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SOUL OF A PEOPLE: WRITING AMERICA'S STORY
TO PREMIERE LABOR DAY ON SMITHSONIAN CHANNEL™

*Two part documentary tells the story of the Federal Writer's Project of
1930's
to premiere Sunday, September 6 at 8 pm*

Washington, DC – (June 18, 2009) – It was a time of unparalleled national crisis; as millions of Americans faced unemployment, vanishing life savings, banks foreclosing on homes and feeling a general loss of hope, Americans turned to a newly elected President to lead them out of this turbulent time.

It sounds eerily like today's current events. But as viewers of a powerful new two part documentary, "Soul of a People: Writing America's Story," will see when it premieres on Smithsonian Channel this coming Labor Day Weekend, September 6 at 8 pm, the Great Depression also created a unique opportunity to capture the essence of America. "Soul of A People" explores one of the most controversial public assistance programs of the Great Depression.

The Federal Writers Project was one of four arts programs under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) of newly elected President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Project employed thousands of unemployed writers, including Richard Wright, Saul Bellow and John Cheever, to fan out across America, interview its citizens, and produce a portrait of the USA from the ground up in a series of state travel guides. They captured a unique portrait of 1930's Americana. But what began as a program to create guidebooks for every state ended up igniting a storm of controversy when writers sought out not only the triumphs of America, but also its tragedies.

At its peak, the Project employed over 6,600 people in all 48 states. They included a handful of published authors, old newspaper reporters, former school teachers and others. Two of its better-known workers, Studs Terkel (in one of his last interviews before passing away in October 2008) and Stetson Kennedy, are interviewed for the documentary.

In addition to Kennedy and Terkel, the documentary features interviews with a diverse group of leading authors, poets, and historians, including Douglas Brinkley and David Bradley, who provide witty and heartbreaking insights into the Project.

Filmed entirely in high definition, "Soul Of A People: Writing America's Story" is a Spark Media Production produced for Smithsonian Networks™ with a major funding grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. It is produced and directed by Andrea Kalin and based on the book, "Soul Of A People," by David A. Taylor. Taylor also serves as co-producer and co-writer for the documentary. Award winning actress Patricia Clarkson is the narrator.

"Soul Of A People" will be the subject of a series of organized exhibits, lectures and panels at over thirty libraries throughout the United States. Each library will work with a local scholar of the era to help present and plan and promote these programs. These exhibits will continue through the Fall of 2009 and are sponsored by the American Library Association and supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities

"This is the perfect show for Smithsonian Channel," said David Royle, Executive Vice President of Programming and Production. "It defines our mission of telling America's stories with our distinctive voice. This is a story that speaks to our times and we feel is ideally timed for a Labor Day airing."

"Soul Of A People" will air exclusively on Smithsonian Channel on Sunday, September 6 at 8 pm.

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ABOUT SMITHSONIAN NETWORKS

Smithsonian Networks (SN) is a joint venture between Showtime Networks Inc. and the Smithsonian Institution. It was formed to create new channels to showcase scientific, cultural and historical programming based largely upon the assets of the Smithsonian Institution, the world's largest museum complex. Smithsonian Channel features original documentaries, short-subject explorations and innovative and groundbreaking programs highlighting America's historical, cultural and scientific heritage. Visit Smithsonian Networks on the Internet at www.smithsonianchannel.com

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