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As Part of a Yearlong “Voices of a People’s History”
Arts and Education Pilot Project in Chicago Classrooms and Communities

Matt Damon Headlines “*The People Speak, Live!*” Benefit Performance of Dramatic Readings and Songs at the Metro, Jan. 31

Tuesday, January 31st, 7:00 pm, Doors 6:00 pm | Metro, 3730 N. Clark, Chicago, IL 60613 | Tickets on sale January 9th
\$11 advance GA, \$14 at door, \$24 seated, \$99 premium for two, at the Metro box office and at www.metrochicago.com

The Chicago premiere of “*The People Speak, Live!*” features Matt Damon with **Alana Arenas** and **Robert Breuler** of the **Steppenwolf Theatre Ensemble**; local poets **Angela Jackson**, **Kevin Coval**, **Idris Goodwin**, and the **Louder Than a Bomb All-Stars**; journalist **Rick Kogan**; civic leader **Rami Nashashibi** of the Inner-City Muslim Action Network; the **Luna Blues Machine** band; **Maritza Cervantes** of Teatro Luna; and other special guests to be announced.

CHICAGO, IL—Part of a new, yearlong arts and education initiative in Chicago, a benefit performance of “*The People Speak, Live!*” produced by Voices of a People’s History takes place at Metro, Tuesday, January 31st, 2012. Bringing to life the extraordinary history of ordinary people who made the United States what it is today, the evening pairs Academy Award®-winner Matt Damon with local Chicago talent for dramatic readings and songs of the actual words of rebels, dissenters, and visionaries from America’s past—and present.

“*The People Speak, Live!*” is based on the award-winning documentary feature *The People Speak* which had its broadcast premiere on HISTORY™ in December 2009. Seen by more than eight million people, *The People Speak* features Matt Damon reading John Steinbeck; Bob Dylan performing Woody Guthrie; Marisa Tomei describing the 1937 Flint sit-down strike; Morgan Freeman and Don Cheadle performing the words of Frederick Douglass; John Legend reading Muhammad Ali; and many others performing the work of both the acclaimed and anonymous in U.S. history.

The January 31st benefit performance of “*The People Speak, Live!*”—its Chicago premiere—will feature readings of a fifteenth century priest documenting Columbus’ arrival in the New World; a fugitive slave’s scathing letter to a former master; the words of pathbreaking Chicago labor organizers; testimony of civil rights activists; musical performances from the songbooks of Woodie Guthrie and one-time Chicagoan Sam Cooke; poetry from the earliest days of Hip-Hop; Studs Terkel’s interview with Mamie Mobley, the mother of Emmett Till; and more.

“**It’s an honest and exciting look at where we’ve come from,**” says **Damon**, a featured actor in and executive producer of *The People Speak* film. “The idea that all of the progress in America towards equality has been struggled for by everyday people, I hope will become a point of discussion for more students of all ages. With *The People Speak*, you’re getting the actual historical text verbatim; there’s no spin.”

Voices of a People’s History—the national non-profit that runs education and performing arts programs based on primary source materials—has produced more than 100 performances in 17 states with casts that have included local students, parents, civic leaders, and actors alongside celebrated artists such as Black Thought of The Roots, Josh Brolin, Diane Lane, Danny Glover,

Sandra Oh, Steve Earle, Robert Redford, Mark Ruffalo, Patti Smith, Kerry Washington, and Alfre Woodard—on stages ranging from small classrooms to the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the Sundance Film Festival.

Voices of a People's History is producing the January 31st benefit in partnership with Louder Than a Bomb: The Chicago Youth Poetry Festival. Bringing together hundreds of youth across Chicago every year, Louder Than a Bomb is the city's famous youth spoken word program, celebrating its 12th year in 2012 with the January broadcast premiere on the Oprah Winfrey Network of the award-winning documentary *Louder Than a Bomb*, directed by local filmmakers Greg Jacobs and Jon Siskel.

Together, the organizations have initiated a yearlong pilot project, bringing free educational material, teacher workshops, and public arts programming to classrooms and communities across Chicago. The Chicago pilot project, like the film, is inspired by the work of the late historian Howard Zinn, author of the bestselling *A People's History of the United States* (HarperCollins 1980) and, with Anthony Arnove, the primary source companion *Voices of a People's History of the United States* (Seven Stories Press 2004).

Damon famously highlighted Zinn in his Academy Award®-winning screenplay for *Good Will Hunting*, saying, as the character Will Hunting, "If you want to read a real history book, read Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*. That book will knock you on your f—king ass." Damon's connection to Zinn goes back to his childhood in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he grew up next door to the historian. "*The People Speak, Live!*" is scheduled in part to commemorate Zinn's passing on January 27, 2010.

"We are thrilled to help bring '*The People Speak, Live!*' to Chicago, a city that epitomizes so much of what it is about. **Chicago is now known around the world as the home of President Barack Obama. But, how many people know it as the home of Studs Terkel and Fred Hampton; or as the birthplace of the movement for the 8-hour workday?**" said Kevin Coval, Artistic Director of Louder Than a Bomb.

Since the Chicago Voices pilot project launched in September 2011, more than 500 Chicago educators have received the free Chicago Voices Educators Toolkit, suitable for middle and high school and introductory college classes. The toolkit includes *The People Speak* DVD, a preloaded USB flash drive with standards-aligned lesson plans, teaching guides, primary source material featuring Chicago history, as well as several books by Howard Zinn. A total of 1,000 educators will receive the toolkit by the project's end this June.

In addition, the pilot project has partnered with community groups—including Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, Erie Neighborhood House, Victory Gardens Theatre, and the Occupy Chicago Education Committee—to host free screenings and discussions of the film *The People Speak*. These screenings will continue in the first half of this year.

MEDIA REQUESTS

Chicago Voices Coordinator **Kevin Coval** is available for live interviews. **Chris Moore** and **Anthony Arnove**, producers of *The People Speak* can be available by phone, along with Voices Executive Director **Brenda Coughlin**. **Select cast members**, of both the film and the January 31st performance, will also be available for select interviews. If necessary, review copies of *Voices of a People's History* or *The People Speak* can be mailed. **Please direct all queries to Sarah Macaraeg at 312-315-8476 or sarah@speakonitpublicity.org**. Cast photos are available at www.flickr.com/photos/voicesofapeopleshistory.

Praise for the Award-winning documentary *The People Speak*

"Striking, exhilarating...the performances are thrilling." —*Los Angeles Times*

"Works beautifully...Each passionate reading flows out of the previous one."
—*Boston Globe*

"A celebration in spoken word and song of those who made history from the bottom up."
—*Scripps News/McClatchey Tribune*

"A terrifically educational and entertaining film for all ages."
—*Pittsburgh Tribune Review*

"The bottom line: An excellent family rental choice to watch with your teenagers, *The People Speak* crosscuts the live readings with historical footage and is more engaging than your average American history lesson."
—*News & Observer*

"A nice tribute to Zinn's work...sort of a live theater version of a Ken Burns documentary"
—*The Capital Times*

"The People Speak does a wonderful job of introducing Zinn's ideas, which focused on civil rights, liberties and the overlooked role of revolution in U.S. history...a wonderful tribute to a man that single-handedly changed the way that I, and many others, look at United States history" —*In Utah This Week*

"If Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* is your type of history, this is a must have." —*Ft. Bend Star*

SELECTED QUOTES FROM *THE PEOPLE SPEAK*



“Democracy does not come from the top. It comes from the bottom.”

—Howard Zinn in *The People Speak*

“If there is no struggle there is no progress. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did it and it never will.

—Don Cheadle in *The People Speak* as Frederick Douglass,
“The Significance of Emancipation in the West Indies” (August 3, 1857)

“Then that man in back there, he says women can’t have as much rights as men, ’cause Christ wasn’t a woman. Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from!? From God and a woman. Man had nothing to do with Him.”

—Kerry Washington in *The People Speak* as Sojourner Truth
“Ain’t I A Woman?” (1851)

“So, I’ll be all aroun’ in the dark. I’ll be ever’where —wherever you look. Wherever they’s a fight so hungry people can eat, I’ll be there. Wherever they’s a cop beatin’ up a guy, I’ll be there. I’ll be in the way guys yell when they’re mad an’ — I’ll be in the way kids laugh when they’re hungry an’ they know supper’s ready. An’ when our folks eat the stuff they raise an’ live in the houses they build why, I’ll be there.”

—Matt Damon in *The People Speak* as Tom Joad from
John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939)

“The great question, sir, is this: Am I not a man? If I am such, I claim the rights of a man. Am I not a man because I happen to be of a darker hue than honorable gentlemen around me?”

—Danny Glover in *The People Speak* as Henry McNeal Turner,
“On the Eligibility of Colored Members to Seats in the Georgia Legislature” (September 3, 1868)

“I marched out, and was followed by the others. As I looked back at the long line that followed me, I was more proud than I have ever been at any success I may have achieved.”

—Marisa Tomei in *The People Speak* as Harriet Hanson Robinson,
“Characteristics of the Early Factory Girls” (1898)

“When we look back at history, history is not just about war and injustice, but it is also the story of people behaving magnificently against great odds. And this was encouraging to me. Because the people up on top, the people who have the power, their power depends on the obedience of the people below them. And when people withdraw that obedience, when workers go out on strike, when consumers boycott, or when soldiers refuse, then the makers of war, the profiteers, the purveyors of greed, then they are helpless. You can see the possibility that small acts multiplied by the millions can merge into great movements of social change. That impels us to act. And we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. If we live now, as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, that in itself is a marvelous victory.”

—Howard Zinn in *The People Speak*