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CONTACT:

Ana Davila

ana_davila@itvs.org

415.356.8383 X254



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THE BLACK KUNGFU EXPERIENCE
CHRONICLES THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF KUNGFU'S BLACK PIONEERS:
FOUR STORIES OF RESILIENCY, COMMUNITY, STRENGTH AND EMPOWERMENT
Film Premieres on Public Television February 1, 2013

The Black Kungfu Experience chronicles kungfu's black pioneers and heroes, exploring the intersection of African American and Asian cultures. This action-packed documentary traces the rise of the black kungfu experience in the 1960s and 70s, and then reconnects with the contemporary martial arts scene in Washington D.C, Los Angeles, The Virgin Islands, Jamaica, and Hong Kong. The film underscores the Chinese and African-American experiences as they evolve differently yet converge in unexpected ways, and the ways they challenge political and social persecution — as diverse as the Qing government's oppressive rule in China and entrenched American racism — with the unique vehicle of kungfu. Directed by Martha Burr and Mei-Juin Chen, *The Black Kungfu Experience* will premiere on public television February 1, 2013 (check local listings).

The heart of *The Black Kungfu Experience* lies in the incredible journey of four respected kungfu masters, Ron Van Clief, Dennis Brown, Don Hamby and Tayari Casel, who are the black pioneers within this martial arts community. The film focuses on how these black kungfu martial artists became respected masters in a subculture and art traditionally dominated by Chinese and white men.

The *The Black Kungfu Experience* also captures the history of these four men through their stories of discrimination, racism, determination, and passion. Each experience and journey is unique, yet adds to the collective fabric that is their history. The experiences of these four African American martial artists establish a compelling and moving story about survival, community, and empowerment.

Ultimately the documentary takes viewers on a fast-paced cultural and emotional journey, allowing them to fully understand how kungfu was — and still is — a unique crucible of the black experience. Ultimately, it asserts that kungfu is less about flash and style, kicks and punches, than it is about community, identity, and bridges.

On Air Appearances

Ron Van Clief, star of the Hong Kong movie series *The Black Dragon*, has trained and taught martial arts for over 40 years. He holds a black belt or the equivalent in karate, ju-jitsu, aiki-jitsu, kungfu, arnis de mano, and zen jutsu. Further, he is a master of the sword, sai, nunchaku, and other martial arts weapons. Van Clief is a tenth degree red belt and founder of the Chinese Goju system, with the title "shidoshi." Ron Van Clief has established more than 25 schools in over 18 countries. He has starred, choreographed, appeared, or assumed roles as a stunt man in more than 40 motion pictures. He served as a policeman in New York, as a soldier in the Vietnam War,

and several years as a United States Marine.

Van Clief, a five-time World Champion, has competed in more than 900 tournaments during forty years of international competition. In 1994, at the age of 51, he fought in the Ultimate Fighting Championship IV against the undefeated Champion Joyce Gracie. He competed in many brutal full contact matches in Asia to prove his system's effectiveness to the world of martial arts.

Tayari Casel is the founder and director of the Tayari Casel Martial Arts Academy. It is an institution that researches, demonstrates, and spreads Africa and China's contributions to the international martial arts community, while simultaneously furthering the appreciation of contemporary and traditional African and Chinese culture. His studies include cultural and humanitarian missions to Africa, Sri Lanka, Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, the Netherlands, Taiwan, the Republic of China, and the arts of Kupigana Ngumi, Shaolin, and Tai Chi Chuan with the directors of the Pan Afrikan Martial Arts Federation. Casel has appeared in various martial arts films and is a frequent guest on local television and radio programs. He teaches and lectures throughout the country and internationally, and is the master teacher at Tayari Casel Martial Arts Academy in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Dennis Brown was cited at the turn of the century in *Black Belt* magazine as one of the "25 most influential martial artists of the 20th Century." As a weapons and forms competitor, Dennis Brown won national grand championships for his staff work and sword forms, while also redesigning and revolutionizing the rope dart. Brown has continuously developed all his skills through an ongoing lifelong study of the fighting forms, traditional weapons, and training resources of classic external and internal wushu. In 1982, he became the first African American to train in Mainland China. He has returned there to do advanced studies every decade since then. In 1982 Brown founded the U.S. Capitol Classics. The twenty-first century U.S. Capitol Classics has evolved into one of the country's most famous and glamorous venues. For three years in the late '90s, beginning on ESPN, the Brown co-hosted *Black Belts*, a weekly half-hour TV show that covered the grand championship showdowns at major national tournaments. He also runs three successful Shaolin Wu-Shu Training Centers.

Donald Hamby is the chief instructor of Hamby's Tiger and Crane Kungfu in Los Angeles, California. He has trained under renowned masters Buck Sam Kong and Lam Chun Fai in Hong Kong. Hamby has published many martial arts articles in *Inside Kungfu* and *Kungfu/TaiChi* magazines, and appeared on *The Steve Harvey Show* winning \$10,000 in the "Big Time Challenge." He has also translated several Hung Gar kungfu manuals from Chinese into English.

About the Filmmakers

Martha Burr (Producer/Director)

Martha Burr graduated from Harvard College in 1985 and went on to receive her Ph.D. in American Studies at NYU in 1997. She has been a member of the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame Research Committee for the past 15 years. She moved to Los Angeles in 1992, where she directed music videos for record companies (including Interscope), which aired on MTV. She also worked in other film production capacities as a writer, costumer, and production coordinator.

From 1997-2003, Burr was the executive editor of *Kungfu* magazine, where she became one of America's

leading experts on kungfu and other martial arts, and traveled extensively in China and Southeast Asia. In 2003, she and producing partner Mei-Juin Chen made *Shaolin Ulysses: Kungfu Monks in America*, which aired nationally on the PBS *Independent Lens* series in October 2003. In 2005, Burr wrote and co-produced a documentary, *What Babies Want*, in collaboration with executive director Noah Wyle. In 2008, Burr produced and directed a documentary, with Mei-Juin Chen, for National Geographic Channel International, called *Taiwan's Kungfu Secrets*; in 2011 they completed another documentary for NGCI, *Super Solar Yacht*, about the world's first all-solar yacht. Burr is also completing the companion book for **The Black Kungfu Experience**.

Mei-Juin Chen (Producer/Director)

Mei-Juin Chen is a native of Taipei, Taiwan. After graduating from Taiwan University in 1989, she moved to Los Angeles, where she received an M.A. in visual anthropology from the University of Southern California. In 1993, she founded her production company, Lotus Films, and embarked on a career as a documentary filmmaker, pursuing projects in Asia and the United States. Her award-winning work has appeared in major film festivals and on TV stations around the world. Her first documentary, *Hollywood Hotel*, about a group of unconventional tenants at a low-income hotel on Hollywood Boulevard, was shown in competition at the prestigious International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam and at Vision du Réel in Néon, Switzerland. Her next documentary, *The Worlds Of Mei Lanfang*, on the life and art of the incomparable Peking Opera star Mei Lanfang, debuted at the Berlin Film Festival in 2000 and was honored by Women in Film. In 2003, her hour-long documentary *Shaolin Ulysses: Kungfu Monks In America*, produced/directed with Martha Burr, aired nationally on PBS's Emmy®-winning *Independent Lens* series in the United States. In 2007, *Woman of the Southern Wind*, a film about Taiwanese pipa player Mei-O Chen's quest to revive the ancient Chinese musical art form of nanguan, won The Chris Statuette award at the Columbus International Film Festival. The following year, *Taiwan's Kungfu Secrets* (produced/directed with Martha Burr, commissioned by National Geographic Channel), about Taiwan's mysterious kungfu secret society, aired in 166 countries. Chen is currently in post-production on her latest project, *Secret Daughter*, about the life of controversial super star Lee Xianglan (a.k.a. Shirley Yamaguchi.) The project is being funded in part with grants from the prestigious National Arts and Culture Foundation in Taiwan, and the Asian Cultural Council. In addition to her role as an independent producer/director, Chen has produced TV documentaries for Sony Columbia Pictures, acted in a supporting role in the MGM film *Red Corner* (starring Richard Gere), and served as co-curator of video programming for LA Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) and the American Film Institute's national video festival. In 2000, Ms. Chen received the Most Outstanding Asian Artist Special Award from Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the Chinese American Arts Council, and New York City's Department of Cultural Affairs.

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