



RELEASE

AMERICAN EXPERIENCE "New Orleans" on WPSU-TV

Portrait of New Orleans explores its unique and distinctive culture and illuminates its central place on the American landscape

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. (Feb. 8, 2007) — On August 29, 2005, a catastrophic hurricane named Katrina made landfall on the Gulf Coast of the United States. When the skies finally cleared, the survival of a major American city hung in the balance. For more than 200 years, that city had been an iconic feature on the national landscape — a vital port; a cosmopolitan mecca; a sensual, mysterious refuge. Now, the storm had laid it waste, raising a stark and previously unthinkable question: What exactly would America be without New Orleans? "New Orleans" airs Monday, February 12, at 9 p.m. on WPSU-TV.

AMERICAN EXPERIENCE presents "New Orleans," a fascinating portrait of one of America's most distinctive and beloved cities: a small French settlement surrounded by water that ultimately would become the home of America's biggest party, Mardi Gras, and its most original art form, jazz; the site of explosive struggles with both integration and segregation, and a proving ground for national ideas about race, class and equality; a mirror that reflects both the best and the worst in America. Jeffrey Wright narrates.

The compelling film tells the story of this remarkable city through revealing first-hand interviews with New Orleans natives and scholars, as well as through rich archival photographic material and footage that was miraculously spared from the devastation wrought by Katrina. Bringing the film vividly up to the current moment are vérité-style portraits of people now living in or returning to New Orleans.

"New Orleans has always been a laboratory for the American experiment," says program director Stephen Ives, "and the astonishing mingling of peoples there has created the most original urban culture in this country."

The city has embraced creativity, the marriage of cultures and a diversity of opinions — and has served as home and inspiration for some of America's most famous creative forces, from Tennessee Williams to Louis Armstrong. "Without New Orleans, our American culture would look and feel much different," says AMERICAN EXPERIENCE executive producer Mark Samels. "What would our music sound like? Would we have a different understanding of race? With New Orleans at a crossroads, this is the perfect time to train our lens on this city and explore those questions."

WPSU serves central Pennsylvania with programming, educational services and community outreach. The public media services produce, acquire and distribute programs that address local interests and reflect the diverse cultural, political, geographic and demographic characteristics of an audience within central Pennsylvania.

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Contact:
Jill Filby
WPSU-TV
jillfilby@psu.edu
814-863-9912