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***Juror Number Six* premieres on blackpublicmedia.org in Fall 2008
Internet doc exposes the role of media & crime -- from OJ to Internet to death penalty.**

Emmy Award-winning filmmaker and Chair of Cinema & Television at SMU-Dallas, Rachel Lyon had just finished *Race to Execution*, when it hit her. "The media's role has fundamentally changed," states Lyon. "Far from merely reporting objectively on these cases, the media has become an active participant—directly influencing what jurors believe before they ever walk into the jury box."

Just weeks after winning the Cine Golden Eagle, eight Telly awards and opening in festivals around the world, Lyon has completed *Juror Number Six*, a new documentary short for the Internet, which exposes the symbiotic relationship between media, race, crime and punishment.

Juror Number Six opens with one of the most infamous trials of the 20th century: The O.J. Simpson murder trial. "This was the ultimate crime story," Joe Domanick, Senior Fellow for Criminal Justice, of USC's Annenberg Institute for Justice and Journalism, says in the documentary. "You had race, you had violence, you had sex, you had sports—it all came together." The Simpson trial also created a national appetite for court-related media coverage.

Juror Number Six will be Web-cast during the Fall 2008 on the National Black Programming Consortium (NBPC) website, www.blackpublicmedia.org. The new Project includes a national outreach campaign for the, *Masculinity Project*, a collaboration of original voices from independent filmmakers to reach out into the black community with support from the Ford Foundation. *Juror Number Six* examines how today's 24/7 news culture, with television dramas such as *CSI* and *Law & Order* create a climate of fear —exacerbated by portrayals of black men as dangerous criminals who inherently possess an interest in and ability to commit violent crime against whites — especially women.

"Our 'crime-soaked media culture' of TV news often presents minorities as probably dangerous, out-of-control, and filled with rage. Further, the media tends to reinforce — at great profit — an unconscious assumption that white, middle-class people are at great risk of being violently attacked by people of color," NBC's Renee Ferguson reports. "These misperceptions reverberate throughout our criminal justice system." Studies show that if a jury has five-or-more white men, the defendant jumps to a staggering 70% chance of receiving the death penalty.

"Crime has been going down for years, and yet it gets reported five, six hundred percent more than it used to be because of the 24-hour news cycles and the need to feed that entertainment beast," says Andrea Lyon, sister of the filmmaker and director of DePaul University's Center for Justice in Capital Cases. "All the research shows that people who watch local television are more afraid of crime than people who don't."

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“Before O.J. Simpson, there was no Greta Van Susteren on *On the Record*,” says Charles Ogletree Jr., director of Harvard University’s Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice. “Before O.J. Simpson, there was no Nancy Grace. Before O.J. Simpson, we didn’t have these programs that can around-the-clock cover crime and news the way that it does.”

Much of that crime coverage, observers say, disproportionately focuses on minorities. “Crimes that get covered the most are crimes in which the victim is white,” says Renee Ferguson, an investigative reporter for NBC 5 News in Chicago. “The mug shots of people who’ve been picked up, they’re often black.”

Juror Number Six explores the impact of television crime dramas like *CSI* and *Law & Order*, which some legal experts say present an overly optimistic picture of a criminal justice system where attorneys, judges and jurors of color abound and miscarriages of justice are few. In reality, America’s legal system is overwhelmingly white: minority defendant are up to 30 times more likely to be sentenced to death than a white defendant convicted of the same crime.

Ogletree agrees. “You see drugs, you see police, you see sirens, you see handcuffs,” he says. “And you see people in prison and in jails,” and those people are African American.

“You might not think media-influenced perceptions matter that much,” NBC’s Renee Ferguson remarks. “But it does matter a jury room. ...Do you really want decisions like [life and death] to be influenced by what a juror saw on cable TV last night?”

Juror Number Six is produced by Lioness Media Arts, Inc., and is produced and directed by Rachel Lyon. Visit the website at www.jurornumbersix.com. Lioness also collaborated with NBPC and ITVS on *Race to Execution* that aired on PBS’ *Independent Lens*, *The Masculinity Project* is proud to add *Juror Number Six* to their national program on black male identity issues. The writer is Christine Intagliata. The Ford Foundation, Bentley College, DePaul University, and the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities provided funding for *Juror Number Six*.

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