

# **FAUBOURG TREMÉ:** *The Untold Story of Black New Orleans*



**Running Time: 68 minutes (festival edition)**  
**or 56:46 (PBS broadcast version)**

A co-production of Serendipity Films, LLC, Independent Television Service (ITVS), WYES-TV12 New Orleans and Louisiana Public Broadcasting (LPB) in association with the National Black Programming Consortium (NBPC).

## **THE TEAM**

**Executive Producers:** Stanley Nelson & Wynton Marsalis  
**Director:** Dawn Logsdon  
**Writer/Co-Director:** Lolis Eric Elie  
**Producers:** Lucie Faulknor, Dawn Logsdon & Lolis Eric Elie  
**Cinematographers:** Diego Velasco, Bobby Shepard, & Keith Smith  
**Editors:** Dawn Logsdon, Sam Green & Aljernon Tunsil

## **THE FILM**

Lolis Eric Elie, a New Orleans newspaperman, takes us on a tour of the city – his city – in what becomes a reflection on the relevance of history folded into a love letter to the storied New Orleans neighborhood, Faubourg Tremé. Arguably the oldest black neighborhood in America and the birthplace of jazz, Faubourg Tremé was home to the largest community of free black people in the Deep South during slavery and a hotbed of political ferment. Here black and white, free and enslaved, rich and poor cohabitated, collaborated, and clashed to create America's first Civil Rights movement and a unique American culture. *Faubourg Tremé: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans* is a riveting tale of heartbreak, hope, resiliency and haunting historic parallels.

While the Tremé district was damaged when the levees broke, this is not just another Katrina documentary. Long before the flood, two native New Orleanians—one black, one white—writer Lolis Eric Elie and filmmaker Dawn Logsdon, began documenting the rich living culture of this historic district. Miraculously, their tapes, unlike their homes, survived the disaster unscathed. The completed film, *Faubourg Tremé: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans*, which critics have called “devastating”, “charming”, and “revelatory” takes us back to a New Orleans that is in danger of being lost forever.

Elie and director Dawn Logsdon make clear the city's present, up through Katrina, remains steeped in its past- one that, for New Orleans, naturally includes an emphasis on music, heightened here by Derrick Hodge's original jazz score and over a hundred years of New Orleans music. This is a film of ideas, a historical film, a personal film and a celebration of place.

## **PRESS CONTACT:**

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# **FAUBOURG TREMÉ:** *The Untold Story of Black New Orleans*

## **WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING...**

*"A new documentary finally captures the real New Orleans on film...Flat out brilliant...This is a great piece of storytelling, filmmaking and testifying. It is also, arguably, the most poignant film ever made about New Orleans...See it as soon as you can. It will make you smile and cry and fall in love with New Orleans all over again. Some of us need that now more than ever."* -**The New Orleans Tribune**

*"Faubourg Tremé is a celebration of the venerable African-American history of New Orleans...passion for the subject infuses the film...remarkable footage and charming interviews"* - **Variety**

*"... timely and essential...charming yet hard-hitting..."* - **The Village Voice**

*"It's history come alive. I enjoyed every second. The music, the second-line dancing, the characters, are wonderfully presented. The camera catches many telling moments that reveal the pulse and texture of a very special place. The historical footage is tremendous. The tragedy of Katrina hits home hard. Sad as it is, we come out the other end feeling hope for the future and glad to have shared in such a rich history."* -**Les Blank, Filmmaker**

*"...a powerful reflection of Tremé as a place of creative ferment and political resistance for some 300 years."* - **Salon.com**

*"Faubourg Tremé is indeed the untold story of black New Orleans. It's not only a beautiful portrait of the parades, the music and the sites of the neighborhood, but also an important film about the buried history and surprising heritage of the community. To anyone who wants to understand the rare American creation that is New Orleans, an appreciation of The Tremé and its history -- and therefore this fine documentary -- will prove essential."* - **David Simon, Creator/Writer, HBO's The Wire**

*"I watched the film on Tremé and it just opened the floodgates. Really right on...the filmmakers tell it like it is...very accurate depiction of what has happened."* - **Aaron Neville, Musician**

*"...Faubourg Tremé: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans, an impressive, immaculate, and impassioned documentary that swings with second-line syncopations, and visually sings an all-American song of pride, place, pain, and perseverance."* - **The Black World Today**

*"...Perhaps the most moving use of music in the festival comes in a film that is not, ostensibly, about music. Dawn Logsdon's documentary **Faubourg Tremé: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans** is heartbreaking in its depiction of the cultural devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina. But the movie is fascinating and even uplifting in its recounting of the region's lesser-known history — the deep African influence that made the city unique long before the Civil War."* - **San Francisco Weekly**

*"A cinematic paean to justice...finding optimism amidst a broken city, the film sanctifies the enduring belief of most black and white New Orleanians- that there is room for all at the table."* **Cine Source**

*"Just got back from a community screening of 'Faubourg Tremé: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans.' I expected it to be good. It was great. I can't say enough good things about this movie. The film brought the old Tremé back to life and demonstrated that not only was it the birthplace of jazz, it was also the birthplace of civil rights in the U.S. This is not just a black New Orleans story, this is an essential AMERICAN story."*

**-foodmusicjustice.com**

*"...Elie's persistent socio-political curiosity, solemn and lyrical reflections, and profound understanding for a New Orleans that has informed who he has become and his beliefs and aspirations, make this unique and passionate documentary essential viewing..."* - **Prairie Miller, WBAI, Arts Magazine and Film Critic**

*"...Faubourg Tremé is a revelation. The film provides a totally new perspective on African American history...this film transcends the legacy of Katrina and reveals some of the soul of New Orleans...it is a work of love, and every frame shows it. You don't want to miss it."* -**San Francisco Bay Times**

*"...Faubourg Tremé's bravery resides in telling its story. Its artistry enters through the back door...it's a film swollen in the blues 'til it simultaneously combusts into an unbroken faith and unwavering hope."* -**Short End Magazine**

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# ***FAUBOURG TREMÉ: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans***

## **FULL SYNOPSIS**

***Faubourg Tremé: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans*** is riveting tale of hope, heartbreak and resilience set in New Orleans' most fascinating neighborhood. Shot largely before Hurricane Katrina and edited afterwards, the film is both celebratory and elegiac in tone.

Faubourg Tremé is arguably the oldest black neighborhood in America, the birthplace of the Civil Rights movement in the South and the home of jazz. While the Tremé district was damaged when the levees broke, this is not another Katrina documentary. Every frame is a tribute to what African American communities have contributed even under the most hostile of conditions. It is a film of such effortless intimacy, subtle glances and authentic details that only two native New Orleanians could have made it.

Our guide through the neighborhood is New Orleans' *Times Picayune* columnist Lolis Eric Elie who bought a historic house in Tremé in the 1990's when the area was struggling to recover from the crack epidemic. Rather than flee the blighted inner city, Elie begins renovating his dilapidated home and in the process becomes obsessed with the area's mysterious and neglected past. The film follows the progress of his renovation, which eventually emerges as a poignant metaphor for post-Katrina reconstruction of New Orleans.

Irving Trevigne, Elie's seventy-five year old Creole carpenter, is the heart and soul of the neighborhood and a born storyteller. Descended from over two hundred years of skilled craftsmen, he beguiles Elie with the forgotten stories behind Tremé's old buildings. Other neighborhood chroniclers like Louisiana Poet Laureate Brenda Marie Osbey, musician Glen David Andrews and renowned historians John Hope Franklin and Eric Foner help bring alive a compelling and complex historical experience that gracefully combines pre and post hurricane footage with a wealth of never-before-seen archival imagery.

Long ago during slavery, Faubourg Tremé was home to the largest community of free black people in the Deep South and a hotbed of political ferment. Here black and white, free and enslaved, rich and poor cohabitated, collaborated, and clashed to create much of what defines New Orleans culture up to the present day. Founded as a suburb (or *faubourg* in French) of the original colonial city, the neighborhood developed during French rule and many families like the Trevignes kept speaking French as their first language until the late 1960's.

The film brims with unknown historical nuggets: Who knew that in the early 1800's, while most African Americans were toiling on plantations, free black people in Tremé were publishing poetry and conducting symphonies? Who knew that long before Rosa Parks, Tremé leaders organized sit-ins and protests that successfully desegregated the city's streetcars and schools? Who knew that jazz, the area's greatest gift to America, was born from the embers of this first American Civil Right's movement.

This film is imaginative, revealing, and disturbing. The images are unforgettable, reminding us of who we are and who we have been. Today many Tremé residents are unable to return home and the neighborhood is once again fighting many of the same civil rights battles first launched here a hundred and fifty years ago. ***Faubourg Tremé: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans*** celebrates the resiliency of this community and how they managed to carve out a unique and expressive culture and history that would enrich America and the world."

# **FAUBOURG TREMÉ:** *The Untold Story of Black New Orleans*

## **DIRECTORS' BIOGRAPHIES**

### **DAWN LOGSDON**

#### **DIRECTOR/EDITOR/PRODUCER**

*Faubourg Tremé* is Dawn Logsdon's debut as a feature length documentary director and producer. She has produced and directed two short documentaries, *Theresa: A Grandmother's Journey*, and *Tomboy* which screened at festivals around the world and aired on local PBS stations nationwide. For over 15 years Dawn has been as an award-winning documentary editor and consultant. She edited the 2004 Academy Award-nominated documentary film, *The Weather Underground*, directed by Sam Green and Bill Siegel and the Sundance Award-winning documentary *Paragraph 175*, directed by two-time Academy Award winners Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman. She was also the editor of the Emmy and Peabody award-winning PBS program *The Castro: Hidden Neighborhoods of San Francisco*. Most recently, Dawn has edited two New Orleans documentaries, *Lindy Boggs: Steel & Velvet* which she co-directed with Bess Carrick and *By Invitation Only*, directed by Rebecca Snedecker. She is an Open Society Institute Katrina Media Fellow. Dawn Logsdon was born in Madison, Wisconsin. She moved to New Orleans at the age of two with her mother and father when they went South to help with voter registration drives during the Civil Rights Movement. Her father was a history professor at the University of New Orleans and her mother is a retired New Orleans public school teacher. Dawn holds a degree in Philosophy from the University of California at Berkeley. Dawn was living in New Orleans when the levees breached after Hurricane Katrina. Her house and neighborhood were badly flooded; she was fortunate to have friends who helped her to relocate to the Bay Area where she was able to complete this film.

### **LOLIS ERIC ELIE**

#### **CO-DIRECTOR/WRITER/PRODUCER**

Lolis Eric Elie is a national award-winning metro columnist and accomplished author. For the past eight years, he has chronicled the heartbeat of New Orleans' neighborhoods thrice weekly for New Orleans' major daily newspaper, [The Times-Picayune](#). A recognized expert on New Orleans food and culture, Lolis is the author of *Smokestack Lightning: Adventures in the Heart of Barbecue Country*, a book about the culture of barbecue. He recently produced a television documentary based on that book and has several other culinary documentaries in development. He is currently writing *Of Bondage & Memory*, a book on the enduring legacy of the slave trade on two continents. He is editor of *Cornbread Nation 2: The Best of Southern Food Writing* for University of North Carolina Press. As a producer for the Smithsonian Institute's Jazz Oral History Project, Lolis conducted interviews with many of New Orleans' elder jazz musicians. He has master's degrees from the Columbia School of Journalism and a Master's in Creative Writing from the University of Virginia. He is an Open Society Katrina Media Fellow. Lolis was born in New Orleans, the son of a New Orleans Public School principal and Civil Rights lawyer. He lives in Faubourg Tremé where he is still fixing up his Creole cottage.

# ***FAUBOURG TREMÉ: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans***

## **DIRECTORS' STATEMENT**

We are New Orleans filmmakers, one black and one white. With the failure of the federal levees after Hurricane Katrina, our entire city was transformed overnight into the symbol of all that has gone wrong in America, in particular its deepening racial and economic divide. Seared into the nation's consciousness are images of desperately poor black people trapped on rooftops and denied the most basic protection of American citizenship. Those images have come to represent black New Orleans.

Our goal in making this film was to tell the story behind those images. We chose to focus on one New Orleans neighborhood, Faubourg Tremé, a historic community that like much of the old city is predominantly African American, poor, and steeped in distinctly un-American traditions. For us Faubourg Tremé is quintessential New Orleans. We wanted to capture the spirit of this place that has persevered in the face of great hostility for centuries and created a culture and history that enriched America and the world.

These days, "character driven" documentaries are all the rage. In editing this film, however, we chose not to structure our story around the personal dramas of our wonderful individual characters but to highlight the larger drama of community. We hope New Orleans itself becomes the character you laugh and cry with, and come to love.

Our film focuses on a forgotten 19<sup>th</sup> century Civil Rights Movement in New Orleans and the music and writing that was born of those dreams. We ourselves are both products of a later Civil Rights Movement. Our parents were Civil Rights activists. We were each sent to integrate New Orleans schools — Lolis to an elite all-white private school, Dawn to an inner city public school that had been abandoned by white parents after desegregation. Our childhood memories are of picket lines, voter registration drives and dreams of a new New Orleans.

Today, there's another new New Orleans in the planning and a new generation of young Americans trekking South to help in the rebuilding. Many of the battles of the past are being fought again. In the course of making this film, the Tremé neighborhood was transformed from one of the most rooted communities in America to among the most uprooted. Before the hurricane, one of the things old people loved to tell us over and over was "You can't possibly know where you're going if you don't know where you've been." Back then, this expression sounded to us like a simplistic cliché. After the flood, it became our mantra too. The history of New Orleans is littered with tragic paths not taken. But it's also rich with tales of brave uprisings, interracial collaboration, endurance and creativity. Our hope is that this film can help heal, educate and inspire at this critical moment in New Orleans' future."

*Dawn Logsdon and Lolis Eric Elie*

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## **LIST OF INTERVIEWEES** (in alphabetical order)

**Glen David Andrews** is a New Orleans jazz trombonist and singer who began playing in his family's brass band in Treme when he was a young child. He has released several cd's and performs with his band *The Lazy Six*.

**John Hope Franklin** is a renowned Reconstruction historian and the James B. Duke Professor Emeritus of History at Duke University. Professor Franklin's numerous publications include *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African-Americans*, *The Emancipation Proclamation*, *The Militant South*, *The Free Negro in North Carolina*, *Reconstruction After the Civil War*, and *A Southern Odyssey: Travelers in the Ante-bellum North*.

**Eric Foner** is a DeWitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia University, specializing in the Civil War and Reconstruction, Slavery, and 19th-century America. He has published many books including: *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*; *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War*; *Nothing But Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacy*; *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877*.

**Wynton Marsalis** is an acclaimed jazz artist, composer and Artistic Director of Jazz at Lincoln Center. A New Orleans native, he has helped bring jazz to the forefront of American culture through his performances, recordings, compositions, and educational efforts. He was the first jazz artist to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize in music and has been awarded nine Grammy Awards in both Jazz and Classical genres.

**Keith Weldon Medley** is a New Orleans writer and author of *We as Freedmen: Plessy vs Ferguson*. He grew up a few blocks from where Homer Plessy boarded the train and attended St Augustine church and the school founded by Paul Trevigne. He is working on a historical novel set in New Orleans.

**Brenda Marie Osbey** is a poet and prose writer whose roots in Faubourg Tremé extend back generations. She has published several books of poetry, including *All Saints: New and Selected Poems* which received the 1998 American Book Award. She is also the author of the newspaper series "Faubourg Tremé: Community in Transition." She was named Poet Laureate of Louisiana in 2005.

**Laura Rouzan** is Associate Dean of Dillard University in New Orleans. A professor of Mass Communications, she specializes in the history of African American newspapers and is working on a book about 19<sup>th</sup> century black newspaper editors.

**Kalamu Ya Salaam** is a poet, educator and activist. Salaam is the founder of NOMMO Literary Society and leader of *Word Band*, a poetry performance ensemble that combines poetry with blues, jazz and other forms of music. He is co-director of Students at the Center, a public high school writing program.

**Lenwood Sloan** is an actor, playwright, dancer, choreographer, arts activist, scholar of dance history, and co-founder of the Louisiana Living History Theater Project. Currently Director of Heritage & Tourism for the State of Pennsylvania

**Irving Trevigne** - a master carpenter, building contractor, jazz guitarist and navy veteran of World War II. Evacuated to Vermont after Hurricane Katrina.

# **FAUBOURG TREMÉ:** *The Untold Story of Black New Orleans*

## **BIOS -CREW**

### **EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS**

**Wynton Marsalis** is a world-renowned jazz recording artist, 9-time Grammy Award® and Pulitzer prize-winning musician and composer. A New Orleans native and jazz history expert, he is currently Artistic Director of Jazz at the Lincoln Center in New York.

**Stanley Nelson**, an award-winning filmmaker, has over 20 years' experience as a producer, director, and writer of documentary films and videos. Nelson's films include *Jonestown: The Life & Death of the People's Temple*, Emmy-award winning *The Murder of Emmett Till*, *The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords*, *Two Dollars and a Dream: The Story of Madame C.J. Walker*, (winner of the CINE Golden Eagle, and cited as the Best Production of the Decade by the Black Filmmaker Foundation) and many others. He is also a MacArthur Foundation Fellow.

### **DIRECTOR/EDITOR/PRODUCER**

**Dawn Logsdon** has produced and directed several award-winning short documentaries, including *Tomboy* and *Theresa: A Grandmother's Journey*, which have screened at festivals around the world and aired annually on local PBS stations. Dawn is a nationally acclaimed editor and has worked on celebrated projects for PBS, HBO, and Channel Four in England. She edited the 2004 Academy Award®-nominated documentary film, *The Weather Underground*, directed by Sam Green and Bill Siegel and the Sundance Award-winning documentary *Paragraph 175*, directed by two-time Academy Award® winners Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman. She was also the editor of the Emmy and Peabody award-winning program *The Castro: Hidden Neighborhoods of San Francisco*, which interweaves the many strands of that community's history, culture and politics. Dawn co-directed and edited the documentary on former Congresswoman, *Lindy Boggs: Steel & Velvet*; and is an Open Society Institute's *Katrina Media Fellow*. As the daughter of a local historian and New Orleans public school teacher, Dawn was reared at the dinner table on tales of New Orleans' forgotten past. She has a degree in Philosophy from the University of California at Berkeley.

### **WRITER/NARRATOR/PRODUCER**

**Lolis Eric Elie** is an award-winning metro columnist and accomplished author. For the past eight years, he has chronicled the heartbeat of New Orleans' neighborhoods thrice weekly for New Orleans' major daily newspaper, *The Times-Picayune*. A recognized expert on New Orleans food and culture, Lolis is the author of *Smokestack Lightning: Adventures in the Heart of Barbecue Country*, a book about the culture of barbecue. He recently produced a television documentary based on that book and has several other culinary documentaries in development. He is currently writing *Of Bondage & Memory*, a book on the enduring legacy of the slave trade on two continents. He is editor of *Cornbread Nation 2: The Best of Southern Food Writing* for University of North Carolina Press. As a producer for the Smithsonian Institute's Jazz Oral History Project, Lolis conducted interviews with many of New Orleans' elder jazz musicians. Lolis is a *Katrina Media Fellow* awarded by the Open Society Institute. He has master's degrees from the Columbia School of Journalism in New York and a Master's in Creative Writing from the University of Virginia. He and his father live in the Tremé and have become key figures in the area's cultural renaissance.

# **FAUBOURG TREMÉ:** *The Untold Story of Black New Orleans*

## **PRODUCER**

**Lucie Faulknor** has over 20 years experience in arts administration. She has assisted Academy award nominated documentary filmmaker, Dorothy Fadiman and feature film director, Lynn Hershman-Leeson. Lucie produced Ireland's first Women in Film and Video Film Festival in Dublin and developed and produced "Artists Up-Close" a series of lectures in San Francisco featuring Bobby McFerrin, Wayne Shorter, Sydney Pollack, Laurie Anderson and many others. She has managed fundraising campaigns for a number of theater companies, including Marin Theater Company's season featuring the world premiere of Tennessee Williams' *Spring Storm*. Lucie has been the publicity director for the Dublin (Ireland) Fringe Theatre Festival, San Francisco's Working Women Theater Festival, the Irish Arts Foundation, 4 Non Blondes and various other independent musicians, artists, actors and filmmakers. She has a Bachelor of Arts from San Francisco State University in Arts Management and completed all course work for a Master's degree in Nonprofit Administration from the University of San Francisco. She lived in New Orleans for three years and moved back to the Bay Area after Hurricane Katrina.

## **CINEMATOGRAPHERS**

**Keith Smith** is a Los Angeles-based cinematographer who brings to the project over twenty years of documentary and narrative experience-and a special eye for his hometown, New Orleans. Keith has shot numerous documentaries, such as the nationally acclaimed ten-part educational series *Black Americans of Achievement*, as well as a number of narrative feature films, including *Luck of the Draw* and *Any Given Sunday*. His work has been shown theatrically and on numerous television broadcast and cable stations, such as PBS, HBO, Black Entertainment Television and Lifetime Television. He has also won awards at international film festivals.

**Diego Velasco** was born in the United States and raised in Venezuela. He currently resides in New Orleans and Los Angeles. He has worked as the director of photography for various music videos, commercials and independent films including *Tony Bravo* and *Mutiny*. He has also worked on such feature films as *The Insider*, *Double Jeopardy*, *Crazy in Alabama*, *My Dog Skip* and *Dracula 2000*. His films have won more than 19 awards worldwide including being pre-selected for Oscar consideration. Velasco directed the first ever Latin American sitcom, *Planeta de 6*, for Venezuelan television. He is currently filming with Fox broadcasting in Los Angeles.

## **COMPOSER**

**Derrick Hodge** is currently the bass player and a composer with Terrence Blanchard's jazz band. He was the composer for *Who The !@#\$ Is Jackson Pollack?* and has composed tracks for Spike Lee's *Inside Man*, *When The Levees Broke* and other film works. He attended Berkeley College of Music and received a bachelor's degree in Music (emphasis on jazz and composition) from Temple University. Hodge has performed and/or recorded with Donald Byrd, Kanye West, Jill Scott, Bootsy Barnes, Q-Tip, Terrell Stafford, Mos Def, and many others.

## **POST-PRODUCTION SOUND**

**Larry Blake**, a New Orleans native, has mixed and edited the sound for Steven Soderberg's *Che*, *Ocean's Eleven*, *Oceans Twelve*, *Oceans Thirteen*, *Welcome to Collinwood*, *Full Frontal*, *Traffic*, *Waking Life*, *Erin Brokovich*, *The Limey*, *Out of Sight*, *Solaris*, *Coastlines*, *Kafka*, *Schizopolis*, and *Sex, Lies, & Videotape* and countless other feature and documentary films. He mixed, designed, and edited the sound for *Faubourg Tremé* at Swelltone Labs in New Orleans, Louisiana.

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