

TRUE LIVES

A New Limited Series from the Producers of *P.O.V.*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A Litany for Survival: The Life And Work Of Audre Lorde

"I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood."

- Audre Lorde

Moving Documentary, Distributed by American Public Television,
Available for January - December 2006 Scheduling in Second Season of "True Lives"

Series Theme is "Radical Artists"

Poet, lover, mother, warrior—Audre Lorde was a fiercely passionate American visionary. Her poetry and prose spoke to her deepest convictions—love and anger, civil rights and sexuality, family politics and glories of nature. She gave voice to a political generation and became a role model not only for black women but for everyone who believes, as she did, that "liberation is not the private province of any one particular group." In 1992 Lorde lost her battle with breast cancer, but she leaves behind a rich and vital legacy.

A Litany for Survival: The Life and Work of Audre Lorde, a powerful profile of the African-American-poet, will air on public television stations in 2006 as part of **True Lives**, a documentary series bringing classic documentaries to public television, from the producers of PBS's **P.O.V.** series.

"Audre Lorde was a pioneer in making available her voice as a teacher, a survivor, an activist, and a crusader against bigotry," says filmmaker Ada Gay Griffin, who made **A Litany for Survival** with co-director Michelle Parkerson. The two spent eight years collaborating with Lorde, weaving together a richly textured portrait of a gifted, strong-willed woman who embraced life's moments and focused her energies to fight for civil justice, women's equality, and lesbian rights.

A Litany for Survival features interviews with many of Lorde's fellow poets and activists, including Adrienne Rich, Sapphire, and Sonia Sanchez—all of whom pay tribute to Lorde's impact as a mentor and inspirational force. Lorde had many children—two biologically and many

metaphorically, from colleagues and students to people she met only fleetingly. “I remember meeting Audre when I was in college,” says Griffin. “She remembered me 20 years later when I called her about making the film.”

“There are some of us who think of Audre as a mother,” says Jewelle Gomez, who studied poetry with Lorde at Hunter College in New York. As a professor, Lorde encouraged her students to find their own voice. “You don’t need me,” she told the class as the term was ending. “The ‘me’ that you’re talking about you carry around inside yourselves. I’m trying to show you how to find that piece in yourselves because it exists. It is you. You have got to be able to touch that, to say the things, to invite, to court yourself. . . . Don’t mythologize me.”

Raised in Harlem, the daughter of West Indian immigrants, Lorde started writing poetry to express bottled-up feelings. “I was in high school and I was a mess,” she recalls. “I was introverted, hypersensitive, I was all of too intense—all of the words that other people used for little wild black girls who were determined to live.”

Though her advisor told her it was “a bad sonnet,” her first poem was published in *Seventeen* magazine while she attended Hunter High School. In 1968, amid escalating racial tensions, she accepted an invitation to become the poet in residence at Tugaloo College, a small black college in Jackson, Miss. “It changed my life,” she says. “I had a chance to work with young black poets in what was essentially a crisis situation. White townspeople were shooting up the edges of Tugaloo at night. Many of the students had been arrested. I realized I could take my art in the realest way and make it do what I wanted. I began bringing together my poetry and my deepest-held convictions.”

Lorde published more than a dozen poetry collections and six books of prose from 1968 to 1993. Her works were reviewed in national publications including *The New York Times Book Review*. She worked closely with women of color in many countries and was founder of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. In 1979, she addressed the first national march for lesbian and gay liberation in Washington, D.C.

Once her cancer was diagnosed in 1978, Lorde became even more focused. “Her life took on a kind of immediacy that most people’s lives never develop,” her son Jonathan recalls. “The setting of priorities and the carrying out of important tasks assumed a much greater significance.” For the next 14 years, Lorde battled the cancer as it metastasized through her body. In an unusually poignant creative exchange, she continued to collaborate with Griffin and Parkerson, who were rushing to complete the film as Lorde neared the end of her life. “What I leave behind has a life of its own,” she says in the film, her voice ravaged by illness. “I’ve said this about poetry; I’ve said it about children. Well, in a sense I’m saying it about the very artifact of who I have been.”

A Litany for Survival: The Life and Work of Audre Lorde is a production of the Third World Newsreel.

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About the Filmmakers:

Ada Gay Griffin is an African-American activist working in electronic media and film production. She was formerly executive director of Third World Newsreel and works to ensure a flourishing future for producers of color in progressive media. She studied art, political science, and black feminist writing at Hampshire College, where she studied the works of Audre Lorde. Griffin previously directed and produced **Can’t Jail the Revolution and Break the Walls Down**, and

developed **Black in a Small Town**, a documentary series that explored issues of race and class in semi-rural areas in the United States. She served as first assistant director on the drama **Dead Man's Shoes**, which premiered at the 2005 Tribeca Film Festival.

Michelle Parkerson is a writer, independent filmmaker, university lecturer and performance artist from Washington, D.C. She has served on the faculties of Temple University, the University of Delaware, Howard University, and Northwestern University. Her films include **But Then She's Betty Carter**, about the jazz vocalist, and **Urban Odyssey** (both seen on PBS) and **Gotta Make This Journey: Sweet Honey in the Rock**, about the black women's a cappella ensemble. In 1992, she received a Rockefeller Foundation Film/Video Fellowship. As a member of the American Film Institute's Directing Workshop for Women, she wrote and directed **Odds and Ends**, a science-fiction short about black Amazon warriors.

Credits:

Producer/ Director: Ada Gay Griffin
Director: Michelle Parkerson
Editor: Holly Fisher

Cara Mertes is the Executive Producer of **True Lives**. The series is produced by American Documentary, Inc. Major funding for **True Lives** is provided by the Tides Foundation.

American Public Television (www.aptonline.org)

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American Documentary, Inc. (www.americandocumentary.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. The producers of *P.O.V.* and *P.O.V.'s Borders* online (www.pbs.org/pov), AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, on line and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback, to educational opportunities and community participation.

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