



## For Immediate Release

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## **“Traces of the Trade” Opens P.O.V.’s 2008 Season With Unique Story of Family Confronting Its Slave-trading Past, Tuesday, June 24 on PBS**

History Is Up-close and Personal When Filmmaker and Relatives Retrace  
The Global Slave Trade Conducted by Their New England Ancestors

*“Powerful is an inadequate word to describe the impact of Katrina Browne’s ‘Traces of the Trade’. . . .  
Browne’s clear-headed film represents an intense and searing call for national dialogue.”*

*– Kirk Honeycutt, The Hollywood Reporter*

**P.O.V.’s** Season 21 opens **Tuesday, June 24, 2008** with a unique and disturbing journey of discovery into the history and “living consequences” of one of the nation’s most shameful episodes — slavery. In this bicentennial year of the U.S. abolition of the slave trade, one might think the tragedy of African slavery in the Americas has been exhaustively told. Katrina Browne thought the same, until she discovered that her slave-trading ancestors from Rhode Island were not an aberration. Rather, they were just the most prominent actors in the North’s vast complicity in slavery, buried in myths of Northern innocence.

Browne — a direct descendant of Mark Anthony DeWolf, the first slaver in the family — took the unusual step of writing to 200 descendants, inviting them to journey with her from Rhode Island to Ghana to Cuba and back, recapitulating the Triangle Trade that made the DeWolfs the largest slave-trading family in U.S. history. Nine relatives signed up. **Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North** is Browne’s spellbinding account of the journey that resulted.

**Traces of the Trade** has its national broadcast premiere on **Tuesday, June 24, 2008** at 10 p.m. on PBS, beginning the 21st season of P.O.V. (Check local listings.) American television’s longest-running independent documentary series, P.O.V. is public television’s premier showcase for point-of-view, nonfiction films and is a 2007 recipient of the Special News & Documentary Emmy Award for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking. **Traces of the Trade** is directed by Katrina Browne, with co-directors Alla Kovgan and Jude Ray and co-producers Elizabeth Delude-Dix and Juanita Brown.

As the film recounts, the DeWolf name has been honored over the generations in the family’s hometown of Bristol, R.I., and on the national stage. Family members have been prominent citizens: professors, writers, legislators, philanthropists, Episcopal priests and bishops. If the DeWolfs’ slave trading was mentioned at all, it was in an offhand way, with reference to scoundrels and rascals.

Then Browne’s grandmother opened the door a crack. She wrote a DeWolf history booklet with a brief but pointed reference to the slave trade, which caused Browne to look deeper. What Browne learned, and the journey she undertook with other DeWolf descendants, retracing early America’s infamous trade in rum, slaves and sugar, revealed secrets hidden in plain sight. Archival documents — from logs and diaries to detailed business correspondence, cancelled checks and sales records

detailing a global economy — unsettle not just a family but also a nation's assumptions about its not-so-distant history.

Most of the relatives Browne invited to join her never responded. Some were against the effort, including one who felt he had never done anything to anyone and saw no reason why he should be implicated in the DeWolf history. But when the 10 DeWolf descendants, ranging from siblings to seventh cousins, came together, they found they formed an answer to their relative's objection. Several in the group — and everyone's father — are Ivy League graduates, except Tom DeWolf, whose father went to night school. (Tom's book about the trip, "Inheriting the Trade," is published by Beacon Press). The family's preponderance of elite alma maters showed that its privilege endures. The DeWolf slave fortunes were plowed into other, legitimate businesses, a pattern matched in the larger U.S. economy.

From this extraordinary family angle, **Traces of the Trade** sets out to plumb contentious questions: What is the full story of the northern slave trade? What responsibility does white America bear for the past wrongs and contemporary legacy of slavery? Why is it so difficult for black and white Americans to have this conversation? Intrepid, candid, intellectually engaged and, for better or for worse, "unfailingly Protestant and polite," Browne and her relatives set out to face the facts — and themselves.

The family gathers in Bristol, where the DeWolf name is writ large as traders and rum distillers whose entrepreneurship built the city. Traces of the slave trade are few, but include the gravestone of an enslaved African girl, Adjua. In 1803, she and a young boy, Paulemore, were "given" as Christmas gifts by James D'Wolf (the spelling at that time) to his wife. They are hauntingly remembered in a family nursery rhyme.

Browne and her relatives fly to Ghana, where the old slave forts bring home crushing realities. They receive discomfiting lessons in the vividness of slavery's cruelty and injustice from contemporary Africans and African Americans on their own homecoming pilgrimages. In a chilling moment, they also learn that local West Africans tribes have a tradition of naming children for their day of birth: so Adjua, whose grave they visited, was born on a Monday.

In Havana, where the DeWolfs either farmed out enslaved Africans to the sugar plantations they owned (which supplied their Bristol distilleries) or sold the slaves for large profits on the open market, Browne's group is nearly overcome by frustration and a sense of helplessness. Worn down by travel, tension, the accumulating weight of slavery's detailed brutality — and more antagonism than their good intentions led them to expect — they confront the questions that have been haunting them: How has their experience affected their views of the black/white divide in America? If they accept some responsibility for the "living consequences" of their ancestors' crimes, what can they do to make amends?

One "secret" excavated by **Traces of the Trade** is that the DeWolfs were not just participants in the slave trade — they were the largest slave traders in American history. This one family, whose name adorns the stained glass windows they donated to Bristol's St. Michael's Episcopal Church, brought over 10,000 African slaves to the Americas. Up to half a million of these Africans' descendants are alive today. Moreover, the DeWolfs conducted the trade over three generations, beginning in 1769, and well after it had been banned in the United States in 1808.

Another fact obscured by post-Civil War mythologies is that the entire Northeastern seaboard was deeply implicated in the trade right up to the war. The DeWolfs may have been the biggest slavers in U.S. history, but there were many others involved. The Triangle Trade sustained the growing economies of Northern seaports like Bristol. Locals may have thought of the DeWolfs as distillers and traders that supported ship-building, warehousing, insurance and other trades and businesses, but it was common knowledge that the basis for all this was the cheap labor and huge profits reaped from trafficking in human beings.

The efforts of group members to answer these questions with action form the film's dramatic denouement — while landing the questions right back in the laps of all Americans. The family comes home and dives head-on into the debate about reparations for slavery, interviewing leading spokespeople who are for and against this remedy, and inviting viewers into the question of how to create “repair.” The film asks us to consider this from political, economic and an internal viewpoint: What would it take to repair our relationships and to move beyond the guilt, defensiveness, anger or fear that can trip us up?

“In **Traces of the Trade**, we wanted ask this question: What is our responsibility?” says Browne. “I’m less concerned with understanding the extreme inhumanity of my ancestors than with understanding the mundane, ordinary complicity of the majority of New Englanders who participated in a slave-based economy. That had more parallels to me and my family today: well-intentioned white folks who are still part of systems that do harm. It’s important to roll up our sleeves to deal with what we all inherited from our country’s history.”

**Traces of the Trade** is an important historical corrective to America’s view of slavery and its consequences, and a probing essay into divergent versions of a history that continues to divide black and white in America, North and South.

**Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North** was produced in association with WGBH Boston. Major funding provided by: The Akonadi Foundation, the Animating Democracy Initiative (a project of Americans for the Arts funded by the Ford Foundation), the Threshold Foundation, Trinity Grants Program, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Sundance Institute Documentary Fund. For a full list of funders please visit [www.tracesofthetrade.org](http://www.tracesofthetrade.org).

#### **About the filmmaker:**

##### **Katrina Browne, Producer/Director/Writer**

**Traces of the Trade** is Katrina Browne’s first film. Previously, she served as outreach planning coordinator for the film adaptation of Anna Deavere Smith’s critically acclaimed play about the Los Angeles riots, “Twilight: Los Angeles.” Browne consulted with race relations and media experts to plan a national campaign to use the PBS broadcast of “Twilight” to promote community dialogue on race, ethnicity and equity. Earlier, she worked as a senior staff person at Public Allies, an AmeriCorps program now operating in 15 cities, which she co-founded in 1991 in Washington, D.C. The program recruits young people and people of color for nonprofit careers. Browne holds a master’s degree in theology from the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, Calif., and a bachelor’s from Princeton University. She is a seventh-generation descendant of Mark Anthony DeWolf, the first slave trader in the DeWolf family.

#### **Credits:**

Director/Producer/Writer:	Katrina Browne
Co-Director/Editor/Writer:	Alla Kovgan
Co-Director/Executive Producer:	Jude Ray
Co-Producer/Executive Producer:	Elizabeth Delude-Dix
Co-Producer:	Juanita Brown
Director of Photography:	Liz Dory
Original Music:	Roger C. Miller

**Running Time:** 86:46

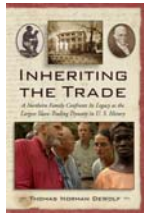
#### **Festivals:**

- World Premiere, Sundance Film Festival, Documentary Competition, January 2008
- New Orleans Human Rights Film Festival, April 2008
- Human Rights Watch International Film Festival, New York, June 2008

#### **People Featured in “Traces of the Trade”:**

**Thomas Norman DeWolf** has written a book about his experiences during the family's journey, *Inheriting the Trade: A Northern Family Confronts Its Legacy as the Largest Slave-Trading Dynasty in U.S. History*, published by Beacon Press in January 2008 on the occasion of the bicentennial of the abolition of the U.S. slave trade. Tom was born and raised in Pomona, Calif., and graduated with degrees from both Northwest Christian College and the University of Oregon. He served on the Oregon Arts Commission for nine years and as a local elected official for 11. His years of public service focused on the arts, literacy, children's issues and restorative justice. Tom has been writing full time since 2005. He and his wife, Lindi, live in Oregon and have four grown children and three grandchildren.

About *Inheriting the Trade*:



In 2001, at age 47, Thomas Norman DeWolf was astounded to discover that he was related to the most successful slave-trading family in U.S. history. His infamous ancestor, U.S. Senator James DeWolf of Bristol, R.I., curried favor with President Thomas Jefferson to continue in the trade after it was outlawed. When James DeWolf died in 1837 he was reportedly the second-richest man in America.

*Inheriting the Trade* is Thomas's memoir of a journey in which nine family members joined their cousin Katrina Browne to retrace the steps of their ancestors. Their trip, recorded in Browne's film **Traces of the Trade**, takes the family through the notorious Triangle Trade. With searing candor, the author tackles both the internal and external challenges of the journey and our nation's desperate need for healing. An urgent call for meaningful and honest dialogue, *Inheriting the Trade* provides a persuasive argument that the legacy of slavery isn't merely a southern issue but an enduring American one.

**Juanita Capri Brown**, co-producer and cast member, is an educational reform consultant, diversity trainer/facilitator and artist. She has written plays and produced videos on race issues with young people. She currently works as the Assistant Director of Development at the Coalition of Essential Schools. Juanita has a master's degree from the Goldman School of Public Policy at U.C. Berkeley, and also studied at the University of Ghana in West Africa.

**Keila DePoorter** and her sister Holly, who also participated in the journey, grew up in Bristol, R.I. Keila currently lives with her husband, Jerry, outside of Boulder, Colo. She has worked as a neuromuscular therapist, and as a mother.

**Holly Fulton** teaches English as a Second Language and French, and currently resides in Peabody, Mass., with her husband, Bill. Prior to teaching, she was an interpersonal skills and diversity trainer for public and private industries, which included running her own practice.

**Ellen DeWolfe Hale** grew up in Reno, Nevada. After studying East Asian Studies and living in Tokyo, she now lives in Seattle, Wash., where she works at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Superfund cleanup projects.

**Elizabeth Sturges Llerena** is an artist and art teacher who teaches in New York City public high schools. She grew up in Bristol, and has studied and lived in China.

**Ledlie Laughlin** has been an Episcopal priest for 50 years, with parishes in Jersey City and Newark, N.J., Greenwich Village and Florence, Italy. He and his wife, Roxana, live in Connecticut. While Ledlie was Dean of the Cathedral in Newark, he helped bring about the merger of a small, white cathedral congregation with a large black congregation.

**Dain Perry** participated in the documentary along with his brother, Jim, and nephew, James. He spent his formative years growing up in Charleston, S.C., and now lives in Boston. He just retired from a career as a financial representative. During the 1970s, he worked for a nonprofit agency that promoted reform in the criminal justice system, particularly prison reform. Dain has been a member

of the vestry at his church and has been an active volunteer in his community for many years, including serving on the boards of several nonprofit organizations.

**James DeWolf Perry V (Jim)** was born in Providence, R.I., and is now retired with his wife, Shirley. In his career, Jim served as a Foreign Service Officer (in Vietnam, Belgium, and Laos), as a manager for several non-profit organizations, and then as a management consultant. Jim was the Executive Director of the Big Brother Association of Boston when the association shifted to recruiting large numbers of African American men as big brothers.

**James DeWolf Perry VI** is currently earning his Ph.D. in political science at Harvard University. His work focuses on international security and global civil society, with an emphasis on international legal institutions and the evolution of norms in international relations. As part of his work, James has spent time investigating the history of the Atlantic slave trade and its abolition during the 19th century. He attended law school at Columbia University and has done extensive volunteer work.

#### Experts/Scholars in “Traces of the Trade”:

- **Robert Addo-Fening:** Professor of History, University of Ghana
- **Kofi Anyidoho:** Professor of Literature, University of Ghana; award-winning poet
- **Ronald Bailey:** Professor, African American Studies, Northeastern University
- **Harold Fields:** Inter-racial dialogue facilitator
- **Kevin Jordan:** Architectural historian; Professor of Historic Preservation (retired), Roger Williams University
- **Glenn Loury:** Professor of Economics, Brown University
- **Charles Ogletree:** Executive Director, Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice, and Jesse Climenko Professor of Law, Harvard University; Co-Chair, Reparations Coordinating Committee
- **Joanne Pope Melish:** Associate Professor of History and Co-Director, Africana Studies, University of Kentucky
- **Elizabeth Warren:** Principal Historic Preservation Specialist (retired), Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

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Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and celebrating its 21st season on PBS in 2008, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running showcase on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through September, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought more than 250 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V is available online at [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov).

#### ***P.O.V. Interactive*** ([www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov))

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces special features for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of our films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, streaming video, and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. P.O.V. Interactive also produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. In addition, [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov) has launched the *P.O.V. Blog*, a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss and debate their favorite films, get the latest news and link to further resources. The

P.O.V. Web site, blog and film archives form a unique and extensive online resource for documentary storytelling.

***P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education***

American Documentary | P.O.V. works with local PBS stations, educators and community organizations to present free screenings and discussion events to inspire and engage communities in vital conversations about our world. As a leading provider of quality nonfiction programming for use in public life, P.O.V. offers an extensive menu of resources, including free discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. In addition, P.O.V.'s *Youth Views* works with youth organizers and students to provide them with resources and training so they may use independent documentaries as a catalyst for social change.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by PBS, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Educational Foundation of America, The Fledgling Fund, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the New York State Council on the Arts and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.'s *Diverse Voices Project* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston and Thirteen/WNET New York.

***American Documentary, Inc. ([www.amdoc.org](http://www.amdoc.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. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation. Simon Kilmurry is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

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