



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE PIVOTAL ROLE PLAYED BY BLACK
LANDOWNERS IN MISSISSIPPI DURING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

MISSISSIPPI INFERNO

**PREMIERES MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16 AT 8 AND 9PM ET/PT
ON SMITHSONIAN CHANNEL™**

**Actor, Director And Political Activist Danny Glover
Narrates Two-Part Black History Month Special**

New York, February 3, 2015 – This year marks the 50th anniversary of the passage of one of the most important pieces of civil rights legislation in American history, the 1965 Voting Rights Act. A new Smithsonian Channel Black History Month two-part special, **MISSISSIPPI INFERNO** reveals the essential role played by black landowners and black independent farmers as a real driving force behind the passage of this legislation. Narrated by actor, director and political activist Danny Glover (*Lethal Weapon*), the two-part special premieres Monday, February 16 with **MISSISSIPPI INFERNO: SEEDS OF REVOLT** at 8 p.m. ET/PT, followed by **MISSISSIPPI INFERNO: DEEDS OF DEFIANCE** at 9 p.m. ET/PT.

This past November President Obama awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom to slain civil rights activists James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, who were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan during 1964's historic voter registration drive. **MISSISSIPPI INFERNO** reveals that a second "triple murder" was being planned by the KKK – only the next three targets were not "outside agitators," but three black landowners who allowed civil rights workers to stay in their homes. This group of black landowners and independent farmers were willing to risk their land, their homes, and their lives by using their land as collateral to obtain property bonds to get hundreds of civil rights workers out of jail.

MISSISSIPPI INFERNO features compelling first person accounts of the courage and resourcefulness of the families who jeopardized their land and their lives for social justice. Their story has been largely ignored and yet they were key to the success of the civil rights movement. They not only provided safe havens and food, but even armed protection to the outside volunteers who were otherwise committed to non-violence.

Willing to risk it all, they changed the course of American history. Powerful southern white officials may have been worried more about African- Americans using the "cotton vote" to take over agricultural committees which controlled millions of dollars in federal crop subsidies than they were about black enfranchisement. Also told is the story of an independent farmer and teacher, Robert Clarke J.R., who came to own the land on

which his great-grandparents were enslaved and became the first black candidate elected to a state-wide office in Mississippi since Reconstruction.

The film also reveals how a New Deal era experiment in land reform enabled over 100 families of sharecroppers to gain control of 10,000 acres of some of the most fertile land in the state and become independent farmers who a generation later became leaders of the civil rights movement in Mississippi.

MISSISSIPPI INFERNO is produced by Think It Media in association with Mentorn Media for Smithsonian Channel. David Shulman is the producer and director. Joy Galane and David Royle serve as executive producers for Smithsonian Channel.

Smithsonian Channel™, owned by Showtime Networks Inc. and the Smithsonian Institution, is where curiosity lives, inspiration strikes and wonders never cease. This is the place for awe-inspiring stories, powerful documentaries and amazing entertainment across multiple platforms. Smithsonian Channel combines the storytelling prowess of SHOWTIME® with the unmatched resources and rich traditions of the Smithsonian, to create award-winning programming that shines new light on popular genres such as air and space, history, science, nature, and pop culture. Among the network's offerings are series including *Aerial America*, *L.A. Frock Stars*, *Secrets*, *Mighty Ships*, *Mighty Planes* and *Air Disasters*, as well as critically-acclaimed specials that include *Civil War 360*, *9/11: The Heartland Tapes*; *The Day Kennedy Died* and the Peabody winning *MLK: The Assassination Tapes*. Find out more at www.smithsonianchannel.com.

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