

## TRUE LIVES

A New Limited Series from the Producers of *P.O.V.*

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### THE UPRISING OF '34

*A thoughtful exploration of the paternalistic relationship between mill management and its employees, the relationship between black and white workers, and the impact of the New Deal on the lives of working people*

Documentary Distributed by American Public Television  
Available for January – December 2005 Scheduling

In 1934, Southern textile workers took the lead in a nationwide strike that saw half a million walk off their jobs in the largest single-industry strike in the history of the United States. For a time, these new union members, in response to New Deal legislation, stood up for their rights and became a force to be reckoned with in the South. Then management moved in and crushed the strike. Some mill workers were murdered, thousands more were blacklisted, and many were so intimidated that “union” became a dirty word in Southern communities for decades to come.

Barely publicized, rarely acknowledged in history books, the General Textile Strike of 1934 remains a stirring yet amazingly forgotten chapter in Southern history. **The Uprising of '34**, a film by famed documentarian George Stoney and independent filmmakers Judith Helfand and Susanne Rostock, examines this hidden legacy of the labor movement in the South and its impact today.

**The Uprising of '34** will be broadcast on public television stations as part of *True Lives*, a series presented by American Public Television and American Documentary, Inc. *True Lives* is a new programming initiative from the producers of *P.O.V.* a series from the producers of *P.O.V.*

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For decades, it seemed as if all memory of the General Textile Strike had been buried with the workers who died in its front lines. Stoney and Helfand spent nearly six years tracking down and interviewing surviving strikers and their relatives in Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, and North and South Carolina.

In these candid interviews, the workers' courage and pride is still heart-wrenchingly evident over half a century later – along with the grief, disillusionment, and lingering fear of retribution. “I took a man's hat off his head and fanned him 'til he died, 'til the breath left him,” Mrs. Atkins, an elderly mill worker, remembers sadly. “But I ain't got no more to say into it. I've been trying to forget about all of that, and this is just bringing it all back up.” Kathy Lamb, a former mill worker's daughter, is flabbergasted that her father never mentioned the strike. “I can't understand why my Dad didn't tell me. He could talk about the war and about people being blown to bits, but he couldn't talk about his neighbors being killed. It's like somebody trying to hide a dirty secret about their family, like they're ashamed. They ought to be proud of them. They stood up when other people wouldn't.”

**The Uprising of '34** intercuts this heartfelt testimony, often spoken for the very first time, with extraordinary archival footage of the strike itself and the miserable working conditions that led to the walk-out. Mill owners' non-compliance with New Deal legislation resulted in speeded-up production, which forced workers to produce the same in eight hours that they used to in 12 and for wages far below the federal government's newly established minimum. “You just feel like you've got somebody behind you, pushing, pushing, pushing – wanting more and more and more – to give you less and less,” recalls former mill worker Leonard Knight. “People too darn sorry to pay anybody enough to live on, because they're afraid they're going to get a little bit ahead, then they can't get them to work for nothing!” adds another mill alumnus, Mr. Quattlebaum. “Like a man told me up in North Georgia, keep a man hungry and he'll work. That's the truth!”

A thoughtful exploration of the paternalistic relationship between mill management and its employees, the relationship between black and white workers, and the impact of the New Deal on the lives of working people, **The Uprising of '34** is “meant to challenge the myths that Southern workers can't be organized, that they will work for nothing, and that they hate unions,” says Stoney. More than a social document, the film is intended to spark discussion on class, race, economics, and power – issues as vital today as they were 60 years ago. “This is more than a story about a strike; it's a story about community. We went out of our way to make sure that we didn't make a ‘which side are you on' film,” says Helfand. “The thrust of this film is to give the workers their chance to speak,”

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adds Rostock. "We're very proud of the fact that here's a film in which they speak for themselves without a narrator."

**THE UPRISING OF '34** was accompanied by an extensive outreach campaign that has made a lasting impact in the community and in the classroom. The Labor to Neighbor initiative involved more than 50 screenings and local events, bringing trade unionists together with diverse members of their communities. In Honea Path, S.C., site where seven union members were shot by during the strike of 1934, Kathy Lamb (who appears in the film) organized to build the first workers' memorial in the history of South Carolina. The educational materials developed to accompany the film continue to be used in schools and museums around the country.

### **About the filmmakers:**

**George C. Stoney** has been a professor of Film and Television at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts since 1970. An innovator in the art of community-based film and video, he is an internationally respected media educator. Professor Stoney is a native of Winston-Salem, N.C., with a passionate interest in the history and culture of the South. In 1946 Professor Stoney began his career as a writer, editor and director for the Southern Educational Film Production Service at the University of Georgia at Athens. He has written, directed and produced more than 50 documentary films, videotapes and television series including the Emmy Award-winning *WE SHALL OVERCOME* and *THE WEAVERS: WASN'T THAT A TIME* (both co-produced by Jim Brown), *HOW THE MYTH WAS MADE*, and the classic *ALL MY BABIES*, about an African American midwife in Georgia.

**Judith Helfand** defines herself as a filmmaker/organizer and has worked as a documentary producer and educator for the past ten years. Her film *A HEALTHY BABY GIRL*, which had its broadcast premiere on P.O.V., was in competition at the 1997 Sundance Film Festival and received a Peabody Award for Excellence in Journalism and Public Education.

*BLUE VINYL*, the 2002 "toxic comedy" co-directed and co-produced with Daniel Gold, was broadcast nationally on the HBO series *America Undercover*. Accolades include the 2002 Excellence in Cinematography Award, an IDA nomination for Best Documentary, a Nice Modernist award from *Dwell* Magazine, the 2002 Environmental Messenger of the Year from the Environmental Grantmakers Association, a 2002 EPIC Award from the White House Project, and recent Emmy nominations.

Helfand co-founded Working Films, a nationally recognized organization dedicated to leveraging the power and prestige of documentary to economic, social and environmental justice. With the success of *BLUE VINYL*, she and her filmmaking partner Daniel B. Gold formed a production company, Toxic Comedy Pictures, to create projects with a social conscience and a sense of humor. They are currently in production on *MELTING PLANET*, a feature documentary about global warming and human nature. Helfand is a full-time professor at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, Department of Undergraduate Film and Television.

**Susanne Rostock** was described as "a visual and aural poet" by the judges of the San Francisco International Film Festival when awarding top documentary honors to *PASSIN' IT ON*, for which. Rostock also received an Emmy nomination for editing. Other editing credits include four Michael Apted productions, *MOVING THE MOUNTAIN*, *INCIDENT AT OGLALA*, *THE LONG WAY HOME*, and the *INSPIRATIONS* series; the opening title sequence for *THE COSBY SHOW*; and music

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videos for Freddy Jackson, Melba Moore and UB40. She edited HARLEM DIARY, for which she won a Silver Apple; CALLING THE GHOSTS, which received the Human Rights Watch Nestor Almendros Award and the George Kennedy Journalism Award; STEALING THE FIRE; THE SWEATBOX; and most recently PATERNAL INSTINCT, directed by Murray Nossel.

### **Credits:**

Producer/Director	George Stoney and Judith Helfand
Editor	Susanne Rostock
Executive Producer	Vera Rony
Director of Photography	James B. Stoney
Music	Alicia Svigals and David Earle Johnson

Cara Mertes is the Executive Producer of *True Lives*. The series is produced by American Documentary, Inc. Major funding for *True Lives* is provided by the Tides Foundation.

### **American Public Television**

For 42 years, American Public Television (APT) has been a prime source of programming for the nation's public television stations. APT has more than 10,000 hours of available programming including *Discovering the Real World of Harry Potter*, *Globe Trekker*, *Muhammad Ali: Through the Eyes of the World*, *Nightly Business Report*, *Rick Steves' Europe*, *Julia and Jacques Cooking at Home*, *Ballykissangel*, *Brian Jacques' Redwall* and *Sinatra: The Classic Duets*. APT is known for identifying innovative programs and developing creative distribution techniques for producers. In more than four decades, it has established a tradition of providing public television stations nationwide with program choices that enable them to strengthen and customize their schedules. For more information about APT's programs and services, log on to [www.aptonline.org](http://www.aptonline.org).

### **American Documentary, Inc. ([www.americandocumentary.org](http://www.americandocumentary.org))**

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. Through two divisions, *P.O.V.* and *Active Voice*, and additional initiatives, AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, on-line and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

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