



GOOD & MySpace *On Skid Row*

Online video is perfectly suited for investigative journalism pieces. It's just as easy to go out into the field with camera in hand as it is with a tape recorder, and now the final product is no longer limited to the written word but can hit viewers with video and audio as well. *On Skid Row*, a new five-part series from GOOD and MySpace, takes the cameras into the seedy side of Los Angeles, exploring the issue of homelessness among the 9,000 vagrant bodies in L.A.'s 50 square-block Skid Row.

GOOD, a year-old multimedia company with a print magazine, has produced numerous excellent video shorts, which we've profiled here, but *On Skid Row* is the most ambitious and longest video project they've undertaken to date. GOOD is quickly supplanting Current as my top pick for an engaged, multimedia source of information and entertainment. This new series shows that GOOD has got the journalistic chops to tackle complicated issues, and the fact that they are devoting five episodes to this single topic says that GOOD is willing to invest in bigger stories.

The series is written and produced by Sam Slovick, a multimedia artist and journalist who's written several cover stories on Skid Row for L.A. Weekly. He employs a matter-of-fact narration style to dish out disheartening statistics. When Slovick says flatly, "Los Angeles is the first third-world city in the United States," it readjusts your image of our urban largess.

The series juxtaposes GOOD's clean aesthetic with gritty, shaky camcorder footage of Skid Row's viciousness and vitality. It takes the viewer from a clear graphical representation of the 1.35 million homeless children in America to closeups video of youth on the streets to an animated flowchart of how easy it is to suddenly become "homeless" as defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The series looks like a good project for Kevin Sites, certainly a better follow-up to his "Hot Zone" solo journalism series than his current "People of the Web" trivialities. And so far Slovick holds his own, his gravelly voice narrating while his shaky hand records much of the footage.

His narration and shooting style accentuate the separation between “us,” the presumably not homeless viewers, and the bedraggled and forlorn “them,” the homeless masses on the streets. This schism is perhaps the biggest barrier in understanding homelessness, and the series does not shy away from that.

GOOD Magazine: Skid Row Part 1 Introduction

The series is sponsored by designer Kenneth Cole and MySpace and is consequently mired in MySpace’s horrendous video network. GOOD so far has relied on other video sites to deal with the distribution of their excellently produced content but really needs to invest in tweaking out its own player, allowing it to integrate its videos into the rest of its content. Hopefully, however, MySpace’s involvement will garner this series the many eyeballs it deserves.