

## AMERICAN CREED

### PREMIERES TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27 ON PBS

**Former Sec. of State Condoleezza Rice, Historian David M. Kennedy, Author Junot Díaz, Chicago Cubs Manager Joe Maddon, and Others Come Together from Remarkably Different Perspectives to Explore American Ideals and Identity**



**(CHICAGO, IL)** — What does it mean to be American? What holds us together in turbulent times? In the documentary film **AMERICAN CREED**, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Pulitzer Prize-winning historian David M. Kennedy come together from different backgrounds and points of view to investigate the idea of a unifying American creed. How, ask

Rice and Kennedy, have American ideals of freedom, fairness, equality, and opportunity been shaped? How are they interpreted today? Rice and Kennedy's spirited inquiry frames the stories of citizen-activists striving to realize their own visions of America's promise. Written, directed, and produced by Sam Ball, **AMERICAN CREED** premieres Tuesday, February 27, 2018, 9:00-10:00 p.m. ET ([check local listings](#)) on PBS.

"I hear more and more people say, 'we're coming apart, we're not civil to one another, our institutions are falling apart,'" says Rice. "In times like this," adds Kennedy, "we need stories that remind us of the ideals that hold us together."

The stories in **AMERICAN CREED** are told from the points of view of unlikely activists who creatively bridge cultural, economic and/or political divides. In his hometown of Hazleton, Pennsylvania, baseball manager **Joe Maddon** brings new immigrants and long-time residents together after a controversial local election. In Oklahoma, Lindbergh Elementary School Principal **Deidre Prevett**, a dual citizen of Muscogee (Creek) Nation and the US, fights for the struggling children and transient families of many different ethnicities who pass through her hometown of East Tulsa. Acclaimed novelist **Junot Diaz**, from urban New Jersey, and Marine Sgt. **Tegan Griffith**, from rural Wisconsin, work in very different spheres to achieve "the dream of an America where we can be on each other's side." Based in Seattle, **Eric Liu** brings community organizers together across ideological divides. By "being open and listening," the founders of the grassroots organizations MoveOn.org and the Tea Party Patriots unexpectedly find common ground. In the Arkansas Delta, where mechanization threatens agricultural jobs, entrepreneurs **Leila Janah** and **Terrence Davenport** start an innovative



technology company based on what they see as America's promise of equal opportunity for all.

Adding depth and context as each story builds on the next, Rice and Kennedy lead a moving discussion of the question at the heart of this film – what does it mean to be American today? – with a group of first-generation college students at Stanford University, where Rice teaches political science and Kennedy teaches history. These students find themselves on an uncertain pathway to full participation in American life; their commentary is insightful and affecting, in surprising ways.

**AMERICAN CREED** will launch as a primetime PBS special and will stream on [PBS.org](https://www.pbs.org) and the PBS app beginning on February 28, 2018, kicking off a multi-year, multi-partner national public engagement campaign, the crux of which is conversation: heartfelt talk and respectful listening among people of different backgrounds, life experiences, education levels, professions, political ideologies, and religious faiths. It is through these community conversations, made possible by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and a robust array of partners, that the film will realize its highest purpose: to engage Americans in reflection and dialogue about their own part in the American story, and in acting to shape that story for the better.

The feature length film **AMERICAN CREED** will stream at [PBS.org](https://www.pbs.org) for the duration of this multi-year campaign. A wider selection of short films, stories, and reflections on America's ideals and identity can be found at [americancreed.org/](https://americancreed.org/), along with listings of local in-person community conversation events around the country. Audiences are encouraged to share their own stories, ideas, and reflections on the themes of the film on all social media platforms, using the hashtag #AmericanCreedPBS.

Students around the country will experience **AMERICAN CREED** in the classroom – as part of their history, civics, and social studies courses – thanks to partnership between **AMERICAN CREED** producer Citizen Film; co-producer WTTW Chicago; the National Writing Project; Facing History and Ourselves; PBS LearningMedia; and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's American Graduate Program.

Educator resources and other features, including a selection of timely and relevant stories created by local PBS stations participating in the **AMERICAN CREED** public engagement campaign, will be curated on [americancreed.org](https://americancreed.org/) in the weeks, months, and years following broadcast and launch.

### **THE PARTICIPANTS (in order of appearance)**

**Condoleezza Rice** is a professor of political science and global economy at Stanford University. She was the second woman and first African American woman to serve as Secretary of State, and the first woman to serve as Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs at the White House. Rice also served as Stanford's Provost from 1993-1999. In 1997, Rice was named to the Federal Advisory Committee on Gender-Integrated Training in the Military. In 1991, Rice co-founded the Center for a New Generation, an innovative, after-school academic enrichment program affiliated with the Boys and Girls Clubs of America. She remains an active proponent of extended learning through after-school programs and teaching the arts in schools. Rice believes that "when you are a country that is based on the aspirational notion, 'It doesn't matter

where you came from; it matters where you're going,' it had better be true—because it's the only thing that's holding you together."

**David M. Kennedy** is a professor emeritus of history at Stanford University. He's the son of a copper mineworker from Washington State. The first in his family to go to college, Kennedy won the Pulitzer Prize for History for *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War*, his critically acclaimed account of the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his times. Kennedy's take on the American national myth is "that this is the land of absolutely unlimited opportunity and that we are all the captains of our own fate," and says it "has been hugely energizing for our society over many, many generations." But, he warns, the promise of America is fragile, a particularly personal awareness formed by his family's financial struggles when he was growing up in the Pacific Northwest.



**Joe Maddon**, manager of Major League Baseball's 2016 World Series-winning Chicago Cubs, returned one year to his hometown of Hazleton, Pennsylvania, as he does every off-season, and "didn't recognize the place." Passage of a controversial immigration ordinance sparked rancorous demonstrations, dividing the local cultures and pitting whites vs. Hispanics. Maddon brought parents and kids together to integrate Hazleton's Little League, turning the town into a baseball powerhouse. He and other community leaders founded the Hazleton Integration Project (HIP), where hundreds of kids are enrolled in activities from after-school study groups to basketball teams, martial arts instruction, and debate clubs. His experience as the grandchild of Italian immigrants, the child of a hardworking coal-miner, and his intuitive understanding of how sports teach people to work together across multiple divides, motivated him to give back to the hometown he loves.



**Deidre Prevett**, a spirited elementary school principal, stands outside and greets each child every morning upon arrival at Lindbergh Elementary School in Tulsa, Oklahoma. A Muscogee (Creek Indian) Native American from Tiger Flats, Oklahoma, Prevett is living her American dream as an educator. She passes along the message from her grandmother: education is the key to overcoming the many obstacles that confront Native Americans, as well as the transient, low-income, multi-ethnic populations Prevett's school serves. Many of her pupils are economic migrants whose parents move frequently in search of better-paying jobs and affordable housing. While she may see a student for only two or three months before the family moves on, Prevett will never give up on that student's ability to realize his or her individual potential.



**Junot Díaz** is an acclaimed novelist, winner of the MacArthur "Genius Grant" and Pulitzer Prize recipient for *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Díaz has never forgotten his school librarian Mrs. Crowell, who believed that one of her Spanish-speaking immigrant pupils would one day write great American novels for a new generation. Díaz emigrated from the Dominican Republic in 1974 and grew up in a low-income, multi-ethnic melting pot in New Jersey, across the river from Manhattan. Díaz sees America "at its margins." Only by looking "at this country's farthest edges — the places where we rarely turn our eye — can we get a better sense of what our real values are and what they need to be."



**Sergeant Tegan Griffith**, from the rural town of Wittenberg, Wisconsin, joined the Marine Corps at 21 in search of economic and educational opportunity, and a meaningful, patriotic life. Her service offered Sgt. Griffith a valuable new perspective on what values are worth defending – those embedded in her vision of the American creed. After serving in Iraq, she returned to Wisconsin where she works tirelessly to help fellow vets build a support network to advocate for themselves and others. At Wisconsin's state capitol in Madison, she encounters loud and passionate protesters, and decides that defending their right to free speech is "part of the fabric of my uniform." As a leader of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Griffith continues to fight for freedom and community.



**Eric Liu** of Seattle served as a speechwriter for President Clinton, and is the founder of Citizen University, a non-profit organization working to foster a strong and vibrant culture of civic engagement. His parents emigrated to the U.S. from China and worked multiple jobs while pursuing their education. Liu's mother worked for baseball great Jackie Robinson, and his father landed a job at IBM. Liu is part of "the tradition of students from poor or immigrant backgrounds who don't quite fit in but wind up finding their own way." After a trip to China, where he witnessed firsthand the political repression of dissidents, Liu made the decision to devote himself to fighting civic apathy at home. He believes that when you stop participating in politics, "you cede the field to the few who would like to command the field...and don't have your interests in mind."

The full-length version of **AMERICAN CREED** will stream on PBS.org starting February 28, 2018. These additional participants are featured in the full-length film:

**Joan Blades** is the co-founder of MoveOn.org, a grassroots progressive advocacy group with more than 3.3 million members. She is also a successful entrepreneur, the founder of Berkeley Systems, a tech company that, among other things, created the flying toaster screen-saver. In 2011, Blades co-founded Living Room Conversations (LRC) and works with Mark Meckler and others on the right to create meaningful dialogue between people of opposing views. Her goal is to engineer a more civil political culture that fosters common-sense approaches to solving urgent public policy problems. "We're so far apart on some issues that it's uncomfortable, because we're going to stay far apart," she says, "and yet, by getting to know one another, we discover we share many concerns in common; concerns we can act on together." Campaign finance, prison reform, and energy policy are a few areas where they surprisingly find common ground.

**Mark Meckler** co-founded one of the largest grassroots political organizations aligned with the Tea Party movement, the Tea Party Patriots. He is currently president of Citizens For Self-Governance, "an organization that empowers citizens — not government — to make the crucial decisions that affect their lives." He is also the leader of the Convention of States, which seeks to make legislative changes to a system he believes has become dysfunctional because citizens have less and less control over their own lives. Meckler feels the system as it exists now "is rigged to support the entrenchment of power," contrary to the American ideal of a free society where individuals decide for themselves how to form their own communities and govern themselves.

**Leila Janah** grew up in Southern California and moved frequently as a child. Her parents came from Calcutta “with little more than a suitcase and dreams of a better life.” Her mother worked in fast food and other low-paying jobs until her father eventually found work. Scholarships and multiple jobs put Leila through Harvard, where she graduated summa cum laude in 2005. Today, *Forbes Magazine* hails her as “one of the most influential women in technology.” In 2008, Janah founded Sama Group, based on the ideal that everyone deserves access to technological innovation. Sama, from the Sanskrit word meaning “equality,” trains unskilled workers to become adept in emergent digital technologies, then puts them to work. Her mission as CEO, says Janah, is to “bring about a world in which everyone is valued, and has an opportunity to contribute.”

**Terrence Davenport** was raised in the economically struggling Arkansas Delta. He did well in school, attending the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, where he studied web design and started a web development business. He moved back to his hometown of Dumas (pop. 2,500) in 2010 to help his family after his mother was diagnosed with cancer and his grandmother was evicted from the sharecropper’s shack where she had lived most of her life. Davenport stayed in Dumas and became a social entrepreneur, coaching low-income people and connecting them to work. “There’s ingenuity, determination, and grit in our community,” Davenport says, “and if we can get even a small toehold on the economic ladder, we have a fighting chance.”

**AMERICAN CREED** is directed, produced, and written by Sam Ball. Senior executive producer and writer is Randy Bean, with Dan Soles as executive producer and Sr. VP of Content for WTTW. The Citizen Film producer is Kate Stilley Steiner. The film is edited and written by Mike Shen. The cinematographers are Sophie Constantinou, Richard Gunderman, Dana Kupper, Garland McLaurin, Jr., and Howard Shack. Visual Effects: Raffi Simonian. Music: Peter Golub. Georgia Godfrey is consulting producer.

**AMERICAN CREED** is a co-production of Citizen Film and WTTW Chicago.

**AMERICAN CREED** was made possible by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting as part of **American Graduate: Let’s Make It Happen**, a nationwide public media education initiative.

**Citizen Film** is a nonprofit production company that employs collaborative documentary storytelling and story sharing to engage communities in dialogue about important problems and inspire active participation in solutions. **AMERICAN CREED**’s public engagement plan brings Citizen Film’s nationally acclaimed methodology (supported by funders ranging from ArtPlace America to the National Endowment for the Arts) to scale. Citizen Film’s collaborations with independent filmmakers, grassroots organizations, and civic institutions have been featured at America’s most prestigious venues (the Sundance Film Festival, MoMA-NY, LACMA, the Hirshhorn, the Whitney and more) and presented on television (PBS, HBO, IFC, TLC, Arte, etc.).

**WTTW Chicago (co-producing station)** is the flagship public television affiliate for the **AMERICAN CREED** broadcast and public engagement campaign. This Chicago station has mounted dozens of successful, nationally presented productions, including 10 THAT CHANGED AMERICA, SOUNDSTAGE, and NATURE CAT, and won five Peabody Awards and numerous Emmys. Its public engagement team will spearhead PBS station relations and conduct robust local outreach in the Chicago area. WTTW is the second

largest public television station in the country. Its digital offerings reach an audience of more than million people each month.

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More information and photos are available at <http://www.pbs.org/pressroom>

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