PBS Announces RECONSTRUCTION:

AMERICA AFTER THE CIVIL WAR,

a New Documentary from Henry Louis Gates, Jr.,

to Air Spring 2019 on PBS

**— Four-Hour Film Explores the United States’ Emergence from the Civil War and Slavery, and the Thwarted Vision for an Interracial Democracy that Still Impacts the Country More Than 150 Years Later —**

BEVERLY HILLS, CA; JULY 30, 2018 — Today at the Television Critics Association Press Tour, PBS announced **RECONSTRUCTION: AMERICA AFTER THE CIVIL WAR** (w.t.), a new four-hour documentary executive produced and hosted by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., will premiere next spring on PBS stations nationwide. Professor Gates, the Alphonse Fletcher University Professor at Harvard University and director of the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research, will present the definitive history of one of the least understood chapters in American history — the transformative years following the American Civil War when the nation struggled to rebuild itself in the face of profound loss, massive destruction and revolutionary social change.

**RECONSTRUCTION: AMERICA AFTER THE CIVIL WAR** (w.t.) will take a broad view of the Reconstruction era and its aftermath, beginning with the hopeful moment of war’s end and emancipation in 1865 and carrying through to 1915, when the nation was fully entrenched in Jim Crow segregation. In the aftermath of the Civil War, the nation was devastated by death and deconstruction. Members of the U.S. Congress endeavored to reunite North and South while granting citizenship rights to newly freed African Americans, in a plan started by President Abraham Lincoln prior to his assassination. Millions of former slaves and free black people sought out their rightful place as equal citizens under the law. The dream of an interracial democracy was brief, and the broken promises of the Reconstruction era haunt the country to this day. Though tragically short-lived, this bold democratic experiment was, in the words of W. E. B. Du Bois, a “brief moment in the sun” for African Americans, when they could advance and achieve education, exercise their right to vote, and run for and win public office.

“Reconstruction is one of the most important and consequential chapters in American history,” said Gates. “It is also among the most overlooked, misunderstood and misrepresented. Our filmwill tell the real story of Reconstruction, honoring the struggle of the African Americans who fought their way out of slavery and challenged the nation to live up to the founding ideals of democracy, freedom and equality. But we will also tell the tragic story of the sustained and often violent pushback against Reconstruction’s determination to secure equal rights for black people, and the subsequent rise of white supremacy leading to the implementation of Jim Crow segregation. More than one hundred and fifty years later, this struggle continues.”

The first half of the series will center on the pivotal decade following the Civil War rebellion, charting black progress and highlighting the accomplishments of the many political leaders who emerged to usher their communities into this new era of freedom. The series’ second half will look beyond that hopeful decade, when the arc of history bent backwards. It became increasingly clear that many Southern white people were not willing to accept this new social order and that the federal government was not prepared to provide African Americans with consistent or enduring protection of their new rights. While tracing the unraveling of Reconstruction and the rise of Jim Crow segregation in the closing years of the nineteenth century, the film will look at the myriad ways in which black people continued to acquire land, build institutions, and strengthen communities amidst increasing racial violence and repression. Less than thirty years after black men filled state legislatures, one by one, the Southern states began drastically restricting the vote while drawing a stark color line that divided white and black America.

The series will also explore the flowering of African American art, music, literature and culture as tools of resistance in the struggle against Jim Crow racism and the surge of political activism that marked the launch of such iconic civil rights organizations as the National Association of Colored Women, the Niagara Movement, and the NAACP, all at a time when black political power had been blunted and the dream of an interracial democracy seemed impossibly out of reach.

With **RECONSTRUCTION: AMERICA AFTER THE CIVIL WAR** (w.t.), Gates continues a tradition of producing sophisticated documentary films about the African and African-American experience for a broad audience, including the Emmy Award-winning documentary **The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross**, as well as the documentaries **African American Lives** and **Black america since mlk: and still I rise**.

**RECONSTRUCTION: AMERICA AFTER THE CIVIL WAR** (w.t.) will include interviews from leading historians, authors and other experts, including the following individuals:

* **Congressman James E. Clayburn**, U.S. House of Representatives, South Carolina 6th District;
* **Jelani Cobb**, a staff writer for *The New Yorker* and The Ira A. Lipman Professor of Journalism at Columbia University;
* **Kimberlé W. Crenshaw**,an American civil rights advocate and distinguished professor of law at UCLA School of Law;
* **Eric Foner**, the DeWitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia University and author of *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution*;
* **Tera Hunter**, a professor in the History Department and African-American Studies at Princeton University;
* **Mitch Landrieu***,* the former Mayor of New Orleans;
* and **Bryan Stevenson**, the founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative, the nonprofit legal advocacy group that created the National Memorial for Peace & Justice in Montgomery, AL.

In conjunction with the broadcast, co-producer WETA, the flagship public broadcaster in the nation’s capital, will develop an outreach and public engagement program, providing opportunities — facilitated by public television stations — for communities to participate in conversations about the history of the Reconstruction era and the ongoing implications for American society today. In addition, there will be a robust interactive website on *pbs.org* and an educational initiative designed to engage teachers and students through multiple platforms.

Professor Gates is also writing two books about the Reconstruction era. *Dark Sky Rising: Reconstruction and the Dawn of Jim Crow*, a narrative nonfiction book for ages 9-12, will be written with Tonya Bolden, a Coretta Scott King Honor author, and will be published by Scholastic Focus on January 29, 2019. Professor Gates’ adult-market book, *STONY THE ROAD: The Fall of Reconstruction and the Rise of Jim Crow*, will be published by Penguin Press and will be on sale April 2, 2019.

**RECONSTRUCTION: AMERICA AFTER THE CIVIL WAR** (w.t.) is a production of McGee Media, Inkwell Films and WETA Washington, DC. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Dyllan McGee are executive producers. Dalton Delan and Anne Harrington are executive producers in charge for WETA. Julia Marchesi is the senior producer and director. Rob Rapley, Stacey Holman and Cyndee Readdean are producers/directors. Corporate support is provided by Johnson & Johnson. Major funding is also provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; the Ford Foundation; The Gilder Foundation; Dr. Georgette Bennett and Dr. Leonard Polonsky, CBE; Lloyd Carney Foundation; and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and PBS.

**About WETA**WETA Washington, DC, is one of the largest producing stations of new content for public television in the United States. WETA productions and co-productions include PBS NewsHour, Washington Week, The Kennedy Center Mark Twain Prize, The Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song, Latino Americans and The Italian Americans; and documentaries by filmmaker Ken Burns and scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr., including Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Seasons Three, Four and Five), Black America Since MLK: And Still I Rise and Africa’s Great Civilizations. Sharon Percy Rockefeller is president and CEO. The WETA studios and administrative offices are located in Arlington, Virginia. More information on WETA and its programs and services is available at [*www.weta.org*](http://www.weta.org). On social media, visit [*www.facebook.com/wetatvfm*](http://www.facebook.com/wetatvfm) on Facebook or follow [@WETAtvfm](https://twitter.com/wetatvfm) on Twitter.

**About PBS**

[PBS](http://www.pbs.org/), with nearly 350 member stations, offers all Americans the opportunity to explore new ideas and new worlds through television and digital content. Each month, PBS reaches nearly 100 million people through television and nearly 28 million people online, inviting them to experience the worlds of science, history, nature and public affairs; to hear diverse viewpoints; and to take front row seats to world-class drama and performances. PBS’ broad array of programs has been consistently honored by the industry’s most coveted award competitions. Teachers of children from pre-K through 12th grade turn to PBS for digital content and services that help bring classroom lessons to life. Decades of research confirms that PBS’ premier children’s media service, PBS KIDS, helps children build critical literacy, math and social-emotional skills, enabling them to find success in school and life. Delivered through member stations, PBS KIDS offers high-quality educational content on TV – including a new 24/7 channel, online at [pbskids.org](http://pbskids.org/), via an array of mobile apps and in communities across America. More information about PBS is available at [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org/), one of the leading dot-org websites on the internet, or by following [PBS on Twitter](https://twitter.com/pbs), [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/pbs) or through our [apps for mobile and connected devices](http://www.pbs.org/anywhere/home/). Specific program information and updates for press are available at [pbs.org/pressroom](http://pressroom.pbs.org/) or by following[PBS Pressroom on Twitter](https://twitter.com/pbspressroom).

**About McGee Media**

McGee Media was founded by award-winning filmmaker Dyllan McGee to produce documentary content that is innovative, compelling, and immersive. Every story is born from a vision of a more fair and equitable world. Whether it is the sweeping history of the African-American experience, or the intimate personal stories of the hundreds of women who made up the feminist movement, McGee Media uses television, film, and digital media in radical new ways to inform and inspire. Recent projects include FINDING YOUR ROOTS WITH HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR., Seasons 1-5 (PBS), AFRICA’S GREAT CIVILIZATIONS (PBS), MAKERS (Oath), ONCE & FOR ALL (AOL), FIRST IN HUMAN (Discovery), and RANCHER, FARMER, FISHERMAN (Discovery).

**About Inkwell Films**

Inkwell Films was founded by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. to produce sophisticated documentary films about the African and African-American experience for a broad audience. The six-part PBS documentary series The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross (2013) earned the 2013 Peabody Award and NAACP Image Award. Inkwell Films has co-produced Finding Your Roots (Seasons 1-5), AFRICA’S GREAT CIVILIZATIONS (2017), BLACK AMERICA SINCE MLK; AND STILL I RISE (2016), Black in Latin America (2011), Faces of America (2010), Looking for Lincoln (2009), African American Lives 2 (2008), Oprah’s Roots (2007) and African American Lives (2006).

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