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CONTACT

Cara White 843/881-1480 carapub@aol.com
Mary Lugo 770/623-8190 lugo@negia.net
Randall Cole 415/356-8383 x254 randall_cole@itvs.org

Pressroom for more information and/or downloadable images:

www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos

Program companion website: www.pbs.org/natturner

INDEPENDENT LENS's "NAT TURNER: A TROUBLESOME PROPERTY"

—Multi-Layered Investigation into Elusive but Pivotal Historical Figure Reflects Unique Collaboration between Charles Burnett, Frank Christopher and Kenneth S. Greenberg—

**Premieres Nationally on "Independent Lens,"
ITVS's Acclaimed Series on PBS
February 10, 2004 at 10 P.M.
(check local listings)**



"This film about the historic figure Nat Turner is magnificent. It is required viewing by all who are deeply concerned about the nature of race relations in America."

—CORNEL WEST, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

(San Francisco, CA) — Nat Turner's slave rebellion of more than 170 years ago is a watershed event in America's long and troubled history of slavery and racial conflict. A groundbreaking exploration of race, violence and social memory in American life, **NAT TURNER: A Troublesome Property** tells the story of that violent confrontation and the ways that story has been continuously re-told since 1831. It is a film about a critical moment in American history and of the multiple ways that moment has since been remembered. Nat Turner was a "troublesome property" for his master and he has remained a "troublesome property" for the historians, novelists, dramatists, artists and many others who have struggled to understand this enigmatic figure.

Such a complex film required a unique collaboration between MacArthur Genius Award feature director Charles Burnett, acclaimed historian of slavery Kenneth S. Greenberg and Academy Award®-nominated documentary producer Frank Christopher. **NAT TURNER: A Troublesome Property** airs nationally on the



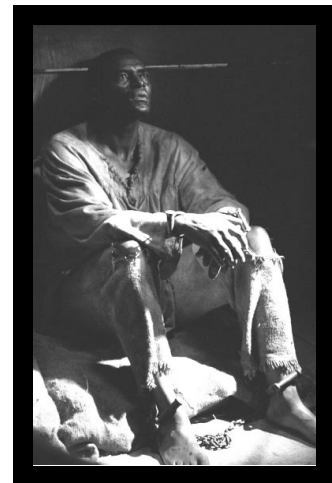
PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Don Cheadle, on Tuesday, February 10th at 10 P.M. (check local listings) as part of Black History Month special programming.

To emphasize the fictive component of historical reconstruction, the film adopts an innovative structure by interspersing documentary footage and interviews with dramatizations of different versions of the story, using a new actor to represent Nat Turner in each version. As literary critic Henry Louis Gates explains in the film, “There is no Nat Turner to recover; you have to create the man and his voice.”


The filmmakers have interviewed a broad range of contemporary African American and white descendants, historians, writers and artists. The film weaves selections from these interviews into a rich narrative reflecting the multifaceted legacy of Nat Turner in America today. The film also

presents Nat Turner as an important figure in American historical memory through selected dramatic recreations based on images and words found in folklore, original documents, novels and plays from 1831 to the present.

The earliest source of information about the man, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, was not written by Nat Turner at all, but was assembled out of a series of jail cell interviews by white Virginia lawyer Thomas R. Gray. The man portrayed in this first telling of the Nat Turner story clearly saw himself as a prophet, steeped in the traditions of apocalyptic Christianity. However, this “confession” of Nat Turner raised the question of whether the slave rebel was an inspired and brilliant religious leader in search of freedom for his people, or a deluded fanatic leading slaves to their doom. Viewers watch this same controversy play itself out over and over again throughout our nation’s history.



Historians Eugene Genovese and Herbert Aptheker discuss how the figure of Nat Turner was transformed as a metaphor whenever racial tensions flared. Religious scholar Vincent Harding and legal scholar Martha Minow reflect on our nation’s attitudes towards violence. Alvin Poussaint and Ossie Davis recall how Nat Turner became a hero in the black community. And when William Styron published his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Confessions of Nat Turner* in 1967—and invented a sexually charged relationship between Turner and a white teenaged girl he later killed—it unleashed one of the most bitter intellectual race related battles of the 1960s. Today, Nat Turner’s slave rebellion continues to raise new questions about the nature of terrorism and other forms of violent resistance to oppression.



Additional information and/or downloadable photographs from **NAT TURNER: A TROUBLESOME PROPERTY** are available at www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos.

The program's interactive companion website at www.pbs.org/natturner features detailed information about the film, including an interview with the filmmakers, cast and crew bios, as well as links and resources pertaining to the film's subject matter. The site also features a "talkback" section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film and more.

NAT TURNER: A Troublesome Property is a production of subpix L.L.C. in association with ITVS and KQED Public Television.

FEATURED INTERVIEWS

ERIC FONER, Historian
MARY KEMP DAVIS, Professor of English Literature
PETER WOOD, Historian
EKEWUEME MICHAEL THELWELL, Professor of Afro-American Studies
THOMAS PARRAMORE, Historian
HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR., Director, W.E.B. DuBois Institute
VINCENT HARDING, Professor of Religion and Social Transformation
HERBERT APTHEKER, Historian
WILLIAM STYRON, Writer
KITTY FUTRELL, Southampton County Historical Society
EUGENE GENOVESE, Historian
MARTHA MINOW, Professor of Law
RAY WINBUSH, Director, Race Relations Institute
OSSIE DAVIS, Actor
DR. ALVIN POUSSAINT, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry
AYUKO BABU, Director, Pan-African Film Festival
LOUISE MERIWETHER, Writer
LOYLE HAIRSTON, Writer
JAMES MCGEE, Southampton County Resident
CHARLES BURNETT, Director
KENNETH S. GREENBERG, Historian and Producer

NAT TURNER: A TROUBLESOME PROPERTY Credits

DIRECTED BY	Charles Burnett
PRODUCED BY	Frank Christopher
WRITTEN BY	Charles Burnett
	Frank Christopher
	Kenneth S. Greenberg
CO-PRODUCED BY	Kenneth S. Greenberg
EDITED BY	Michael Colin
	Frank Christopher
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS	Diedrich Bader
	Terry Mulroy
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER	Cynthia Griffin
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY	John Demps
PRODUCTION DESIGNER	Liba Daniels
COSTUME DESIGNER	Sharen Davis
MUSIC COMPOSER	Todd Capps
ADDITIONAL MUSIC	Stephen James Taylor
CASTING	Liz Marks, C.S.A.
NARRATOR	Alfre Woodard


ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

CHARLES BURNETT (Director / Writer) Critics have called Burnett “the nation’s least-known great filmmaker and most gifted black director.” Burnett’s debut film, *Killer of Sheep*, on which he served as producer, director, writer, editor, cinematographer and actor, was selected by the Library of Congress to be among the first 50 films to be included in the National Film Registry.

In 1983, the Vicksburg, Mississippi native wrote, directed and produced his next feature, *My Brother's Wedding*, centering on the theme of envy and its power to warp families. Burnett’s themes of family continued to influence his work. In 1990, he wrote and directed the drama *To Sleep with Anger*, which starred Danny Glover as the charming, Southern family friend who insinuates himself into a troubled family.

His next film, *The Glass Shield*, was a police drama based on a true story of corruption and racism within the Los Angeles police force. Burnett followed with his television debut via the acclaimed 1996 Disney Channel film, *Nightjohn*, starring Carl Lumbly, Lorraine Toussaint, Allison Jones and Bill Cobbs. Based on the young-adult novel by Gary Paulsen, *Nightjohn* is a period piece about a slave’s risky attempt to teach an orphan slave girl to read and write. *The New Yorker’s* film critic Terrence Rafferty called *Nightjohn* the “best American movie of 1996.”

Burnett’s other television work includes the 1997 ABC mini-series *Oprah Winfrey Presents: The Wedding*, starring Halle Berry and Lynn Whitfield; the 1998 ABC telepic, *Selma, Lord, Selma*, starring Jurnee Smollett, Mackenzie Astin and Clifton Powell; *America Becoming*, a documentary about U.S. immigration; the 1998 Showtime film *Long Distance*; and the 2000 Showtime film *Finding Buck McHenry*, starring Ossie Davis.



In 1997, the Film Society of Lincoln Center and the Human Rights Watch International Film Festival honored Burnett with a retrospective of his work presented at the Walter Reade Theater at Lincoln Center. He is also the recipient of a 1988 MacArthur Foundation Fellowship. A one-time trumpet player, Burnett vividly remembers making his way through the seminal blues tunes of W.C. Handy. His most recent film, *Warming By the Devil's Fire*, was shown on PBS as part of the seven-part series *The Blues*, from executive producer Martin Scorsese.

FRANK CHRISTOPHER (Producer) is an award-winning producer, director, writer and editor who has been making documentaries since 1970. Included among the many awards garnered by Christopher's films and television programs are: an Academy Award® Nomination for Best Feature Length Documentary, six Emmys, two CINE Golden Eagle Awards, the Blue Ribbon Award from the American Film Festival, the Gold and Silver Awards from the Houston International Festival, the Grand Coral First Prize from the New Latin American Cinema (Havana, Cuba), the Outstanding Documentary Award from the National Latino Film and Video Festival, and the Director's Choice Award from the Thomas Edison - Black Maria Film and Video Festival.

In 1996, Mr. Christopher conceived of the idea for the documentary, **NAT TURNER: A TROUBLESOME PROPERTY** after reading William Styron's novel, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. He subsequently assembled the creative team of feature filmmaker (Burnett), historian (Greenberg) and documentary filmmaker (Christopher) to tackle the complexity of presenting the multiple interpretations of the story of Nat Turner to a national television audience.

Currently, Mr. Christopher is the executive producer of *Remaking American Medicine*, a four-part series on the transformation of American health care to be broadcast on PBS in 2005.

KENNETH S. GREENBERG (Co-Producer/Co-Writer) is Distinguished Professor of History and Chair of the History Department at Suffolk University in Boston. He is one of the nation's most well respected historians of slavery and the South. He holds degrees from Cornell University, Columbia University and the University of Wisconsin; has been the recipient of numerous grants, including two from the National Endowment for the Humanities; and has been a Fellow at Harvard University's Charles Warren Center, and a Fellow in Law and History at Harvard Law School.

Professor Greenberg's first book, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (John Hopkins University Press, 1985; paperback edition, 1988) was described by reviewers as "brilliant," "ambitious," "innovative," "compelling," "insightful" and "fascinating." His second book, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton University Press, 1996; paperback edition, 1998) has been widely praised by scholars for both its substance and style. One prominent reviewer noted that Greenberg "hitched an interpretive mood to a clarity of language, argument, and narrative that few historians possess. This is a terrific book. It kept me up, brain going, long past bedtime."

During the past few years, Kenneth S. Greenberg has become the preeminent historian of Nat Turner and the slave rebellion of 1831. He is the editor and has written the authoritative introduction to the original *Confessions of Nat Turner and Related Documents* (Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996). Most recently he has written and published a collection of significant new historical essays on Nat Turner in *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory*, released by Oxford University Press in 2003. This volume also includes

complete text versions of the filmed interviews of Dr. Alvin Poussaint and William Styron, short excerpts of which appear in the film.

ABOUT *INDEPENDENT LENS*

Independent Lens is a weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community or moment in history, which prompted Nancy Franklin in *The New Yorker* to write “Watching *Independent Lens* ... is like going into an independent bookstore—you don’t always find what you were looking for but you often find something you didn’t even know you wanted.” Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites, and national publicity and community outreach campaigns. Further information about the series is available at www.pbs.org/independent_lens. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS, and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts.

ABOUT ITVS

Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the weekly series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting www.itvs.org. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American People.

ABOUT PBS

PBS, headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, is a private, nonprofit media enterprise owned and operated by the nation’s 349 public television stations. Serving nearly 90 million people each week, PBS enriches the lives of all Americans through quality programs and education services on noncommercial television, the Internet and other media. More information about PBS is available at www.pbs.org, the leading dot-org Web site on the Internet.



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