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STORYCORPS GRIOT, AN HISTORIC INITIATIVE TO PRESERVE THE STORIES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES, ARRIVES IN MEMPHIS

StoryCorps Griot Partners With WKNO and the Memphis Public Library In Gathering Stories

Memphis – (November 1, 2007) – **StoryCorps Griot**, a year-long initiative to gather and preserve the life stories of African-American families across the country, today began a six-week stay in Memphis, Tennessee at the Benjamin L. Hooks Central Library, located at 3030 Poplar Avenue.

John W. Franklin, program manager at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), welcomed StoryCorps Griot to Memphis along with **Jacque Gales Webb**, Radio Project Manager for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Also in attendance were **Dan Campbell**, General Manager, WKNO, **Judith Drescher**, Director of Libraries at the Memphis Public Library and Information Center, and **Dr. Benjamin Hooks**.

StoryCorps Griot is the largest oral history project of its kind since 2,300 former slaves were interviewed in the mid-1930s as part of the WPA's Federal Writers Project. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) funds StoryCorps Griot. AT&T is a national sponsor. It is the first major national collaboration for the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), which is expected to open in under a decade as the 19th museum of the Smithsonian Institution. In Memphis, Griot will partner with public radio station WKNO-FM and the Memphis Public Library.

A "Griot" is part of a West African tradition of storytelling; a highly respected member of the community who acts as a living repository of births, deaths, marriages and significant events. Griots are responsible not only for transmitting oral history through the generations, but also for ensuring that people find meaning in their own lives.

"I am both honored and thrilled to have StoryCorps Griot welcomed into these cities rich with history of the Civil Rights struggle for African Americans," said **Dave Isay**, StoryCorps founder. "StoryCorps Griot will provide African American families who have lived in Memphis for generations with the tools to honor loved ones, preserve their stories for generations to come, and educate the country about the contributions of African Americans to the history of Memphis and the nation."

"WKNO is proud to be part of the StoryCorps Griot Initiative," said **Dan Campbell**, WKNO General Manager. "It's a way to remind our community about the contribution African Americans

have made to Memphis. As a public radio station, WKNO strives to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of events and ideas. StoryCorps Griot gives us the opportunity to share our stories with the national audience."

"The Memphis Public Library is excited to be working with StoryCorps on this endeavor to preserve the rich stories of our community," said **Judith Drescher**, Director of Libraries. "The library is a repository of stories and the timing of StoryCorps coincides with our own year-long initiative appropriately entitled 'What's Your Story.' The library is not just bricks and mortar, it is the interwoven stories of the people who live here and make the picture of our community complete."

At a Griot interview, participants record their stories in pairs – oftentimes friends or loved ones – where one person interviews the other. A trained facilitator guides the participants through the interview process and handles the technical aspects of the recording. At the end of a forty-minute session, the participants are presented with a CD of their interview. This unprecedented effort to capture the recordings of African Americans will help ensure that their voices, experiences and life stories will be preserved and presented with dignity. The stories will be archived for future generations at the American Folklife Center (AFC) at the Library of Congress and at the NMAAHC. Griot segments air on the NPR news program "News and Notes," the daily national one-hour series, hosted by journalist Farai Chideya. Locally, segments from StoryCorps Griot will be broadcast on WKNO-FM.

"The Corporation for Public Broadcasting is pleased to support StoryCorps Griot on this historic tour that will honor the untold personal stories of African Americans in our country," said **Patricia de Stacy Harrison**, CPB President and CEO. "We are proud to be a part of this important initiative as it seeks to not only find and record, but also celebrate the contributions of African Americans in our history. The Griot Initiative represents the essence of public broadcasting: high-quality, groundbreaking public service that informs, enlightens and inspires our populace."

"Recording the rich and compelling stories of African Americans across this country is in perfect alignment with a key commitment of this museum which is to encourage all Americans to remember, to reflect and to celebrate our shared humanity," said **Lonnie G. Bunch**, founding director of NMAAHC. "Through this unprecedented relationship we will ensure that the history of 20th century Black America will be preserved, understood and made accessible for years to come."

"African Americans are experiencing a profound connection with their personal truths and collective pasts through StoryCorps conversations with family, friends and loved ones," said StoryCorps Griot manager, **Melvin Reeves**. "For many it has been the first time in life that they could express deeply held feelings."

Reservations for the Griot tour can be made by calling 800-850-4406 or visiting www.storycorpsgriot.net. The StoryCorps Griot tour through Memphis will visit the **South Branch Library, East Shelby Library, and Whitehaven Library**, all branches of the Memphis Public Library & Information Center. Those interested in participating in StoryCorps Griot who do not live in Memphis can review the schedule online to see when the tour will visit a city close to them. While in Memphis, StoryCorps will partner with several community organizations for the duration of the stay including: **Rhodes College; Saint Andrew A.M.E. Church; Church Health Center; Memphis VA Medical Center; University of Memphis; Black Business Association; Ten Point Coalition; NAACP Memphis Chapter; Clayborn Temple; Lane College; Our Family Skate Association; The Black Rose Foundation; Memphis Black Arts Alliance; Midsouth Peace and Justice Center; and the Hattiloo Theater.**

StoryCorps Griot builds on the success of StoryCorps, created in 2003 by award-winning radio documentary producer and MacArthur Fellow Dave Isay. Griot's StoryBooth – a mobile recording studio – visited **Atlanta, Newark, Detroit, Chicago, Oakland, CA and cities throughout Mississippi**. After its tour of Memphis, Griot will travel to the following: **Harlem, NYC (12/13-1/05/08); and cities throughout Alabama (1/10/08 – 2/16/08)**.

In November 2007, StoryCorps will release its first book, **LISTENING IS AN ACT OF LOVE: A Celebration of Life from the StoryCorps Project** (The Penguin Press; November 13, 2007). The book draws from some of the most remarkable stories in the StoryCorps oral history collection and arranges them thematically into a moving portrait of America.

About CPB

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private, nonprofit corporation created by Congress in 1967 develops educational public radio, television, and online services for the American people. The Corporation is the industry's largest single source of funds for national public television and radio program development and production. CPB, a grant making organization, funds more than 1,000 public radio and television stations. **www.cpb.org**.

About NMAAHC

The National Museum of African American History & Culture was created in 2003 when President George W. Bush signed legislation establishing it as the only national museum devoted exclusively to exploring and documenting African American life, art, history and culture. It will be built in Washington, DC on the National Mall on a five-acre site adjacent to the Washington Monument. Through nationally touring exhibitions, collections and educational programs, the museum will explore several areas of history, including slavery, reconstruction, the Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights era. For details on its legislative mandate, visit **www.nmaahc.si.edu**.

About StoryCorps

StoryCorps is a Peabody award winning project of Sound Portraits Productions, the nationally acclaimed New York City non-profit founded by Dave Isay. For two decades, Sound Portraits has celebrated the lives and struggles of unheralded Americans in award-winning public radio documentaries, as well as in books, CDs, museum exhibitions, and Web sites. StoryCorps opened its first StoryBooth, a freestanding soundproof recording studio, in New York City's Grand Central Terminal in October 2003 and two mobile StoryBooths have been traveling the country since 2005. StoryCorps has recorded 10,000 interview sessions to date. Individuals can listen to excerpts from past StoryCorps interviews at **www.storycorps.net**.

About WKNO-FM

The WKNO-FM Stations are non-commercial stations providing the Mid-South community with a unique service which combines classical music and National Public Radio programs 24 hours a day, 7 days a week thanks to the generous support of its individual and corporate members.

About The Memphis Public Library

The Memphis Public Library & Information Center includes the Benjamin L. Hooks Central Library at 3030 Poplar Avenue and 18 branch libraries located throughout the city and county. The library offers books, video and audio cassettes, DVDs, records, compact discs, educational and information programs and community meeting rooms. Internet access is available on 514 public computers. The library also operates WYPL FM 89.3 and TV Channel 18, providing news, public service and

community information programs, as well as special programs for the visually impaired. Approximately 3 million people visit the Memphis Public Library & Information Center annually.

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