



Contact: StoryCorps Griot

Debra Carey / Gillian Kocher / Jo Flattery / Andrea Ferguson
(212) 685-4300

WBGO Jazz88.3FM
Grey Johnson 973-624-8880 ext. 268

Mayor Cory A. Booker
Lupé Todd 973-733-5145

MAYOR CORY A. BOOKER WELCOMES STORYCORPS GRIOT, AN HISTORIC INITIATIVE TO PRESERVE THE STORIES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES, TO NEWARK

StoryCorps Griot Partners with WBGO in Gathering Stories for Archive to be Housed at Smithsonian

Newark, NJ – (March 29, 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 Newark. 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 StoryCorps Griot initiative is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and is in association with the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). It is the first major national collaboration for the museum which is expected to open in under a decade as the 19th museum of the Smithsonian Institution. In Newark, Griot is partnering with public radio station WBGO Jazz88.3FM.

Mayor Cory A. Booker welcomed StoryCorps Griot to Newark along with **Dr. Clement Price**, a professor in the history department at Rutgers University and Newark’s resident historian, and his wife, **Mary Sue Sweeney Price**, director of the Newark Museum. The couple recorded the first interview in the city. The Griot StoryBooth is located on the northeast side of Military Park, across the street from 54 Park Place.

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.

“This is a wonderful opportunity for Newarkers to tell their stories, in their own words, of some of the most historic events in our city’s and nation’s history,” said **Mayor Booker**. “There are thousands of stories in our city – stories of survival, endurance, resilience, achievement, hope, and

pride – that need to be told, recorded, and studied by today’s generation and future generations. The dramatic events of the 1967 Newark riots will clearly be a major subject, and as we mark the 40th anniversary of this tragic event, it is appropriate that residents who experienced it firsthand are given the opportunity to record their memories.”

“I am honored that the Griot Initiative has arrived at such an exciting time for Newark and the African American families who have lived here for generations,” said **Dave Isay, StoryCorps founder**. “StoryCorps Griot will provide families with the tools to honor loved ones, preserve their stories for generations to come, and educate the nation about the contributions of African Americans to the history of this city and nation. It is a great privilege to have such wonderful partners in making Griot a success in Newark, including the City, WBGO, the Newark Public Library, GlassRoots/RBS, the Urban League of Essex County and the New Jersey Historical Society.”

“WBGO is happy to be co-sponsoring this terrific oral history initiative,” **Cephas Bowles, General Manager, WBGO Jazz88.3FM** said. “While Americans live in different spaces, the fact remains that we are more alike than we are different. StoryCorps Griot will provide important insights into African-American life as experienced in Newark that the world needs to know. To understand America, you have to get to the cities and towns that make up this great country. Newark has an immense history. It has been a center for jazz and gospel music for decades, an industrial powerhouse and a mecca for literature and the arts. StoryCorps Griot will take listeners to one of the country's oldest and least understood urban environments. The trip will be short, safe and quite revealing.”

At the Griot StoryBooth, 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 will 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 the WBGO Journal, 7:30 p.m. Fridays and available on-demand at www.wbgo.org.

“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. Those interested in participating in StoryCorps Griot who do not live in Newark can review the schedule online to see when the tour will visit a city close to them.

StoryCorps Griot builds on the success of StoryCorps, created in 2003 by award-winning radio documentary producer and MacArthur Fellow Dave Isay. In addition to the stop in Newark, Griot’s StoryBooth – a mobile recording studio – includes stops of up to six weeks in: **Atlanta (completed); Detroit (5/10-6/16); Chicago (6/21-7/27); Oakland (8/2-9/7); Clarksdale, MS (9/13-10/20); Memphis (10/25-12/1); Selma (1/10/08- 1/26/08) and Montgomery (1/31/08-2/16/08).**

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 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 opened its second StoryBooth at the site of the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan in July 2005. 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 WBGO

WBGO/Jazz88.3FM serves the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area with mainstream jazz, blues, and award-winning news and public affairs programming. Non-commercial WBGO is supported by nearly 15,000 annual members and has over 330,000 weekly broadcast listeners. WBGO also streams its broadcast signal to audiences worldwide at www.wbgo.org. Jazz88.3 was named the “Jazz Station of the Year” by the Gavin Report and is the recipient of the Blues Foundation’s “Keeping the Blues Alive Award” for Achievement in Non-Commercial Radio.