Mobile Baykeeper’s parent organization, was founded in 1999 by environmental attorney and activist Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and several veteran



Waterkeepers. It is a global movement of on-the-water advocates who patrol and protect more than 100,000 miles of rivers, streams and coastlines in North and South America, Europe, Australia, Asia and Africa. Waterkeepers combine firsthand knowledge of their waterways with an unwavering commitment to the rights of their communities and the rule of law. Whether they are on the water tracking down polluters, in a courtroom advocating for stronger enforcement of environmental laws, at a town meeting rallying community support, or in a classroom educating young people, Waterkeepers defend their communities against anyone who threatens their right to clean water—from law-breaking polluters to unresponsive government agencies.

**Also appearing in the film:**

**In Albania:** Gjon Biba, Gjergi Lala, Agim Loci, Gjin Marku, Donika Prenaga, Gjin Prenaga, Liliana Prenaga, Llesh Prenaga, Lorenzo Prenaga, Pashke Prenaga, Ilir Prenga, Petrit Prenga, Zef Sinani

**Fenbrook Institution:** Florence Barran, Paul Mohammed

**Eastern State Penitentiary:** Francis Dolan

**Immokalee:** Gregorio Venegas, Eric Schlosser (author of *Fast Food Nation*)

**Gulf of Mexico:** Rodney Lyons

**For further information:**

|                                |                                                                        |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Charter for Compassion         | <a href="http://charterforcompassion.org">charterforcompassion.org</a> |
| Coalition of Immokalee Workers | <a href="http://ciw-online.org">ciw-online.org</a>                     |
| Waterkeeper Alliance           | <a href="http://waterkeeper.org">waterkeeper.org</a>                   |
| Mobile Baykeeper               | <a href="http://mobilebaykeeper.org">mobilebaykeeper.org</a>           |
| Raj Patel                      | <a href="http://rajpatel.org">rajpatel.org</a>                         |
| Global Footprint Network       | <a href="http://footprintnetwork.org">footprintnetwork.org</a>         |

# FILMMAKER BIOS

## JENNIFER BAICHWAL: DIRECTOR

Jennifer Baichwal has been directing and producing documentaries for 18 years. Her films have played all over the world and won awards nationally and internationally including *Let it Come Down: The Life of Paul Bowles* (1998), *The Holier It Gets* (1999), and *The True Meaning of Pictures* (2003). *Manufactured Landscapes* (2007) about the work of artist Edward Burtynsky, was released theatrically in over 15 countries, while *Act of God* (2009) opened the Hot Docs Film Festival. Baichwal is currently in production on a film about water with Edward Burtynsky, Nick de Pencier and Daniel Iron.

### Selected Awards

#### **MANUFACTURED LANDSCAPES**

Winner - Best Documentary - Ecocinema International Film Festival, 2008  
Winner - Genie (Canadian Oscar) for Best Feature Documentary, 2007  
Winner - Reel Current Award (Al Gore), Nashville Film Festival, 2007  
Winner - Best Feature Documentary & Best Canadian Film, Toronto Film Critics Association, 2006  
Winner - TIFF Toronto-City Award for Best Canadian Feature

#### **LET IT COME DOWN: THE LIFE OF PAUL BOWLES**

Winner - International Emmy Best Arts Documentary, 1999  
Winner - Best Biography Hot Docs, 1999

#### **THE HOLIER IT GETS**

Winner - Best Canadian Independent Film, Hot Docs, 2000  
Winner - Best Cultural Film, Hot Docs, 2000  
Winner - Best Writing in a Documentary Program, Geminis (Canadian Emmys), 2000  
Winner - Best Editing in a Documentary Program, Geminis, 2000

#### **THE TRUE MEANING OF PICTURES**

Winner - Best Arts Documentary Program, Geminis, 2003

## RAVIDA DIN: PRODUCER

Ravida Din is an Executive Producer at the National Film Board of Canada (Quebec and Atlantic Production Centers). Credits include *Pink Ribbons, Inc.* (d. Léa Pool, 2011), *The So-called Movie* (d. Garry Beitel, 2010), *Jelena's Song* (d. Pablo Alvarez-Mesa, 2010) and *Family Motel* (d. Helene Klodawsky, 2007). *Payback* is her most recent production.

## NICHOLAS DE PENCIER: CINEMATOGRAPHER

Nicholas de Pencier is a multi-award winning director, producer, and director of photography working in documentary, performing arts, and dramatic film. He is President of Toronto-based Mercury Films Inc. Documentary credits include *Let It Come Down: The Life of Paul Bowles* (1998), *The Holier It Gets* (1999), *The True Meaning of Pictures* (2003), *Hockey Nomad* (2004), *Manufactured Landscapes* (2007), and *Act of God* (2009). He lives in Toronto with his wife, Jennifer Baichwal, and their two children.

## NICK HECTOR: EDITOR

Editor Nick Hector's award-winning credits include *Chronique d'un genocide* (d. Yvan Patry, 1996), *Dying at Grace* (d. Allan King, 2003) ) and *Air India 182* (d. Sturla Gunnarson, 2008) . Other credits include *Drowning in Dreams* (Tim Southam, 1998), *Crimes of the Heart* (John Haslett Cuff, 2003), *Hogtown* (d. Min Sook Lee, 2005), *Max, Claire, Ida and Company* (d. Allan King, 2005) and *Experimental Eskimos* (d. Barry Greenwald, 2009).

The National Film Board of Canada presents

# PAYBACK

A film by Jennifer Baichwal

Based on the book *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth*  
by Margaret Atwood

Written & Directed by Jennifer Baichwal

Produced by Ravida Din

Director of Photography Nicholas de Pencier

Edited by Nick Hector, C.C.E.

Additional Editing by Avriil Jacobson

Sound Recordist Nicholas de Pencier

Music Composers Martin Tielli, Gabriel Morley

Executive Producer Ravida Din

A Production of the National Film Board of Canada

Canada's public producer and distributor, the National Film Board of Canada creates interactive works, social-issue documentaries, auteur animation and alternative dramas that provide the world with a unique Canadian perspective. The NFB is developing the entertainment forms of the future in groundbreaking interactive productions, while pioneering new directions in 3D stereoscopic film, community-based media, and more. It works in collaboration with emerging and established filmmakers, digital media creators and co-producers in every region of Canada, with Aboriginal and culturally diverse communities, as well as partners around the world. Since the NFB's founding in 1939, it has created over 13,000 productions and won over 5,000 awards, including 4 Webbys, 12 Oscars and more than 90 Genies. Over 2,000 NFB productions can be streamed online, at the NFB.ca Screening Room as well as via partnerships with the world's leading video portals, while the NFB's growing family of apps for smartphones, tablets and connected TV delivers the experience of cinema to Canadians everywhere.

*Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* was originally composed and delivered as the 2008 Massey Lecture Series, broadcast by CBC Radio, and published by House of Anansi Press

Canada – 2012 – 86 mins – Color - Digital and 35mm  
In English, Spanish and Albanian with English subtitles

Press materials can be downloaded from [www.zeitgeistfilms.com/payback](http://www.zeitgeistfilms.com/payback)



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