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‘Homegoings,’ an Inspiring Portrait of a Legendary Harlem Undertaker And African-American Funeral Traditions, Kicks Off POV’s 26th Season on PBS On Monday, June 24, 2013

Isaiah Owens Always Knew He Had a Calling: To Send the Dearly Departed “Home”

“A poetically crafted exploration. . . . poignant, inspirational and unexpectedly uplifting.”

—Lauren Wissot, *Filmmaker Magazine*

MEDIA ALERT – FACT SHEET

National Dates: Christine Turner’s **Homegoings** has its national broadcast premiere on Monday, June 24, 2013 at 10 p.m., launching the 26th season of POV (Point of View) on PBS. (Check local listings.) The film will stream on POV’s website, www.pov.org/pov, from June 25 – July 24, 2013. POV is American television’s longest-running independent documentary series.

The Film: Through the eyes of funeral director Isaiah Owens, the beauty and grace of African-American funerals are brought to life. Filmed at Owens Funeral Home in New York City’s historic Harlem neighborhood, **Homegoings** takes an up-close look at the rarely seen world of undertaking in the black community, where funeral rites draw on a rich palette of tradition, history and celebration. Combining cinéma vérité with intimate interviews and archival photographs, the film paints a portrait of the dearly departed, their grieving families and a man who sends loved ones “home.”

“When it comes to death and funerals, African-American people, we have our own way,” Owens states in the film. “It has worked for us throughout the ages; it has kept us balanced, sane. And everybody know[s] that it’s going to be a sad, good time.”

Homegoings, which had its world premiere during The Museum of Modern Art’s Documentary Fortnight, is a co-production of Peralta Pictures, ITVS and POV’s Diverse Voices Project, with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. It is a co-presentation with the National Black Programming Consortium.

Embed a trailer, download press materials and learn more at www.pbs.org/pressroom.

**About the
Filmmaker:**

Christine Turner is an independent filmmaker based in New York. As a researcher and producer, she has contributed to numerous documentaries for PBS, HBO and OWN, working with Bill Moyers, Lisa Ling, Stanley Nelson and others. Her short fiction films have screened at the Tribeca Film Festival, San Francisco International Film Festival and on PBS. She was born and raised in San Francisco and received a bachelor of fine arts degree in film and television from the Tisch School of the Arts, part of New York University, in New York.

Isaiah Owens: Originally from South Carolina, Owens moved to New York in 1968 to train as a mortician at the age of 17. In addition to being recognized as a superb embalmer and restorative artist, he has since earned a number of awards for his contributions to the community. Along with his wife, Lillie, he runs Owens Funeral Home, “where beauty softens your grief.” His mother, Willie Mae, works as a receptionist at his other funeral parlor in Branchville, S.C.

Filmmaker’s
Statement:

“When I was 13, both of my grandmothers passed away within two weeks of one another,” says filmmaker Christine Turner. “My mom’s mother, who was Chinese-American, happened to be Methodist and was cremated, which was very atypical for traditional Chinese funerals. My father’s mother, who was African-American and Catholic, had an open-casket funeral—the first I had ever attended, leaving an indelible impression on me.”

“Many years later, when I came across a newspaper article about a beloved Harlem undertaker who had a reputation for ‘beautifying’ the dead, I was reminded of my own experiences and wanted to find out more.

“Whatever our beliefs, death is something we all must face, and yet it is so often a taboo subject. With **Homegoings**, I wanted to open a conversation on death in a way that captured grief and sadness, but also the humor and the sense of relief that I sometimes observed from behind the camera.”

Online: POV’s Webby Award-winning website offers a broad range of exclusive content to enhance our broadcasts. Visit POV’s website for **Homegoings** at www.pbs.org/pov/homegoings/ to watch the full film online for free for a limited time following the broadcast (June 25- July 24, 2013), download a discussion guide, lesson plan and other viewing resources, view photos from the film and hear from the filmmaker in an extended video interview.

Outreach: POV works with educators, public television stations and national and community groups across the country to foster dialogue around the issues presented in our films. For a list of upcoming screening events, go to www.pbs.org/pov/outreach. POV and nationally recognized media educator Dr. Faith Rogow develop discussion guides with background information to help event organizers facilitate conversations. The **Homegoings** discussion guide includes background on the role of funerals in African-American culture, prompts for dialogue and a list of further educational resources. Cari Ladd, M. Ed., has developed a lesson plan to accompany the film. Event organizers may email POV at events@pov.org to request a free loaned DVD to screen at their event.

Related Stories: “A Harlem undertaker lightens the funereal life,” by Steve Dollar, *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 27, 2013. <http://tinyurl.com/c8vaeza>

“Christine Turner on *Homegoings*,” by Lauren Wissot, *Filmmaker Magazine*, Feb. 26, 2013. <http://filmmakermagazine.com/65760-christine-turner-on-homegoings/>

“Harlem funeral director Isaiah Owens stars in ‘Homegoings,’” by Clem Richardson, *New York Daily News*, Feb. 14, 2013. <http://tinyurl.com/bos9gzt>

“Helpful Hands on Life’s Last Segregated Journey,” by Kim Severson, *The New York Times*, June 23, 2012. <http://tinyurl.com/6lvo96t>

“Undertaking the way home: Funeral profession revered in Detroit,” by Oralandar Brand Williams, *The Detroit News*, Feb. 21, 2012. <http://tinyurl.com/connkej>

“Dance, Laugh, Drink. Save the Date: It’s a Ghanaian Funeral,” by Sam Dolnick, *The New York Times*, April 11, 2011. <http://tinyurl.com/694tee6>

“Black History Month: African-American funeral directors as community leaders,” by Lisa Rose, *The Star-Ledger*, Feb. 18, 2011.
http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2011/02/black_history_month_african-am.html

“Bringing Back the Dead,” by Alan Feuer, *The New York Times*, Feb. 16, 2004.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/16/nyregion/16bodies.html>

Credits: Director/Producer: Christine Turner
Cinematographer: Marshall Stief
Editor: Sonejuhi Sinha
Original Music: Daniel Roumain
Running Time: 56:46

POV Series Credits:

Executive Producer: Simon Kilmurry
Co-Executive Producer: Cynthia López
VP, Production & Programming: Chris White
Coordinating Producer: Andrew Catauro

Festivals: World Premiere, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) Documentary Fortnight, 2013
Full Frame Documentary Festival, 2013

Pressroom: Visit POV’s pressroom, www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom, for press releases, downloadable art, filmmaker biographies, transcripts and special features.

POV: Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and beginning its 26th season on PBS in 2013, the award-winning POV is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today’s best independent documentary filmmakers. POV has brought more than 365 acclaimed documentaries to millions nationwide. POV films have won every major film and broadcasting award, including 32 Emmys, 15 George Foster Peabody Awards, 10 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, three Academy Awards® and the Prix Italia. Since 1988, POV 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. Visit www.pbs.org/pov.

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