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**CONTACT**

Voleine Amilcar 415-356-8383 x 244

[voleine\\_amilcar@itvs.org](mailto:voleine_amilcar@itvs.org)

Mary Lugo 770-623-8190

[lugo@negia.net](mailto:lugo@negia.net)

Cara White 843-881-1480

[cara.white@mac.com](mailto:cara.white@mac.com)

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**BYRON HURT'S PROVOCATIVE *SOUL FOOD JUNKIES* TO PREMIERE ON PBS'S  
*INDEPENDENT LENS* ON MONDAY, JANUARY 14, 2013**

***Acclaimed Director of Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes Explores the African American  
Community's Relationship with Soul Food***

(San Francisco, CA) — Inspired by his own family's complex relationship with "soul food" — fried chicken, ribs, macaroni and cheese, peach cobbler, and the whole panoply of down-home foods made with grease, sugar, and love — acclaimed filmmaker Byron Hurt asks whether this diet is nurturing or destroying the African American community. With humor and heart, Hurt questions the effects of "soul food" on the health of not only African Americans, but all who guiltily consume this most comforting of American comfort foods. *Soul Food Junkies* will premiere on the Emmy® and Peabody award-winning series *Independent Lens* on Monday, January 14, 2013 at 10 p.m. ET (check local listings).

Food habits and traditions are hard to change, especially when they're passed on from generation to generation and rich with family history and loving memories. Leaving behind the food you grew up with can seem like a rejection of family values and roots. In *Soul Food Junkies*, Byron Hurt (*Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*) shares his journey from his New Jersey home through the South to learn more about African American soul food and its long-term effects on the community.

Hurt's journey was inspired by his father's unwillingness to give up his high-fat, calorie-laden traditional soul food diet, even in the face of a life-threatening health crisis. Although he's been able to improve his diet and stay in shape, Hurt discovers that the love affair that his Dad and others have with soul food is deep-rooted, complex, and often deadly.

Through candid interviews with soul food cooks, historians, and scholars, as well as doctors, family members, and everyday people, *Soul Food Junkies* reveals how the American culinary tradition of "southern" food began in West Africa, spread throughout the Americas during slavery, and was coined "soul food" in the late 1960s during the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. The film also shows how the profit-driven fast-food and processed-food industry, have replaced traditional home cooked meals more and more. This, along with the dwindling

number of markets featuring fresh produce in many communities of color, has negatively impacted African American health.

But change is in the air. Faced with increasing obesity and rising diabetes rates, an emerging food justice movement is taking root: dynamic and passionate individuals are challenging the food industry, encouraging communities to “go back to the land” by creating sustainable eco-friendly gardens, advocating for healthier options in local supermarkets, supporting local farmer’s markets, avoiding highly processed fast foods, and cooking a healthier version of traditional soul food.

To learn more about the film, visit the companion website for *Soul Food Junkies* at [http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/soul\\_food\\_junkies](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/soul_food_junkies). Get detailed information on the film, watch preview clips, read an interview with the filmmaker, and explore the subject in depth with links and resources. The site also features a Talkback section, where viewers can share their ideas and opinions.

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## **Facts and Figures**

### **Obesity and African Americans**

- African American women have the highest rates of overweight and obesity compared to other groups in the U.S. *About four out of five African American women are overweight or obese.*
- In 2010, African Americans were 1.4 times as likely to be obese as non-Hispanic whites.
- In 2010, African American women were 70 percent more likely to be obese than non-Hispanic white women.
- In 2007-2010, African American girls were 80 percent more likely to be overweight than non-Hispanic white girls.

### **Diabetes and African Americans**

- African American adults are twice as likely to have been diagnosed with diabetes by a physician than non-Hispanic white adults.
- In 2008, African Americans were 2.2 times as likely as non-Hispanic whites to die from diabetes.

(From U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health)

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## About the Participants

**Queen Afua** is a wellness expert, nationally renowned herbalist, and certified holistic health specialist who practices from a uniquely Afrocentric spiritual perspective.

**Will Allen** is the founder of Growing Power's Community Food Center, where farmers of all ages and experience come to receive training and assistance in farming practices.

**Christopher Barnes** is a physical education teacher at St. Phillips Academy in Newark, New Jersey.

**Norma Jean Darden** is a former Wilhelmina model, as well as owner of Spoonbread, a restaurant and renowned catering company in New York City that is known for its cutting-edge multicultural cuisine.

**Michaela Angela Davis** is an image activist and a writer on urban style, race, gender, and hip-hop culture, seeking to liberate the narrow and misinformed image of women.

**Lolis Eric Elie** is a New Orleans-based filmmaker/writer and the author of *Smokestacks Lightning: Adventures in the Heart of Barbeque Country*.

**Dr. Rodney Ellis, MD** is a board-certified primary care internist committed to preventing such diseases as hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease.

**Roderick Ephram** is Peaches' son and business partner and is proud of the rich history and symbolism his mother's restaurant has in the city of Jackson, Mississippi.

**Dick Gregory** is a comedian and activist who developed an interest in vegetarianism in the 1970s.

**Dr. Jessica B. Harris** is a professor, food historian, and author of cookbooks documenting the foods and foodways of the African Diaspora.

**Dr. Marc Lamont Hill** is the associate professor of education at Columbia University and the host of the syndicated television show *Our World with Black Enterprise*.

**Frances Hurt** is Byron's mother and confidante.

**Jackie Hurt** is Byron's Dad, who passed away of pancreatic cancer in 1994.

**Tony Hurt** is Byron's uncle who lives in Milledgeville, Georgia and grows his own fresh vegetables.

**Steven Jackson** is a Tougaloo College student who is concerned about obesity in the community.

**Portia Jones** is a Tougaloo College student who is concerned about obesity in the community.

**Shantrelle P. Lewis** is curator at the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute.

**Chokwe Lumumba** is an activist, attorney, human rights advocate, and the Jackson, Mississippi City Councilman.

**Dr. Aletha Maybank** is the assistant commissioner, NYC Dept. of Health & Mental Hygiene, in the Brooklyn District Public Health Office.

**Dr. Leslie Burl McLemore**, is a civil rights activist and political leader in Jackson, Mississippi, and the former interim president of Jackson State University.

**Vonda McPherson** is the owner of Vonda K's Catering in Newark, New Jersey.

**Frank Montesana** is the director of Eco SPACES Program.

**Minister Abdul Hafeez Muhammad** of the Nation of Islam serves as the New York Representative of the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan and the Minister of Muhammad Mosque No. 7 in Harlem.

**Jenga Mwendo** is a raw, vegan, personal chef and the founder/director of Backyard Gardeners Network in New Orleans.

**Dr. Frederick Douglass Opie** is a professor of history and foodways, with particular interest in Africa and African Diasporas, and the author of *Hog and Hominy*.

**Ms. Peaches** is the owner of Peaches, Jackson, Mississippi's original soul food restaurant, who serves up history along with delicious food.

**Sonia Sanchez** is an educator, author, and activist. She was also a pioneer in developing Black studies courses at what is now San Francisco State University, where she was an instructor from 1968 to 1969. She is author of more than a dozen books of poetry and published plays.

**Dr. Leni Sorenson, Ph.D.** is a culinary historian at Monticello in Charlottesville, Virginia, who has taught eighteenth century history by demonstrating its fireplace cookery in Southern museums for more than twenty years.

**Bryant Terry** is an eco chef, food justice activist, and author of two critically acclaimed books: *Vegan Soul Kitchen: Fresh, Healthy, and Creative African-American Cuisine* and *Grub: Ideas for an Urban Organic Kitchen*.

**Marcia Weaver** is a Mississippi resident and community leader.

**Dr. Rani Whitfield**, affectionately known as the “The Hip Hop Doctor,” is a family physician, contributor to the bestselling book, *Not In My Family: AIDS in the African American Community*, and the national spokesperson for the American Stroke Association.

**Sherry Whitfield** is Dr. Whitfield’s mom and one of his biggest supporters.

**Baye Wilson** is a planner, lawyer, activist, and executive director for Lincoln Park Coast Cultural District, Newark, New Jersey.

**Kolu Zigbi** is the program director of Sustainable Agriculture & Food Systems for the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation and has been an active member of the Sustainable Agriculture and Food System Funders group.

#### **About the Filmmaker**

Byron Hurt is an award-winning documentary filmmaker, published writer, anti-sexist activist, and lecturer. Hurt is also the host of the Emmy®-nominated series, *Reel Works With Byron Hurt*. *The Independent* named him one of the "Top 10 Filmmakers to Watch" in 2011. His most popular documentary, *Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and was later broadcast on *Independent Lens*. In 2010, MSNBC's TheGrio.com named *Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes* one of the “Top 10 Most Important African-American Themed Films of the Decade.” Hurt’s writing has been published in several anthologies and his work has been covered by *The New York Times*, *O Magazine*, *AllHipHop.com*, *NPR*, *CNN*, *Access Hollywood*, *MTV*, *BET*, *ABC News World Tonight*, and many other outlets.

#### **About Independent Lens**

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy® Award–winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about unique individuals, communities, and moments in history. Presented by the Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.