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CONTACT

Voleine Amilcar, ITVS	415-356-8383 x 244	voleine_amilcar@itvs.org
Mary Lugo	770-623-8190	lugo@negia.net
Cara White	843-881-1480	cara.white@mac.com

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**“THE ORDER OF MYTHS”
REVEALS PARALLEL BLACK AND WHITE WORLDS
OF MARDI GRAS SECRET SOCIETIES IN MOBILE, ALABAMA**

*Film Premieres on the PBS Series Independent Lens on Mardi Gras,
Tuesday, February 24, 2009*

“There’s nothing post-race about the closely orbiting worlds depicted in **THE ORDER OF MYTHS**, Margaret Brown’s wise and soberly affecting documentary about the separate but unequal Mardi Gras festivities that take place each year in Mobile, Alabama.”

—Manohla Dargis, *The New York Times*

(San Francisco, CA)—In Mobile, Alabama, home of the oldest Mardi Gras celebration in the United States, tradition runs deep. As winter surrenders to the rites of spring, the city buzzes and flutters with floats, parades, *bal masques* and secret mystic societies with names like the Striker’s Independent Society, the Infant Mystics and the Order of Myths. Young women dress up in stately gowns and bejeweled capes handed down from their grandmothers while dashing young men hide their identities in tuxedos, crisp white shirts and masks. Yet in Mobile, these annual rituals—like much of Southern culture—are complicated. Two parallel sets of Kings and Queens are chosen to rule: one black, selected by the 175 Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association (MAMGA), and one white, crowned by the Mobile Carnival Association (MCA). Each royal court, full of pomp and circumstance, hosts its own masquerade balls, parades and parties. Like foreign dignitaries who will soon return to their respective worlds, the MCA and MAMGA monarchs cross the color line only briefly to visit each other’s events.

An illuminating film about the complexity of race in the modern South, **THE ORDER OF MYTHS** will have its television premiere on Mardi Gras—Tuesday, February 24, 2009—at 10 PM (check local listings) as part of the seventh season of the Emmy® Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Terrence Howard.

Director Margaret Brown, who set out to make a film about her mother’s ambivalence about being crowned Queen of Mardi Gras in the 1960s, found herself slowly but surely drawn into the exotic and enduring rituals of Mardi Gras. Yet the deeper she journeyed into the hearts of the townspeople of Mobile, the more she was perplexed by the seeming acceptance—by black *and* white residents—of the segregated system perpetuated by both.

Wisely choosing to let the subject matter unfold before the viewer without comment, Brown quietly and powerfully peels back the layers of Mobile’s history and heritage, pageantry and pride to reveal a tangled web of violence, power dynamics and, in an ironic twist, the hidden relationship between the families of the black and white Queens.

To learn more about the film and the issues, visit the companion website for **THE ORDER OF MYTHS** at pbs.org/independentlens/orderofmyths. Get detailed information on the film, watch preview clips, read an interview with the filmmakers, and explore the subject in depth with links and resources. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions.

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About the Participants

Stefannie Lucas is the black Mobile Mardi Gras Queen of 2007. She is a teacher at Maryvale Elementary School in a neighborhood that has an 80 percent poverty rate. During February—when most of Mardi Gras takes place and which is also Black History Month—Stefannie teaches the fifth-graders about segregation in the South. Stefannie’s great-great-grandfather arrived in Mobile on the *Clothilde*, a slave ship smuggled into the United States by an ancestor of the white Mardi Gras Queen, Helen Meaher. The week before Mardi Gras, Stefannie decides that she and Joseph Roberson, the black King, are going to attend the white coronation, which no black royalty have ever attended.

Joseph Roberson teaches fifth grade in a classroom opposite Stefannie’s and is the King of the black Mobile Mardi Gras of 2007. The first in his family to serve on a royal court, Joseph hopes his experience will show his nieces and nephews that they too might someday be royalty.

Helen Meaher is the fourth of five daughters in the Meaher family. All three of her older sisters were debutantes in the white Mobile Mardi Gras Court, but Helen will be the first Queen of this generation of Meahers. Helen’s grandmother was the 1935 white Mardi Gras Queen. One of Helen’s ancestors smuggled the *Clothilde* into Mobile. The *Clothilde* was the last slave ship to enter the United States, more than 50 years after the country had abolished the slave trade.

Brittain Youngblood, a Brown University senior and one of the white debutantes, describes herself as “the liberal debutante.” Notwithstanding her ambivalence, she decides to participate in the Mardi Gras social season as a debutante.

Dora Finley is a local activist and historian in the Mobile community and a self-described “Mardi Gras enthusiast.” She tells the story of the slave ship *Clothilde* and reads a letter she wrote to the editor of the *Mobile Press Register*, which declares that Mardi Gras is “the last stronghold of segregation.”

About the Filmmaker

Margaret Brown (Producer /Director/Editor)

Brown is the producer and director of the acclaimed documentary *Be Here to Love Me: A Film About Townes Van Zandt*, which was released in the United States by Palm Pictures and received worldwide theatrical distribution in 2005. *Be Here to Love Me* premiered at the Toronto Film Festival, was the opening night film at North America’s premier documentary film festival, Full Frame, and the closing night film at the Nashville Film Festival. Brown recently directed the music video *Our Life Is Not a Movie or Maybe*, for Okkervil River, and produced Cat Power’s *Living Proof* video, directed by Harmony Korine. Brown produced *Six Miles of Eight Feet*, which won a Student Academy Award in 2000. She was the cinematographer for *Ice Fishing*, which received a special jury prize from Sundance in 2000 and for which she received the Nestor Almendros Award for Cinematography from the NYU Graduate Film Program. The short film Brown directed while at NYU, *99 Threadwaxing*, starred Justin Kirk and Heather Burns and screened at film festivals across the country. She produced the narrative feature film *Mi Amigo*, which was released in 2006 by ThinkFilm and starred Josh Holloway of *Lost*.

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 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. Further information about the series is available at pbs.org/independentlens.