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From NYC to Sundance: Paul Rachman and Steven Blush, 'American Hardcore'

[Ed. Note: For the next few days, *The Reeler* will present a series of profiles of some of the New York-based filmmakers with movies at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival. The subjects worked on various aspects of this year's shorts, documentaries and features; their Sundance experience ranges from that of rookies to seasoned veterans to prize-winning alumni. Starting Jan. 19, *The Reeler's* Sundance coverage will continue from Park City, Utah. -- STV]

Paul Rachman had a feeling. The director had spent more than four years adapting writer Steven Blush's 2000 punk survey *American Hardcore* as a documentary, and after submitting a rough cut for consideration in this year's Sundance Film Festival, he found himself doing what thousands of other Sundance hopefuls do every fall: He waited.

And waited.

"Neither one of us really thought it was going to get into Sundance," Rachman told *The Reeler* last week. "You know, you hear the rumors about people getting in; they hear weeks before the final, *final* deadline. They already know, but you haven't heard, so you're not in. I heard *nothing* from them. ... You've got politics matched with a documentary about a subculture. I didn't know if they were going to get it."



Then Rachman received a voicemail last November while vacationing in the Dominican Republic: *American Hardcore* was set to screen in the documentary competition.

"What we figured out is that it's almost a new chapter to the book almost--an addendum," Blush said. "It's like a counterpart. A book, in its essence, is delving into certain particular facts and the like. The film is an overview on the subculture. So while the basic premise that this was a tribal, regional, underground, early '80s movement is consistent throughout, everything else is different. There are different interviews, there are some different people, and of course, there's the visual element. So it's a very different experience. But I'm very pleased with it; they *should* be a little different."

Of Rachman's three previous Sundance submissions, *Hardcore* is the first to make the cut. Not that he is any stranger to the event's dynamic; as a founding filmmaker of the Slamdance Film Festival in 1995, Rachman helped to build Park City's underground, strictly indie alternative to the burgeoning Sundance hype machine. As he wound down work on *American Hardcore*, which looked at the legacies of pioneering bands like Minor Threat, Bad Brains, D.O.A. and Black Flag, he knew it would be easy enough to screen it at Slamdance.

Of course, Rachman knew that would somewhat defeat both *Hardcore's* and Slamdance's purposes. "The

mission there is first-time filmmakers, films without a distributor and that discovery of talent," Rachman said. "And while Slamdance might be the expected audience, Sundance is the *less*-expected audience. And that's more challenging. And, you know, by not going to Slamdance, it really frees up the screening slot to a first-time filmmaker who deserves that slot."

Judging from the film's succession of sold-out screening dates, the challenge seems to have made its impact. "I'm just looking forward to having the opportunity to play this beyond the underground," said Blush, a longtime musicologist making his film writing debut. "Bringing this to a larger audience--people who might not even know what this movement is. That's what excites me--the chance to do that."

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