

## The Wire: Series Wrap-Up

A Panel Discussion With Clark Johnson, Nina Noble, Bill Zorzi and Chad Coleman

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**Marc:** Welcome, everybody. Good to have you all here. Let me introduce the panel, and, you know, all good shows have to come to an end—*The Wire*, other shows as well. But we have a new one now. Here we go. [laughs] So—Nina Noble is to my left. Nina is the executive producer of *The Wire* and has been working—can you hear me now? This is one of those mics you have to hold to your lips. I'm sorry. Hook that up better. Nina Noble, executive producer of *The Wire*, who's been working with David Simon since the beginning, really for a long time, they go back a long way. And to her left is Clark Johnson, who was in *Homicide*, is becoming a director of great note, and played the role of Gus in this epis—in this season of *The Wire*, which just concluded. And to my right is Chad Coleman. And Chad, if you remember, played Cutty, in *The Wire*, one of the most memorable roles for a lot of us. And to his right is Bill Zorzi, who I think played himself [laughter]

**Bill:** A version.

**Marc:** A *version* of himself. And is, one of the, of course, the writers of *The Wire*. And made an incredible transition from journalism to screen writer. So. This is our pal. So. And we have a mic—[applause] a microphone right there in the middle, and as I like always do, let's have a real community conversation here. So when the spirit moves you, please come to the mic and bring your questions and thoughts to the panel, okay? And we're going to cover a bunch of things. I think that we have here people in production, actors, writers, directors. And I—I mean—people are very curious about how these pieces get put together and how, how much of a collaboration there is going on between actor, writer, director, producer—on the scenes, I mean. And—how much people get to interplay about how much you do or how much is dictated by what is already written. Zorzi? We'll start with you.

**Bill:** Oh yeah. Uh—what did you say about the spirit moving you? I guess I have to—does it have to move me first?

**Marc:** No, I can—I can move on to Clark Johnson if you—I'll move to Clark.

**Bill:** No, I'm kidding, I'm kidding. I guess the uh, do you want to—do you want to talk about how it happens on set, or talk about the whole process?

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**Marc:** Yeah, I mean, 'cause when—let me tell you what I—I mean, I've heard from some people on the set when you have a script in your—when you're given the script, as an actor, that's your script. Let's not veer away from what's written. So—and—so, well, what is the creative process between people who do any acting and the directing and the producing, on what we finally see?

**Bill:** The actors will do as they're told. [laughter] Now, I'm—I'm, you know, as writers, we, you know, we put it on the, on paper, the way we—we see it, and everybody leaves their mark on it. You know, whether it—beginning with the actor, when he or she reads the part, the director has his or her ideas about how that actor should play the part. We might be on set, we're all—there's always a writer on set, so the director may as for our input or ask if you know, this is the way we envisioned it. Or if we did it this way, is that going to effect something, you know, three episodes down the line. So it's a—it really is a collaborative effort, I think.

**Clark:** Basic—basically, it's shaking the bushes here, boss—that's our response to the writer types. We—we're just the pee-ons, bringing the words to life.

**Marc:** Somehow I don't think of Clark Johnson as a pee-on, that's kind of hard to imagine. Clark Johnson, pee-on?

**Clark:** Shaking the bushes here, boss? [laughter]

**Nina:** Marc, the thing about the—the thing that's unique to *The Wire*, couple of things. One, the scripts are so—the scripts are so detail-oriented and all the stories are interconnected. And so sometimes we like to say it's like a sweater, that you pull one thread and the whole things gonna unravel. So I think—I'd like to say the writers are sometimes open to dialogue changes when there's suggestions, but sometimes we just really have to be careful about changing the intent of, of any—any—even the simplest most trivial sounding line, because sometimes it can really affect something that's gonna happen three episodes later.

**Clark:** We—we were doing the, I think it was the second episode of the very first season. And I remember being out on some drug corner, in east Baltimore, and—doing a scene where a drug slinger's talking on a pay phone outside of a pinball arcade or something. And it's about three in the morning and it was cold, and all of a sudden, a little Taurus, a gray Taurus comes screeching up and David Simon jumps out of the car and he comes running up—I was directing that episode, and he comes running over to me, and he says “What are you doing? What are you doing?!” I said—I—well, we're doing the scene where the guy is talking to his friend on the phone. “He can't be at a pay phone, because—” Well, Simon hadn't written the subsequent episodes, and they had had just a revelation that night. So I mean, in the—in the early going with the show,

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it became so dense, but the pilot was just of, out of Simon's head, and then—and then these characters came to life, these characters were slowly defined. So it really—it gave a sense of what we were in store for, because for Simon to n—to come screaming out of a Taurus at three o'clock in the morning, to make sure that this guy wasn't actually in that phone booth, because three episodes from now there's stuff that he had just written, that guy needed to be somewhere else. So.

**Bill:** Welcome to *The Wire*.

**Marc:** So, I mean—that's where the fluidity is, I guess, in this—in *The Wire*, I mean. 'Cause I've talked to some of the actors in *The Wire* who say “Well, when I first got the gig, I thought I was going to be told I'd be here for, maybe one or two to three episodes, then I'd be gone.” But something happens in the process of writing and directed and producing and acting that characters develop and things happen that literally will change.

**Chad:** Well, I mean, it's kind of specific to each character. You know, my character arc, I believe, was already established. You know. They absolutely knew where—where I was going when I didn't know where I was going. So it's just basically establishing the parameter, you know, it's like, okay, we can go—you can go this far that way, that far that way—no further. You know, I didn't—

**Nina:** ...We can't tell you why.

**Chad:** Exactly, exactly. So.

**Marc:** You can't tell him why.

**Chad:** But like Nina was saying, it's so detail oriented and, you know, most of us been working in the industry for you know, years and years and seen a lot of bad scripts. So you know, when you—when you come into something that was written, it's so tight, you know, I—for me, all I had to do was just trust and drop in, you know, and just let it—just let it flow. And it worked! I never had many circumstance where I was like—well, can I, can I say this—instead of, you know—I never ran into that. It was really just very tight. I was like, you know, just get in the Lamborghini and drive, man. I mean, somebody gonna allow you to drive a Lamborghini—you know, you don't ask a lot of questions. You get in, you drive. [laughter] I'm sure you're gonna have a good time, you know. That's how it was—that's really how it was for me. I never ran into situations where I was—had to fight to try to change something. It fit, you know?

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**Marc:** So what is the, the kind of madness, or sense of keeping it all so tight, keeping the script tight, away even from actors or people who're working on—working on the, on the series, that it's you know it's like a top secret land—but why?

**Nina:** You mean, the reason for it? I—I think the reason, the logic for it is that—that you know, as playing the character Cutty, Chad would only know as much as Cutty knows, at any time. And—and so he didn't—he had no way of knowing what his destiny was or what was down the road for him. So just to keep the characters real, as much as possible.

**Chad:** And because Simon was driving at three o'clock in the morning in that little gray Taurus with new shit for us.

**Bill:** Sure. [laughter]

**Marc:** And you were acting and directing in this series.

**Clark:** I only acted in this final series—season. I didn't—I

**Marc:** You didn't direct any episodes?

**Clark:** I did the very last one.

**Marc:** The last one, that's what I thought. Right, right, right. And you were in that one.

**Clark:** Yeah, I'm in all of them, this season. But—

**Marc:** So—a lot of people would ask the question, and I think that a lot of people will watch things that directors do and they're in the piece they're doing, how that works. Seems to be a strange process, you know, like you're almost directing yourself while your directing others and acting at the same time.

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**Clark:** Yeah, it sucks. [laughter] I remember when I first started directing on *Homicide*, and I was doing a scene with Johnny Seda and it was just the two of us in a restaurant. And we're back and forth with the dialogue and—you get this actor flicker, your eyes start to bat around and you know you're up on your lines and I'm going up, I can't remember my line. How *unusual!* I used to keep them, keep them in my hat. In my little—"You're under... arrest!" [laughter] It's why I wore the little porkpie. But anyway, so I couldn't remember my lines, and I'm starting to go up, and—and then Johnny Seda speaks, and while he's speaking, I'm thinking to myself, "It's okay, I won't be on me for this bit." So—you know, that's the director, the little director, the good director on this shoulder, a little actor angel on this shoulder. "Come on, Clark! Come on, Clark!" And it's—it's right brain, left brain. I don't think you can find that easily, but it's really hard to do both. This season it wasn't so bad, because I had the whole season to prep. Every shot they dropped in episode one or two, I figured I was going to have to pick it up in episode ten. So I was ready for it. So in the end, it became easier, so it wasn't as bad to do the whole thing this year.

**Marc:** So—let's talk about that last episode for a minute. I mean, that—that was—to me, one of the most powerful closings of a TV series that I've ever witnessed. I mean, and I'm not saying that just to blow smoke. I mean, it was just—I sat there and went oh, my god. The very end and just the—what a lot of people have said in the conversations that I've had about it is what was being said there, what was being said about the state of who we are and where we are, that that's how he ended it, with a few messages, a glimmer of people breaking through. And others never breaking through. And just—and the—what the battle against the system itself inside the police department, how it all kind of ended, so I'm just curious, did you all think about what that says—what the ending says to you as just people in this process?

**Clark:** Well, I—I really wish Simon was here. I mean it's—it was really a rough time when we were pr—uh, you know, promoting the show that he was you know, a stalwart in the WGA Action and couldn't—couldn't be involved in that. And it seems like he's docking me, personally. I think the whole Writer's Guild strike was just 'cause he thinks I smell bad. Because he's never—we're never in the same room, I haven't said that I—I try to speak for him when I can, because he's such a talented guy, and in terms of the ending of the series, I wouldn't, I would characterize it as Baltimore is just gonna keep going on. The—the good, the bad, the—and the ugly of Baltimore will continue, we just stopped talking about it. You know, you could have an ending on *The Sopranos* where they're buying, you know, french fries or whatever and it goes dark, but we were just talking about Baltimore up until, 'til we stopped talking. Speak to that, Bill?

**Bill:** No I—absolutely. I mean, it just continues.

**Marc:** Pull [the mic] closer to your mouth.

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**Bill:** No, it just continues, that's all. And I—as far as I can—I'm not sure, is the point of the question—are you sort of thinking of the, the montage, the ending montage, or—which really was about the city itself, I think.

**Marc:** Yeah, I mean, that's the one. I think—no, it was the ending montage for me, it was—it was wrapping up what happened to characters and where they ended up, you know. And it was just—to me, you know, I was curious what you all—how you all felt about it. It seemed to me it was really kind of a philosophical wrapping up of—of you where, not just where Baltimore is, but where 21<sup>st</sup> century America is at the end of dealing with twenty centuries of capitalism. And what it's done to America. And—and what those closing pieces said about the condition we're in. I mean, it was a pretty heavy ending. This was not like la-de-da, light, let's have a french fry, or are they going to kill Mr. Soprano or not, it was something much more different than that. At least to me. Maybe I'm reading too much, but I don't think I am.

**Bill:** No, I don't think so. I mean, there were several things going on there. I mean, one is, you know, the hu—the, at the same time it was a tip of the hat to the city of Baltimore, you know, that was representative of what is going on, in post-industrial, industrial America. And in cities everywhere, and, you know, the games, the game, it just continues. And I think, you know, Clark is absolutely right.

**Marc:** Nina? Chad? I'm sorry.

**Chad:** Yeah, I agree with—it goes on, you know? I mean, to not fall into any, you know, entertainment tricks or games, just stay [mic momentarily cuts out] true to it, you know—oh—okay [laughs] No I—

**Bill:** You can take mine. [laughter]

**Chad:** No, it's just I just felt like—just like he said, the game continues. The truth continues. No one's trying to snow anything—anybody over. No one's trying to go Hollywood, you know. It's really paying homage and honoring—

**Clark:** I was trying—I was trying to go Hollywood, I don't know where.

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**Chad:** You were? [laughs] But I mean, at the same time— [laughter]

**Marc:** Right out there—please, join us.

**Audience:** As a—

**Marc:** Is it on? Smack it around a little bit. There you go.

**Audience:** As a former student of journalism, I particularly liked this season. I wanted to ask Bill if you could tell us a little bit more about your writing process and trying to bring to the forefront the demise of journalism as I learned it, anyway.

**Bill:** Jeez. The demise of journalism. [laughter]

**Clark:** Take it away, Bill! Ba-dum boom, go!

**Bill:** I—I guess I didn't really think of it as the demise of journalism. I—I just thought of it as, sort of a snapshot of journalism, as we're in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In fact, we were criticized for not, you know, highlighting some of the pressures that are on the industry right now, other than the economic factors. I mean, a lot of what we—what Simon and I did, I think, and really it was Simon, or *Mr. Simon*, as we referred to him. The—there were a few little messages that he put in there, but I think it really was homage to the craft. I'm sure I'm not answering the question, but I think what we wanted to do was show a newsroom in a very real way and show journalism in a very real way. And there were other messages there, like, you know the Templeton foray into fiction, and the idea that there are all these people running around reporting on news that—while the rest of the city, you know, well, burned. That little message is there. The writing process that—I mean, I—all those things were discussed. I'm not sure if I'm, if I'm answering.

**Clark:** We're just witnessing the demise of journalism, right here.

**Bill:** It's working. It's crashing and burning.

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**Marc:** But that was your character. He's—

**Clark:** Of course. Gus Haynes, the patron saint of journalism. I had a, I had a blast playing that, because it comes from these guys, that character came from their heart. And it was so cool to play—and we're segueing away from the question, but—to play this guy who spoke to some of the issues that were dear to Bill and David's heart and—the biggest compliment I could have playing that guy was real reporters coming up to me and saying, you know, that's kind of how we like to see it. We wish we had an editor like you, and that's—I think that it was an homage as much as—as the guys who are slamming the institution of journalism as it is in this country now. I don't think it's that much different than it was in the Hearst days. They started an unjust war in Cuba, and—hey! Nah, I won't go there. [laughter] But the idea that—that Simon was slamming the press, I don't think that's true. I think he was slamming the institution, slamming the powers that be, all the mergers that were happening. A great newspaper like the Sun, taken over by interests in Chicago, foreign bureaus being called home, all these things that are happening to—in—in print journalism were—were, you know, discussed too, at length on the show from the newsroom point of view. It wasn't a slam on, on newspaper people, it was a slam on the powers that be. Which is—you know. Vintage classic Simon. He hit every institution. It was just funny that, that the newspaper chose to take issue with this particular—they didn't mind when we slammed the mayor's office or the police force or the schools, but, oh, don't touch the—hallowed—

**Bill:** That, that really is true. I've never met a—bigger bunch of thin skinned human beings as I've met this year. My former colleagues in the media.

**Marc:** You—it's nothing compared—I don't know how many of you have heard what happened in Washington when Zell, the new owner of the Sun and the Tribune came to the DC bureau and looked out at everybody, he was caught on tape, and he knows he's being caught on tape, and he looked up at these reporters who were covering Capital Hill and Iraq and said “You are overhead.” So that's the truth. I mean, what you all wrote, it's the reality of what's going on. “You are overhead.”

**Clark:** And thank you very much for coming, everybody! It's been great. [laughter]

**Marc:** Thanks a lot. Cancel the dinner, no drinks. It's over.

**Audience:** I want to thank you guys for being here. I have two questions for Clark. Was there any intimidation factor in doing the—directing the last episode of such a critically acclaimed TV show? I mean, did you worry, did you lose sleep over it?



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**Clark:** I don't scare easy. [laughter] You know, I—no. Because it—this is family. I mean, I've been working—a lot of faces here that I've been working with since '93 in *Homicide*. It's a nurturing cocoon, and that's just—I can only say that because I, you know. I'm gonna get all weepy. But no, I didn't feel any pressure there. I tell you when I did feel pressure. I'm from Philly, and Mayor Nutter, the new mayor, invited some of us to come there and screen it there. And you know, Philly's a rough town. And we're in city hall and there's 300 people watching the finale, and I thought—what happens if they have same reaction they had to *The Sopranos*? Are they gonna be throwing shit at me? So, so that didn't transpire and I'm happy. You know, I was in good hands because I knew the script was solid as soon as I got it. It was wrapped up in an intelligent way and I didn't feel I'd be letting anybody down. I just had to shoot it. The problem for Nina and Bill and myself, in that instance, was Simon just wouldn't stop freaking writing. So we just kept shooting and Simon kept writing. And that's why it was 90 some pages, but I never felt like it was going to be anti-climatic.

**Audience:** That's cool. One of the blogs that's helping kill the newspapers, they were really complimentary of the direction of the last show. And they were looking at your motivation or whatever, whatever bloggers do. Is there any truth to what they surmised, that you got a lot of your motivation from Foard Wilgus?

**Clark:** Did he pay you? Stand up, Wilgus.

**Audience:** Five dollars! Five dollars!

**Clark:** You're—for those of you who don't know Foard, Foard, let's have a round of applause for Foard Wi—Foard Wilgus. His is and always will be the Sgt. Bilko of Baltimore.

**Nina:** Oh.

**Clark:** You know, and that's going back. Wilgus.

**Nina:** Actually, I don't—for those of you who were here for the earlier panel and saw the clip where Dominic West is speaking in that fake Baltimore accent, Foard Wilgus actually was his—his model, his dialect coach for that. [laughter]

**Marc:** So—

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**Clark:** Foard's worked on every show that ever shot in Baltimore and always will. Long after he's dead, he will still be putting time cards in on all the shows.

**Marc:** Bob Wisdom said to me that the—what about the, the array of actors that were on the set. That there—that there's never been a time in American TV or maybe even cinema, where this array of African American actors and talent were in one place at one time. This was like—something that was just unique and the kind of in the, kind of the annals of TV and film. Talk to me about that.

**Clark:** I saw a production of “Pearly” when I was a kid—no. I'm kidding. [laughter] That's—I mean, that's no faint praise. I mean, it could be the cynic in me, because I've been working for Simon for a while, is that many shows with this big a representation of African American actors, so it may be just by number, but I would have to agree that this is a really great cast and it has been, and it's, as Chad would attest, it's—it's unfolded with new actors coming in as we went along. I left the show and was gone for a couple years and was amazed at some of the new people that came and stepped up and—the ones that died. I mean, that's—the show never glorified the drug corners, it was always, to me, that you may have a fancy car for a minute, you may have a pocket full of cash for a minute, but you—there's only two ways to go, that's jail or dead. So it was never really glorified, but having said that, because of that, we constantly needed a flow of actors, and Pat Moran and the New York casting people and everybody had been—bringing—every actor in Baltimore has been in the show. So that's—that's a testament and some of you, you know, are probably here tonight, so.

**Chad:** Yeah, no, that's why even when people would criticize and say, you know, as you're saying like, you're glorifying the drug trade and things of that nature, and it's like, well you obviously haven't watched the show. You know. So some people, you know, have certain agendas which I understand, 'cause industry wide, you don't get a lot of diverse representation but we went from the mayors office to the streets, you know, and I don't think any other show was that inclusive or expansive in their representation, so, yeah. Kudos to the show all the way. To the producers.

**Audience:** Yeah, I wanted to ask about the writing for some of the black characters particularly, Snoop. One of my favorite scenes was wherein she goes into the Home Depot to buy the nail gun [laughter] and I'm wondering, you know, who wrote that, did anybody, did she have any input in, in to the dialog in that particular sequence and it was—I don't know, it just captured my attention. Now, when Bill was in the newsroom and it was being given the double assignment about covering city courts and federal court, that sound like pure Bill. But Snoop, I wonder how you write for that.

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**Marc:** Anybody want to—

**Bill:** I'm trying to remember if it was David or if it was Ed, who wrote that.

**Marc:** It was Ed who wrote that, wasn't it? Didn't Ed write that scene? Ed Burns? No?

**Bill:** I don't know. It was one or the other or both. I don't, I don't really remember. If Ed wrote it, it was Simonized. But in any event, that was—as I recall, the—Snoop

**Nina:** Snoop was a force of nature. Snoop just arrived on set one day. We were sitting there, you know, just sitting there watching video, and Michael K. Williams came up and said, you know, somebody you gotta meet, and—you know, and it was Snoop, and he had just run into her, it was a chance meeting, and conv—convinced us, and convinced Ed and David that you know, she had to be part of the show. And, and she's just—she's who she is. What you—what you see up there is Snoop, I don't know how—how we could have written that.

**Bill:** But at the same time, I think—I seem to remember her having a—Claire, the script supervisor keeping her on books, and—

**Nina:** Well, this was, this was actually the beginning of season—this was the beginning of season three, and Claire Cowperthwaite was our script supervisor, and she was new to the show. She joined us then. Claire had never—four—sorry, yeah. Claire had never met anyone like Snoop before. [laughter]

**Marc:** Who had?

**Nina:** When you talk about worlds colliding, this was—this was Snoop and Claire, and Claire who's a very well trained script supervisor, felt it was her job to make sure that Snoop said all the words exactly correctly, the way they were in the script.

**Clark:** And—and in defense of my tribe, Simon had an incredible year for dialog. For a balding Jewish guy from the suburbs, unbelievable how he would just tap into—and a lot of times, he could possibly listen to Snoop talking in conversation, earlier on, and that would fold into the dialog, which I'll explain the irony of that in a minute. 'Cause—you

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know, one of my favorite marriages imploded during the course of *Homicide*, and I found that I was—that was being written about, to a degree. So, the writers—good writers, anyway, will take from the characters that—that we're defining with them, and roll some of those personal anecdotal stuff back into it, so when Snoop comes on set and is off book, it's probably something she said to Simon two, three weeks ago that he's written into the script and now insisting that she says it exactly as he wrote it that she said it two weeks ago. [laughter] Yeah. Attica! Attica! Come on, actors stand up! Attica! I had to—sag. [laughter]

**Audience:** I have a question for Mr. Coleman and I—I guess Cutty was probably one of my favorite characters. Flashing back to episodes three and four, here.

**Chad:** Right.

**Marc:** Right here.

**Audience:** I just was wondering if you could tell us sort of the long boring story about how you got the part in *The Wire*, and if you were considered for any other parts.

**Chad:** Well, you know—I'm—I auditioned. I vaguely remember auditioning for Omar [laughter] ...yeah. I—

**Clark:** Why you laughing?

**Chad:** Any of you get—right, why you laughing?

**Audience:** You think you could do it?

**Chad:** Of course I could, I'm an actor!

**Bill:** How many—how many—

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**Chad:** But I wouldn't—but, Michael K., I had talked to Michael K., I mean, I—tremendous, tremendous, job—just amazing, and you know, the level of respect that he gets out there on the streets, you know, it's a testament to the work he's doing. [laughter] Truthfully, man. No, I just, I had an audition that they, you know what, they didn't have a—they had written the character, so I was reading sides from it, maybe from episode two, you know, Cutty premiered in the—third season. So I had an audition, went in for the audition, I got a call maybe a week later—they like you, they want to meet you—went back in, and it was, it was just a nice kind of collaborative effort. I—I from what I understand, they'd been trying to find this guy for a while, you know, and I'll just give you an example of someone else, a very dear friend of mine who went in for Cutty as well. And at one point after he read, Nina and Ed and David, you know, they're—they're trying to get him to zone in who Cutty's all about, and he's says “Uh, is it like, Obi Wan Kenobi?” So— [laughter] to tell you that—some people were in left field with this thing. But, you know, I mean, I just remember Nina saying, you know, he—he's not sure himself, he's, you know, he's—just not sure of himself, so it—it's just an incredible mix of that, you know, insecurity and strength and you know, just actors who can do two things at one time, you know. It turns out, it usually turns out pretty good. So. But it was a great—I, you know, I auditioned and we talked, and I started to just get a real sense of, of who he was. Just, just talking to David and, and Nina. And so when I did it again, I just clicked into this—I, you know, it was one of those out of body experiences for me, really.

**Clark:** Like Obi Wan Kenobi. [laughter]

**Chad:** Strangely enough. But I'm glad I didn't say that, because I'm sure I would have been out of the role. So, you know, I'm—I just—hey, you know, I just really, you know, you identify with that internal struggle with this guy. You know? He's just—he's in a strange, in he's in the same world, but it's a strange world at the same time. You know, so, just clicking into that and, you know I think some good stuff happened in the room that day. So.

**Nina:** No, absolutely.

**Chad:** It's one of those...

**Nina:** We weren't quite sure who this, this character was, either it was a new character for this season and, and it's true, as Chad says, there's a lot of inner turmoil with this guy that he has to be hard, he has—a gangster history, but—but, yet now he's at a point in his life where he's questioning a lot of how he's been operating and what he's been doing. And—so we saw a lot of actors that day, and you know, I'm not just saying this because Chad's sitting here, but Chad auditioned and we made a couple adjustments and gave him some notes and then we saw Cutty. And I mean, for Ed and David and I to

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agree on—on something is—is pretty rare. You know, without a lot of discussion. So, I mean. And—and that was one of the surest casting decisions we ever made. Really.

**Chad:** David said “nice,” David said “nice adjustment,” you know. Then I was like *Is that the kiss of death?* [laughter] Because people—you know, a lot of directors say that, you know. Oh, boy. But I—I really felt like I walked out of the room and said, you know, there is nothing else I could do in that room. That's how I felt, so. I was happy that it worked out. And—and I'm just—honored to represent this guy. There's so many guys out there, you know, that that's really their story, and it's so many people—that would normally not say anything to me, you know, so these guys you know, walk around carrying a lot, so for them to identify with the character in a way that they—I mean, they really wanted to just spend like, 20, 30 minutes talking about it. 'Cause I think they were just excited, wanted to see an accurate depiction, of, you know, of their lives. It's like giving voice to their lives when most of the time people are trying to minimize them or, you know, push them to the side, so it was—it was great to be able to speak to those guys. It was amazing. The response was amazing.

**Marc:** A little aside over here, we'll go right over here to the next questioner, but when you were saying that Nina was there with Ed and David, I think people don't realize that unless they listen to our podcast—that they didn't realize, Nina, that you were—what an integral part of the production you are. I mean, people think of Executive Producers as somebody who kind of sits up here and handles the money and does all this, but you were in the middle of it all the time,

**Clark:** The Glue.

**Marc:** Yeah. I mean, the glue, as David even put it. So I mean, I should—I think—explain a little bit about your role, people don't get it—as the executive producer, they'll think it's kind of off here, someplace but not with you.

**Nina:** I'm getting pretty good at juggling. It's—no, that—that's just it. I try to come to work every day and try to learn something new, try to, try to fill in the gaps and really just—I'm a camelian. I really just try to do whatever—whatever it takes and that's a different thing every day.

**Chad:** She who must be obeyed.

**Clark:** She's being modest. She's being modest, she who must be obeyed. Nina—I've known Nina since the beginning of *Homicide* when she was in AD and she—she's—was a

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big part of that and, and then from, from the get-go on *The Wire* and when we were first getting the production off and Nina was, like, when—when we lost Bob, it was always Nina that was picking up slack. So. She's not tootin' her horn, but I'll toot it for her. Because she—she had a lot to do with defining the show.

**Marc:** Amen. Right here.

**Audience:** I hope this is a story that you hear a lot, but after your season that was focused on the schools, I went out and I joined the board of Baltimore Freedom Academy. It's a Baltimore City high school that really is working. We graduated our first class last year, 95% of the kids going to college. [applause] We're—so—it really, it really crystalized for me that that was something I really wanted to give my time to, I want to thank you for that, because we're about to expand to being six through twelve, and we're out there fighting the good fight every day. But my question is someone nicely gave me for Christmas, knowing I loved *The Wire*, a book about *The Wire*, and the forward in it is so eloquent, about what you hoped to achieve with this show—and I won't even come close to getting it right, but that basically it wasn't sort of a “cops and robbers” show, or a—bad vs. good and that it was really—the goal was to really examine where we are with the American cities. And I just wanted to know—you know, when you walk around and you talk to people and you reflect on now, this show that has ended, do you feel like you achieved what you wanted to achieve, and have you raised a dialog about, you know, the city we're living in, all across our—our country.

**Marc:** Bill, why don't you start.

**Bill:** I'm not even sure where to begin, really. I'm sort of stuck on the Freedom Academy, since I've done work down there myself. So.

**Audience:** Yeah, it's a great place. Not a great building, but a great place.

**Bill:** I'm not sure that, I mean I think, but I don't want to speak for the producers, but I think that we're all pretty satisfied with what was said. I sometimes wonder if it just has fallen on, on—it's just out there, in the ether somewhere. You know, I mean that it's—we tried to say the truth, speak the truth, write the truth, did that, and there it is. And—we're marching off to whatever we're doing now, in these United States.

**Clark:** I—I think that—shit would happen, in the course of—and I can speak for this season, really, and—and the first season, in my involvement. But this season, stuff would happen in—in Baltimore City as we were filming. And we knew that we wouldn't

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come on the air until months, months later. And we would go—damn, I wish we could let people know that we're already writing about this stuff. So I—I agree with Bill, that I think a lot was said and enough was said about these institutions and a lot of times, that's my only regret, is that we couldn't, you know, go straight to air because we were talking about stuff that was happening in the city as it happened. And, and it wasn't, it wasn't because we were just listening to what we were doing, it was we were a little ahead of them in predicting what was going to happen. And that happened on more than one occasion.

**Nina:** Yeah, I think—in answer to your question, I think—I think we are satisfied that we've been able to raise a dialog. I think there are people that are not that interested in these, these problems that we've illuminated—but, but through watching *The Wire*, maybe they've started to think about them a little bit. And maybe, maybe some of those people out there are the ones who are capable of—of solving these things or thinking about them in a different way. I know that David is frustrated that it hasn't happened more quickly. That the show has ended without much momentum, on some of these issues that we've raised. But, but I'm optimistic that that can still can happen because of you know on-demand and the DVDs now, and everything, this show is going to be around for, for a while. And thanks to this exhibit here, too. And so I hope that people continue to think about the issues raised in *The Wire* and discuss them.

**Marc:** Chad, you want to jump in along with us?

**Chad:** No, I think that's well said.

**Marc:** And—to—to put this out, I'll just tell you that when we did our podcast series with a lot of the actors and writers of *The Wire*, not all of you, we've got to get the rest of you, but when it hit the web, the—the respond is overwhelming. There were people from all over the world who downloaded our podcasts of interviews. And people wrote to be in touch, because people are studying *The Wire*. Universities all across the country. And in Europe. About—to wrestle with 20<sup>th</sup> century America. I think it's gonna—it's having, it's going to end up having an effect beyond just the viewers that will have HBO—when the series was alive.

**Bill:** That's encouraging, but I'm still, you know, awfully cynical about what, you know, it might mean so far as change goes, really. I'm sorry to say.

**Marc:** No no no, I—you've got to remain cynical about that, I think. But I think that cynicism and hope go together. But anyway. Your turn.



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**Audience:** When I was walking in, like a dork, I pulled Bill aside, and I told him I teach at Walbrook High School up here on the west side of Baltimore. And—what was I going to say. Well, first of all, what's so interesting about *The Wire* is that yes, there are people like Cutty who go and round up kids and bring to your classroom so they're on your roll once a month. That legitimately happens. And I mean, I didn't know that this stuff happened. I think that what your show did is you showed people who never would have entered this world that—what that, I mean, it's real. And I wonder if there's anything more you guys wish you had gotten to say. I know the show got ended—it ended this year, what else do you think needed to be said about the zip codes that it—you know. I forgot the journalist's name in the last season, said don't get covered, you know, the—if you remember what I'm talking about.

**Clark:** I—I had something that I brought up to, to Simon, right when I got here. And it was a direct result of, of the tragedy that happened at Virginia Tech. And I wanted—and it—there wasn't time in the course of the season, but what I wanted to get to was the responsibility that that media has in deifying these people and putting the guy with the bullet belts on the front page of the newspaper and letting him put his manifesto out so every nut who has an axe to grind, who wants to go out in a blaze of glory knows that they'll get the cover, the Post, and I wanted to get that in. And Simon agreed it'd be interesting to talk about, and we talked about a little bit with Bill, that it—it wasn't—it was a responsibility of journalists to put it out regardless of that fact. And that was something I wanted to get into, but ten episodes and it wasn't all about the newsroom. So we never got to. But that was one that I would've liked to address, because I think that's a real big problem. And it's happening right now with Obama and Pastor Wright, where the sound bytes are killing us.

**Marc:** Anyone else? Thank you.

**Audience:** Clark, this is directed to you. You've done a lot of work with *Homicide*, with *The Wire*, you went off you did some stuff with *The Shield*. What brings you back to Baltimore? How is the, the shows that you've done that are centered around Baltimore, you know, I mean, what keeps drawing you back?

**Clark:** I owe Foard Wilgus money. [laughter] And he gets a cut of everything I make in the state of Maryland. No, I just, I, you know, every time I leave this damn town, I look in my rear view mirror and say, well, that's it for Baltimore. But I always end up coming back here. In fact, my next movie is set in DC, and hopefully we'll end up shooting it here. Something—something about this city. As a kid, my grandfather worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad and he'd bring the freights down to Camden Yard, I've always been coming here. I hate the Os. [laughter] You know, I'll admit it. I—I haven't forgiven the Colts, and I bear that grudge for you, but other than that I have no—I just, you know. I just like it here.

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**Marc:** Well, whose your team? Toronto?

**Clark:** The Eagles.

**Marc:** The Eagles?

**Clark:** I'm from Philly.

**Marc:** Oh, you're a Philly boy. That's right. [applause]

**Clark:** Represent!

**Audience:** Yeah!

**Marc:** Silly question. Yeah, you're next.

**Audience:** This is for Ms. Noble. At my job, we have to talk to a lot of clients, and a lot of clients aren't in Baltimore, so on several occasions, they're like, "Oh my god, I just saw *The Wire*! Are you okay?" [laughter] You know, you know. And so, I think we get that—I'd say, once or twice a week. And I was wondering for you, Ms. Noble, as a producer, did the city of Baltimore worry about you effecting the tourist trade here? Because the show is very real. And—did they ever say anything to you, or any of the producers?

**Nina:** Uh... yes. [laughter] Uh, there—there were some discussions. Right around season two, when it looked like we were going to continue going, there, there were some—there were some phone calls back and forth. And, uh, David's answer to that was well, sure, I can go to Philly, and do the show, but I'm still going to say it's Baltimore. [laughter] So, either way. But—but you know, I would like to respond to your—to your—to the idea that *The Wire* paints a negative picture of Baltimore. I don't really agree with that. I think—I think *The Wire* is illuminating the parts of the city that maybe people don't want to think about, maybe people that, that you'd rather not think about. But what David's done so well is, is to show those people—show the human side of those people, and just show each person, regardless of what type of character they are, with dignity. And with humanity. So, yeah, there's probably a lot of things, you know, that

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you don't want to see. But that's part of the urban experience. It's not Baltimore, per say. These are things, I think when people watch a show across America, they're thinking about what's going on in their own city, they're not saying maybe we shouldn't go there on our vacation.

**Bill:** Yeah, I mean, we're—there's 300 people who get killed in the streets of Baltimore, it's—that's not part of the TV show, that's like, what happens, you know. So, it's kind of a realistic depiction of our fair city. Or parts of our fair city. So.

**Clark:** And I think that we'll go all the way back to—we had the same criticism on *Homicide*. But we're telling the story. I just think this is a unique situation. I don't—what other show represents a city in that, in that specific way? Or in that—a multifaceted way? *Dallas*? [laughter] I mean, *CSI Miami*? I mean, you know, it—it's—Baltimore, and I've always said this, and I said it from the get-go on *Homicide* is definitely one of the stars of the show, so—warts and all, it's, you know, it's represented. And there are people that are—are coming from Denmark and shit to go to the Inner Harbor and experience a little bit of *The Wire* culture. [laughter]

**Marc:** And—and—and other characters, and it's not—again, I mean, the—Bubbles, and the character Cutty, those are prevalent and real all through—inner city of Baltimore. People who are making a change and fighting to make it a better place, and standing up and coming out of their place to stand up and say no. Those are very real—that's real.

**Chad:** Absolutely. One in particular, Calvin Ford. You know? Calvin's right up there on Pennsylvania Avenue, right now, you know, fighting the good fight. At Upton Boxing Gym. Trying to drag these kids off the street, out of the gangs and out of the drug trade and you know, trying to point them in the right direction, so. Yeah. It's unheralded, but, you know—

**Marc:** They are. “Little Big Man.”

**Chad:** Absolutely.

**Marc:** Cab driver. He's an important guy.

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**Audience:** First off, just wanted to say thank you for that one hour a week that we're able to forget about the stress and the anxiety in our own lives and get involved in the stress and the anxiety that you've all created—

**Marc:** You've never relaxed at all, right? [laughter]

**Audience:** It was a nice hour, we could forget about everything else in our own lives. So thank you for that. My question is—it's a lot of fun to watch and I enjoy certain episodes, but I have favorites. And I'd be curious what each of your favorites were for whatever reason, whether writing, producing, acting—and when you look back on all the series and all the seasons, what is your favorite episode and why?

**Marc:** Start with Zorzi and work our way down.

**Bill:** Why don't we start on *that* end?

**Marc:** But—you're Bill Zorzi!

**Bill:** Yeah.

**Clark:** Start at the end of the alphabet. That's natural.

**Marc:** I mean, start back with Z.

**Bill:** I mean, there are—I'm not sure if I can speak to episodes. I mean, there are certainly certain scenes and characters that I love. I mean, I think back to season one, I think it was the third episode, the—uh—D'Angelo, talking about—explaining the chess—the game of chess. You know, the king, state of the king. And, I mean, I loved that scene, I mean. And I'm not sure that I could broaden it out to, say, a favorite episode.

**Chad:** Uh, not to be selfish, but... [laughter] It was a very, you know, pivotal scene in Cutty's chara—Cutty's life when he when in to Barksdale, you know, the guy that ran the whole drug trade and told him he couldn't do it anymore. That was—I could only imagine

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what it was like for people like Calvin Ford, you know, who came to that point in their life, and also it's just an opportunity for the average person to see—see him have that experience, which most people would like to think doesn't exist. But, but it does, so that—that was really, that was probably for me, that's the one that stuck out the most, when he was—he just said, he said to him, like, whatever it is that you have inside of you, that lets you do that thing, it ain't in me no more. And, uh, it was just—you know. That was, that was a pivotal moment for me. I will always remember that.

**Nina:** I'm not sure I can—I can name a favorite episode, either. The—the show was a, was a five year arc, you know, and all the episodes were interconnected, so it was to see the evolution of the whole thing. I would say that I have a lot of affection for season two, this theme of loss of work in America was really fascinating to me and also the way that the show could divert so much from what happened season one and still keep, keep viewers and add more after that.

**Clark:** I would agree with Nina in that, and to paraphrase Simon, it was a hundred and sixty hour movie or however many hours it was. But for me, the pilot—uh, and the first three kind of blend together, in my recollection, but, me and Simon and Bob Colesberry were in Toronto at the Toronto film festival, trying to cast what would ultimately be Dominic West's role. And uh—when the, when the planes hit the towers. And so that was—that had a lot to do with how, you know, what was in our psyches and on consciences and our emotions at that point in time. So. The pilot, and then coming down here and it was just Bob and Nina and Simon and myself gathering up all the crew here and putting together this cast so it's more of that for me. More so than the ending, 'cause I don't like endings. But I think that for me was, was the pick—that couch, you know, with the kids in the low-rises. You know, I just—that was like—the Jay Leno show, right there.

**Audience:** Thanks. Thank you.

**Audience:** First, go Eagles—you and me we're of like mind—

**Clark:** There you go.

**Audience:** Second, thank you for doing this fantastic, fantastic show. Thank you all. And finally, you've obviously all spent time in Baltimore, and what either, like, either scene from *The Wire* or something just—while you're in Baltimore, something to you that like, in caps, is Baltimore. Like, my favorite thing is when Herc is talking about what, white guys dealing drugs. He's like we need affirmative action for the stupid white drug dealers. I mean, what, what to you is like, that explains Baltimore?

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**Nina:** It'd have to be Lake Trout. [laughter]

**Chad:** I mean, you know, it—it used to be, like you say, well, it's crab cake, you know, or something like that. But I don't really have, like a, one pinpoint. The—I think what I, what I take away—really being in those neighborhoods was—was really eye opening for me. You know. Places that—you really didn't think people inhabited. And all of a sudden a head would peek out the window and say “I am *The Wire!*” so. [laughter] So, I mean, I knew that, you know, the Harbor and everything, I have family here. You know. So to just really experience east and west Baltimore from the real hardcore perspective was, you know, for me, I'll always carry that with me.

**Clark:** Two—two things that I would suggest. From two different shows, because we're talking about Baltimore. From *The Wire* was Snot. And the reason why I mention Snot Boogie is he died because he always did what he did. And—and that is—it's such an interesting thing about this city, is that it's a city of familiarity. It's a city where it seems like all you know each other really well. And that's that, and that's what struck me. And then—for—when I was here for *Homicide*, and we're sitting on Broadway getting ready for our—our medicals, and these two old, look like old longshoreman guys. Who—you know, maybe had nine teeth and seven fingers between them were walking up the street towards me and I overheard this snatch of conversation. He said “I understand it's Barry's first venture into television.” Alright, so, this is, this how we, you know, and again—I say that this show is rooted in these, these shows are rooted in this city because it's shit like that that you just, you just don't really experience elsewhere. Except for *CSI Miami*, of course.

**Marc:** You're a Baltimore boy, Zorzi.

**Bill:** Yeah, it's hard for me to just—it all seems like Baltimore to me. But I guess if I had to pick one thing that seemed most like Baltimore, said “Baltimore,” it's the real Jay Landsman, who was, I think is—Lieutenant Mello, I think, in the Western, when he says, well, any time he opens his mouth, but—specifically when he says, when he said something like “Okay you mutts.” Or, or words to that effect. And then I just, I think it's his Baltimore accent that sort of says Baltimore to me.

**Marc:** This series was such a, I mean, everybody I've talked to that's been involved with it with such a—an all encompassing, monumental experience being part of *The Wire* over all these seasons, just what it took to think about the characters and write them and act them and direct them and putting these things together to make them so realistic and so vivid, you know. And not kind of a charade like Miami CSI whatever the hell it is you said it was. It's a—how do you do something after that? I mean, where do you go after that?

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**Clark:** Well I, I—I'm going to jump right in because I think that in a couple years from now, there's gonna be a town hall situation like this in New Orleans where they'll be talking and thanking Simon for bringing their city to life because the guy has a gift for it, and he—Nina can speak more to that, but, you know, I would imagine he'll do for New Orleans the same thing he did for Baltimore, which is put that voice up there.

**Nina:** *The Wire*—we do it the hard way, on *The Wire*, and we probably will in New Orleans, too because we don't know any other way. *The Wire* is the toughest show that I've ever done, and I think we all would say that, probably. But it's—it's work you can be proud of at the end of the day, and so I think that—anyone who's, who's done any work on the show has come away a lot—a lot stronger and a lot more appreciative of the sense of community that we all have together, because that doesn't—that doesn't happen on every production.

**Chad:** No, I just, I said from the moment I became a part of it, it's like, wow. From filet mignon to McDonald's. So. And that's a lot of what's out there, so it's tough, but you, you know, you already—you also have that aspect, you have to make a living. Feed your family, what have you, so it's really tough. You know, so, I'm going to try to get in these guy's back pocket. [laughter]

**Bill:** I don't know I—Nina makes an interesting point. I have to say that I—this is the only television production I've been involved with. I was a newspaper man my whole life, so, well, for most of my life. But did have one little venture into the bureaucracy. So I guess this is all I've known.

**Nina:** It's not usually like this.

**Bill:** Okay. Well.

**Marc:** It's not usually like this, this is rare.

**Bill:** I mean, there are other projects on, you know, the horizon, not just New Orleans, there are a couple other things that I think are in the works. So I guess you just keep pushing for things like that.

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**Marc:** Well, I want to thank all of you and everybody on *The Wire* for all you've done. I think you—it's been remarkable for all of us, and it's—you can look at the audience. The place is filled because of what's happened, so. And I also feel the presence of someone behind me. [laughter] Must be that time. [applause]

-transcript by Judith Lloyd