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**TULIA, TEXAS TO HAVE ITS TELEVISION PREMIERE ON THE
EMMY® AWARD-WINNING PBS SERIES INDEPENDENT LENS
ON TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2009**

**FILM EXPLORES HOW THE WAR ON DRUGS TORE APART
ONE SMALL TEXAS TOWN**

“This is a story about how our idea of justice gets corrupted when we declare war on something.”

—Jeff Blackburn, Texas Criminal Defense Attorney

(San Francisco, CA)—A product of the nation’s “war on drugs,” narcotics agent Tom Coleman was hired to work undercover in a now-infamous drug sting operation in Tulia, Texas. On July 23, 1999, Coleman executed one of the biggest drug busts in Texas history; by the end of that blazing summer day, dozens of residents of the small farming town of Tulia had been rounded up and thrown behind bars. Thirty-nine of the 46 people accused of selling drugs to Coleman were African American. Named “Texas Lawman of the Year” for his investigation, Coleman’s arrests led to quick trials and severe sentences. But it soon became clear that there was more to Coleman than met the eye, and revelations came forward calling into question many of the arrests. Later, as lawyers fought to clear the names of the victims and residents of Tulia joined forces to tackle prejudice within their community, another story emerged. Directed by Cassandra Herrman and Kelly Whalen, **TULIA, TEXAS** will have its television premiere on the Emmy® Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Terrence Howard, on Tuesday, February 10, 2009, at 10 PM (check local listings).

Coleman, the son of a legendary Texas Ranger, worked the Tulia operation alone and never used surveillance equipment. The Panhandle Regional Narcotics Task Force and Swisher County sheriff Larry Stewart together hired and supervised Coleman; the funding came from a federal grant program conceived at the height of the drug wars in the late 1980s that empowered communities across the country to hire freelance agents like Coleman. Although the arrests in Tulia devastated much of the black community, many in the white community applauded Coleman for “cleaning up the town.” When his supervisors learned that Coleman himself was wanted by the police, they kept the information quiet.

With its gripping story told through interviews with the accused, Coleman, and the police officers, jurors, lawyers, families and activists involved, **TULIA, TEXAS** takes you from the personal to the political and back again. The film explores how one part of the community consented to systematic prejudice while another was unwilling to sit back quietly as their neighbors were victimized by one overzealous rogue drug agent and the culture that celebrated him. **TULIA, TEXAS** tells the story of a small town’s search for justice and explores how the war on drugs actually plays out in communities across the country.

To learn more about the film and the issues, visit the companion website for **TULIA, TEXAS** at pbs.org/independentlens/tuliatexas. 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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On-Screen Participants

Jeff Blackburn – The chain-smoking, Amarillo-based attorney represented several of the Tulia drug sting defendants and worked pro bono to investigate agent Tom Coleman, leading to the eventual release from prison and pardons of all the convicted Tulia defendants.

Nate Blakeslee – The *Texas Observer* journalist was the first to chronicle the 1999 Tulia drug sting and its aftermath; he later wrote the book *Tulia: Race, Cocaine and Corruption in a Small Texas Town*.

Freddie Brookins Jr. – One of the 46 people arrested in the 1999 Tulia drug sting, Freddie served four years of a 20-year prison sentence before his felony conviction was overturned in 2003.

Freddie Brookins Sr. – The longtime Tulia resident organized with the multiracial coalition Friends of Justice to free his son, Freddie Brookins Jr., from prison.

Pattie Brookins – Mother of Freddie Brookins Jr.

Terri Brookins – Wife of Freddie Brookins Jr.

Ron Chapman – The now-retired Texas District Judge presided over the evidentiary hearing that led to the overturning of the Tulia drug sting cases.

Thomas Coleman – The undercover narcotics agent made cases against 46 Tulia residents for cocaine dealing. Later, inconsistencies in Coleman's police reports and court testimony resulted in the overturning of the cases, and Coleman was convicted of perjury, prohibiting him from serving in law enforcement.

Gary Gardner – The Texas Panhandle resident was one of the few white townspeople who publicly spoke out against the 1999 drug sting arrests and organized to free those imprisoned.

Rod Hobson – The Lubbock-based attorney was the special prosecutor for the 2005 perjury trial of Thomas Coleman.

Bobby Keeter – The Tulia resident and recovering drug addict is now director of the recovery facility called the Driscoll House.

Charles Kiker – The retired minister and native Tulian was one of the organizers of the Friends of Justice coalition that formed after the 1999 Tulia drug sting.

Mimi McBroom – Wife of Thomas Coleman; she defended her husband's investigation.

Sue Riddick – She served as a juror on one of the trials of the Tulia drug sting defendants.

Larry Stewart – The sheriff of Swisher County was one of Agent Coleman's supervisors on the Tulia drug sting operation; he continues to defend the operation's validity.

Michelle White – Arrested in the 1999 Tulia drug sting, White took a plea bargain because she feared the maximum prison sentences faced by the defendants who fought the charges.

Ricky White – The longtime Tulia resident watched as four of his children and his wife were arrested in the 1999 drug sting.

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About the Filmmakers

Cassandra Herrman (Producer/Director/Photographer)

Cassandra Herrman's other work includes films about immigration, juvenile justice and civil rights. *American Exile*, about an exiled Black Panther leader, was screened at Sundance in 2002. For the PBS series *FRONTLINE/World*, Herrman has produced and photographed stories about human rights in Zimbabwe, female runners in Kenya and the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. The latter was nominated for a 2006 Emmy® Award.

Kelly Whalen (Producer/Director)

Kelly Whalen's recent works include the MSNBC television special *Rising from Ruin*, about hurricane recovery in New Orleans, which she produced and photographed. Whalen also co-produced *The Fire Next Time* and *Not in Our Town: When Hate Happens Here*, PBS documentaries about community responses to hate crimes and hate speech. She also documented hate crimes and ultranationalist activity in Russia as a fellow of the International Reporting Project.

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.

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