

PRESS RELEASE

This Far by Faith: African-American Spiritual Journeys

PBS premiere: Tuesday through Thursday, June 24 to 26, 2003, 9pm to 11pm
(check local listings)

pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith

In six hours of dramatic storytelling, *This Far by Faith* examines the African-American religious experience through the last three centuries. From the arrival of the early African slaves through the Civil War, reconstruction, Jim Crow, the great depression, the civil rights era, and into the 21st century, *This Far by Faith* explores the connections between faith and African-American cultural values.

A co-production of Blackside Inc. and The Faith Project, *This Far by Faith* is the last project conceptualized by legendary filmmaker Henry Hampton. Hampton's contributions to television include *America's War on Poverty* and the Peabody and Emmy Award-winning *Eyes on the Prize* and *Malcolm X: Make it Plain*. Before his death in 1998, Hampton wrote that it was his dream to celebrate the sweep and range of African-American religious experience "in the context of the nation's struggle to realize the goals of democracy and humanity, the heart and soul of America itself: who we are as a nation, what we believe as a people, and what we consider worth dying—and living—for."

Lorraine Toussaint (*Any Day Now*, *Crossing Jordan*) narrates *This Far by Faith*. The companion book of the same title was written by NPR correspondent Juan Williams (with historical notes by University of Indiana professor Quinton Hosford Dixie). Dante J. James (*The Great Depression*) and June Cross (*Secret Daughter*) are the executive producers. *This Far by Faith* premieres on PBS on Tuesday through Thursday, June 24 to 26, 2003, 9pm to 11pm.

"*This Far by Faith* explores how African Americans fought for their spiritual traditions," says executive producer of The Faith Project, June Cross. "It describes how those traditions sustained them as they struggled for the right to express themselves, and how, out of that struggle, the very cultural, political, and social fabric of this nation was transformed. *This Far by Faith* started as the vision of one extraordinary man—Henry Hampton, the founder of Blackside Inc. He inspired so many of us—including the team which initially gathered to produce *Faith* after his death. Our faith in his vision meant we could not rest—we could not let his memory rest—until this series aired."

Each hour-long episode combines rich archival photography, compelling music, inspiring interviews, and vibrant recreations to shed light on a population that has confronted adversity and clung to hope since the first enslaved peoples arrived on these shores.

"*This Far by Faith* explores the African-American community's ever-present faith in a higher power," adds Dante James, series executive producer for Blackside Inc. "A faith that has sustained black people and empowered them to change a society that for generations has challenged and often denied their humanity and dignity. This series makes clear that spirituality of any form can be a basis for truth and understanding—and a vehicle for all people to find common ground as human beings."

The first hour, *There Is a River*, begins with the stories of Sojourner Truth and Denmark Vesey. Both were born into slavery, and both used the Gospel to shape their identities; however, both use their voices in very different ways—one chooses retribution and the other, engagement.

Hour two, *God Is a Negro* takes place after Emancipation, when minister-turned-journalist Henry McNeal Turner uses the black church to engage black people in the political realm. Denied access to the institutions of society at large, black religious communities found and maintain their own grammar schools, universities, banks, insurance companies, printing presses, nursing homes, and hospitals.

Hour three, *Guide My Feet*, begins in the Jim Crow era, when many African Americans migrated north. In Chicago, Thomas C. Dorsey, a pianist with blues singer Ma Rainey, melds his religious faith with his musical talent to invent what we know as gospel music. In present-day San Francisco, the Reverend Cecil Williams takes his religious faith and his compassion for all people to the streets and builds the Glide Memorial United Methodist Church congregation.

Hour four, *Freedom Faith*, follows the Civil Rights Movement in the years after World War II. Ordinary people risk their lives to challenge the sin of racism in American culture and strive to fulfill the nation's promise of "liberty and justice for all." For many, the belief that God intended all people to be equal and free sustains them in the struggle.

Hour five, *Inheritors of the Faith*, plots the growth of the Nation of Islam under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad. After his death, his son, Warith Deen, makes a departure from his father's teachings and leads the Nation of Islam towards a more orthodox practice of Islam.

The series concludes with hour six, *Rise Up and Call Their Names*, which chronicles a two-year interfaith, multiracial, multiethnic pilgrimage from Massachusetts to Africa—by way of Florida and the Caribbean—undertaken to heal the wounds of slavery. But is religious belief alone enough to hold the pilgrimage together?

This Far by Faith: African-American Spiritual Journeys is a co-production of Blackside Inc. (*Eyes on the Prize*, *America's War on Poverty*, and *Malcolm X: Make it Plain*) and The Faith Project, in association with the Independent Television Service. It is presented on PBS by WGBH and ITVS.

It was directed and produced by W. Noland Walker (*There Is a River*), June Cross (*God Is a Negro*), Lulie Hadad (*Guide My Feet*), Alice Markowitz (*Freedom Faith*), Valerie Linson (*Inheritors of the Faith*), and Leslie Farrell (*Rise Up and Call Their Names*). *God Is a Negro* was directed by Reggie Life. The series executive producer for Blackside Inc. is Dante J. James. The executive producer for The Faith Project is June Cross. Lorraine Toussaint (*Any Day Now*, *Crossing Jordan*) is the series narrator. Judi Hampton is the president of Blackside Inc.

Funding was provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and public television viewers, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, The Pew Charitable Trusts, The Lily Endowment, Inc., The Ford Foundation, The National Endowment for the Humanities, the Independent Television Service, The Annie Casey Foundation, and The National Black Programming Consortium.

This Far by Faith is closed captioned for deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers, and described for people who are blind or visually impaired by the Media Access Group at WGBH. The descriptive narration is available on the SAP channel of stereo TVs and VCRs. For more information about *This Far by Faith*, visit the series Web site at pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith.

WGBH Boston is America's preeminent public broadcasting producer. One-third of PBS's primetime lineup and companion Web content, as well as many public radio favorites, are produced by WGBH. The station also is a pioneer in educational multimedia and in access technologies for people with disabilities.

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*. 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. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people.

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Additional Press Information

All press materials and photography for *This Far by Faith* are available through the PBS (www.pbs.org/pressroom), the WGBH Boston (pressroom.wgbh.org), and the ITVS (www.itvs.org/pressroom) press rooms.

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