

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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For more information about the program, visit SouthernBellefilm.com

**PBS DOCUMENTARY SOUTHERN BELLE TO PREMIERE ON
150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CIVIL WAR**

***Program Provides an Insider's Look at a Living History Experience,
Where the Antebellum South Rises Again***

(Nashville, Tennessee)- It has been said that in order to understand America, you must first understand the Civil War. Over the next four years, as the country commemorates the event that defined a nation, what we choose to remember — and hope to forget — of our past reveals much about who we are in the present.

Premiering on PBS beginning in July, 2011 (check local listings) *Southern Belle* is a story about how people use history to create their personal identity and to shape their values and guiding ideology. On the eve of the 150th year anniversary of the Civil War, *Southern Belle* documents the divisive historical memory of an American subculture and challenges viewers to consider how a romantic portrayal of the past affects current attitudes on the race, gender, and class issues that continue to define and divide America today.

The Civil War may be long over, but the spirit of rebellion is hard to extinguish, even in something as innocent as a girls' summer camp. *Southern Belle*, a documentary film by MakeWright Film partners Kathy Conkwright and Mary Makley, is a unique, insider's look at the 1861 Athenaeum Girls' School in Columbia, Tennessee, where the antebellum South attempts to rise again.

Every summer, young women from around the world eagerly sign up to become that iconic and romantic image of southern identity: the Southern belle, replete with hoop skirt, hat, and gloves, singing the region's anthem, *Dixie*. The camp is held at a historic headmaster's home in what was originally a four-year college for young women from 1850-1920. Never before have cameras been allowed to closely shadow the students and teachers during this intensive week of historical reenactment.

The teachers, all of whom work without compensation, hope to instill genteel manners and build pride in Southern heritage. They have carefully selected this time period so they can share the "truth" with the next generation about why the South seceded from the Union. For them, the Civil War had little to do with slavery, and everything to do with states' rights and unfair taxation.

Critics say that by promulgating a Southern identity that erases emancipation as a cause of the Civil War and glorifies a disempowered female image, the camp experience whitewashes history and misinforms the next generation. Orman, a high school history teacher, says, "I'm not sure that everything has to be

balanced...the kids...who come to high school already know all the bad about slavery. It's been taught to them and taught to them and it needs to be because slavery's wrong. But there is a good side too, you know, there was a part of life that was happy."

Southern Belle presents a crucial examination of how historical memory is formed and shared in popular culture by presenting viewers with a series of thought provoking questions: What does it mean to reenact a past that represents only part of the story? How do the young women understand their history if they experience a romantic and nostalgic version of a belle's life? What happens when the rough edges of history are smoothed out of existence?

About the Filmmakers

Kathy Conkwright, Producer/Director

Kathy Conkwright is co-founder of MakeWright Films, established in 2007. Before becoming an independent producer, Conkwright worked as a staff producer for Nashville Public Television (NPT) and spent nine years in New York working in a variety of roles with Bill Moyers and *Frontline* at PBS, *Turning Point* at ABC, and *Dateline* at NBC. Winner of multiple Emmy®, Gracie, and NETA Awards, her credits include nationally and locally broadcast films on topics as diverse as political and social history, music, civil and human rights, political asylum, public education, and a federal inmate's suspicious death, which led to a U.S. Justice Department investigation. Conkwright has also taught documentary production classes at Vanderbilt and Fisk University and served on two local film boards for a decade. She is presently getting her MFA in Integrated Media Arts from Hunter College in New York City.

Mary Makley, Producer/Director

Mary Makley is co-founder of MakeWright Films, established in 2007. Her locally and nationally broadcast programs have won multiple Emmy®, Gracie and NETA awards. She has been an independent producer and freelance editor for nine years. Clients include Nashville Public Television, Country Music Television, and Time Life Music. She co-produced a PBS documentary *Andrew Jackson: Good, Evil, & the Presidency*. She co-wrote and edited *The Carter Family: Will the Circle Be Unbroken*, which was acquired by the flagship PBS series, *American Experience*. Current projects include the first in a series of seven documentaries on the state of children's health in Nashville, Tennessee.

About Independent Television Service (ITVS)

ITVS funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web, and the Emmy® Award-winning weekly PBS series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday nights at 10 PM. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens, and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue, and serve underserved audiences. Since ITVS's inception in 1991, its programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing television audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people. For more information about ITVS, visit www.itvs.org.

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