

Contact: StoryCorps Griot
Debra Carey / Gillian Kocher / Jo Flattery
(212) 685-4300
Andrea Ferguson
(917) 667-5546

Chicago Public Radio
Cindy Hansen
(312) 893-2950

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

StoryCorps Griot Partners with Chicago Public Radio and WVON in Gathering Stories for Archive to be Housed at Smithsonian

Chicago, IL – (June 21, 2007) – **StoryCorps Griot**, a year-long initiative to gather and preserve the life stories of African-American families across the country, today began a five-week stay in Chicago at The DuSable Museum of African American History, 740 East 56th Place.

John W. Franklin, program manager at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), welcomed StoryCorps Griot to Chicago along with **Antoinette Wright**, President and Chief Executive Officer, The DuSable Museum.

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. StoryCorps Griot is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). It is first major national collaboration for NMAAHC, which is expected to open in under a decade as the 19th museum of the Smithsonian Institution. In Chicago, Griot will partner with Chicago Public Radio and talk-radio station WVON.

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 honored to bring StoryCorps back to Chicago through the Griot Initiative," said **Dave Isay**, StoryCorps founder. "StoryCorps Griot will provide African American families who have lived here 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 this city and nation."

"Chicago Public Radio is thrilled to be sponsoring this seminal oral history initiative in Chicago," **Ron Jones**, Chicago Public Radio's VP of Programming said. "Chicago has such a rich history in African American culture and the StoryCorps Griot visit will provide important insights into

African-American life as experienced in Chicago that the world needs to know. I'm so excited to broadcast their voices across the country."

"For more than 40 years, WVON has been the voice of Chicago's black community," said **Melody Spann-Cooper**, President & General Manager, WVON. "Participating in the StoryCorps Griot project is an extension of what we have always done -- give voice to an otherwise disenfranchised community. We were in the thick of the Civil Rights movement and on the cutting edge of social progress. We are proud to be associated with an effort to record these voices for posterity."

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 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 Chicago Public Radio (91.5 FM WBEZ) during *Eight Forty-Eight*, the station's daily newsmagazine (Weekdays, 9-10AM and 8-9PM).

"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 Chicago can review the schedule online to see when the tour will visit a city close to them. While in Chicago, StoryCorps will also partner with several community organizations for the duration of the stay including: **Jesse Brown Veterans Administration Medical Center; ACORN, Chicago Chapter; The Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature of the Chicago Public Library; Coalition of Labor Union Women; Fernwood Park; Saint Columbinas Church; Bronzeville Visitors Information Center; Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago; African American Women Evolving; Pink Panther Double Dutch Team; and the Jackie Robinson West Little League.**

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 Chicago, Griot's StoryBooth – a mobile recording studio – includes stops of up to six weeks in: **Atlanta (completed); Newark (completed); Detroit (completed); Oakland (8/2-9/7); Clarksdale, MS (9/13-10/20); Memphis, TN (10/25-12/1); Harlem, NY (12/6-1/05/08); Selma (1/10/08- 1/26/08) and Montgomery, AL (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 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 Chicago Public Radio

Chicago Public Radio is a community-supported, non-commercial public service broadcasting institution, broadcasting throughout Chicago and surrounding regions. From news and public affairs to arts and culture, the station's eclectic and distinctive selection of internationally, nationally and locally produced programs reflects the diversity of the community it serves. Chicago Public Radio programming is available at WBEZ 91.5 FM Chicago, WBEQ 90.7 FM Morris, W217BM Elgin and www.chicagopublicradio.org. Vocalo.org is available at WBEW 89.5 FM Chesterton and vocalo.org.

About WVON

WVON 1690AM is the oldest black-owned and only black-oriented talk radio station in Chicago. Dedicated to community empowerment, it is the forum for discussion of social, economic and political issues by a community of more than one million African American citizens. "The Talk of Chicago" broadcasts at 10,000 watts, 24 hours-a-day. Owned by Midway Broadcasting and headed by Melody Spann-Cooper, WVON streams through its website at www.wvon.com.