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## ***Dogtown Redemption* Premieres on *Independent Lens* Monday, May 16, 2016 on PBS**

### **Portrait of Street Recyclers, Whose Daily Fight to Survive Raises Questions about Race, Class, and the Rights of the Poor**



*Jason Witt (right) and Heather Holloman. Credit: Amir Soltani*

(San Francisco, CA) – A surprising number of people make their living off our nation’s vast rivers of trash. They are America’s unseen. *Dogtown Redemption* follows the lives of three of these people over seven years: Jason Witt, the Olympic champion of recycling, who often hauls a shopping cart that weighs over a ton; Landon Goodwin, a former minister who struggles with his own fall from grace; and Miss Hayok Kay, the daughter of a prominent Korean family and drummer for a 1980s punk band, now at the mercy of the elements and predators. Each survives by redeeming bottles, cans, and assorted other recyclables in an area of West Oakland, California, nicknamed “Dogtown.” Their poignant personal stories reveal the art, science, economics and politics

of recycling: what it offers, how it touches the poor, and why it matters to all of us. Directed by Amir Soltani and Chihiro Wimbush, *Dogtown Redemption* premieres on *Independent Lens* Monday, May 16, 2016, 10:00-11:00 PM ET ([check local listings](#)) on PBS.

Every year Californians buy about 22 billion beverages in aluminum, glass, and plastic containers, each of which can be redeemed for a few cents. As a result, trash can be turned into cash, providing a lifeline for a subculture of marginalized recyclers — the unemployed and underemployed, the elderly, the mentally and physically disabled, former criminals, drug addicts, and prostitutes — who, through recycling, earn money and reclaim the pride that comes with having a job.

*Dogtown Redemption* follows Jason, Landon, and Miss Kay through the prism of a single recycling center: Alliance Metals in West Oakland. With annual sales in the millions, Alliance is an anomaly in an otherwise depressed neighborhood that has witnessed the steady flight, erosion, and collapse of American industry. Owner Jay Anast purchases bottles and cans from shopping cart recyclers, turning Alliance into a financial hub and community center for a Fellini-esque cast of characters — the pirates of trash. By virtually any measure, the denizens of the recycling center should be dead. But they defy Darwin — poverty has turned them into masters of improvisation and ingenuity.



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Residents of new developments in West Oakland view Alliance Metals as noisy, smelly, and dirty — a giant garbage can that attracts scavengers, drug dealers, and criminals. The rattle of the shopping carts, missing garbage cans, litter on the streets, public defecation, theft, crime, and trespassing are offered as evidence that the recyclers are a blight upon the neighborhood.

Dogged by addiction, mental health issues, homelessness, and poverty, the recyclers' grip on life is tenuous. Recycling serves as the only constant in their life. Yet with commodity prices collapsing, neighbors calling for a ban on shopping cart traffic, and Alliance Metals now slated to close in August 2016, their way of life is threatened.

The question of who owns our garbage makes these otherwise marginal characters important voices in a conflict over race, class, and space in a modern American city. *Dogtown Redemption* humanizes and celebrates this other America, one that many of us never see. That a small business has allowed so many to survive on a daily basis — for years, even decades — is a minor miracle.

Visit the *Dogtown Redemption* page on [Independent Lens](#), which features more information about the film.

### About the Filmmakers

**Amir Soltani (Director, Producer)** is an Iranian American human rights activist who has worked in journalism, philanthropy, and business. He is the author of *Zahra's Paradise*, a *New York Times*-bestselling graphic novel on Iran's 2009 protests. Soltani studied history at Tufts and Harvard. *Dogtown Redemption* is his first documentary film.

**Chihiro Wimbush (Director, Co-Producer, Cinematographer)** is a hapa, Oakland-based filmmaker. Most recently he served as editor of the award-winning *Changing Season: On the Masumoto Family Farm*. With his wife Meena Srinivasan, he creates mindful media and education content via their nonprofit organization, *A Lens Inside*. Between chasing shopping carts and other stories, Wimbush writes and tries to lure his musical muse out of hiding.

### CREDITS

Directors  
Producer  
Executive Producers

Co-Producers  
Associate Producer  
Director of Photography

Amir Soltani and Chihiro Wimbush  
Amir Soltani  
Jamie Wolf, Geralyn Dreyfous, Abou Farman,  
Regina Scully, Khosrow Semnani, Saeed Nasiri  
Ray Telles, Chihiro Wimbush, Denise Zmekhol  
Zachary Stickney  
Chihiro Wimbush





Editor  
Music

Manuel Tsingaris  
Pete Sears

**About *Independent Lens***

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by Independent Television Service, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. For more visit [pbs.org/independentlens](http://pbs.org/independentlens). Join the conversation: [facebook.com/independentlens](https://www.facebook.com/independentlens) and on Twitter [@IndependentLens](https://twitter.com/IndependentLens).

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