



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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BBC AMERICA BRINGS YOU THE AMERICAN FUTURE:
A HISTORY BY SIMON SCHAMA

- U.S. Premiere -

On the heels of one of the most fascinating U.S. elections in decades, comes a new series on BBC AMERICA from Simon Schama, one of TV's most popular historians and a Professor of Art History and History at Columbia University. *The American Future: A History by Simon Schama* was shot against the backdrop of the US presidential campaign with Schama traveling throughout America to dig deep into the conflicts of its history to understand just what is at stake right now. To coincide with Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and the Presidential Inauguration, *The American Future: A History by Simon Schama* will premiere in four parts at the following times:

- Part 1 - Monday, January 19, 8:00 p.m. ET/PT**
- Part 2 - Monday, January 19, 9:00 p.m. ET/PT**
- Part 3 - Tuesday, January 20, 8:00 p.m. ET/PT**
- Part 4 - Tuesday, January 20, 9:00 p.m. ET/PT**

After 9/11, Katrina, Enron and Baghdad, the robustness of American optimism is struggling to reassert itself against the sobering reality of domestic anxieties and military frustration. This is an America grappling with an un-American sense of its own limits. The voters in the 2008 Presidential election expressed feelings of uncertainty about military outcomes and anxiety about their suddenly shaky prosperity leading to a weakened faith in governance that has not been felt this painfully since Watergate.

In his travels through America, Schama takes the long perspective, looking at four of the critical issues facing the country: war, moral fervor, immigration and the increasingly difficult relationship between expectations of prosperity and the reality of economic and environmental limits. Turning to fascinating moments in American history to understand the present, connecting legendary figures such as Thomas Jefferson, Henry Ford, Mark Twain and Abraham Lincoln with contemporary soldiers, businessmen, truckers, schoolteachers and even politicians, Schama offers a timely and gripping vision of the United States, past and present, at a critical moment – not just for the U.S., but also for the rest of the world.

The DVD of *The American Future: A History by Simon Schama*, will be available on January 20, the same day as broadcast at www.bbcamericashop.com. Schama's accompanying book to the series, *The American Future: A History* will be available by Ecco, an imprint of Harper-Collins on May 19.

EPISODE SYNOPSES

PART 1 - American Plenty

Simon Schama explores how American optimism about the infinite possibilities of its land and resources is in danger of coming to a grinding halt. Nowhere is this more evident than the American West, which has always been a symbol of opportunity and freedom. Oil at \$4 a gallon may be dominating the headlines, but here it's the lack of water that's an even bigger threat to the American future. The West is in the grip of a nine-year drought. America's optimism about its natural resources has always been spiced with clashes over conservation, going back to the first man to navigate the Colorado River, John Wesley Powell. American ingenuity made farming on an industrial scale possible in the early years of the 20th century but at the cost of making Oklahoma a dustbowl. The building of the Hoover Dam, a modern American miracle, which provided essential irrigation for farming and for the new city of Las Vegas, now no longer supplies enough water for both.

PART 2 - American War

Simon Schama reveals how different the American attitude is to war from what outsiders assume it should be. "The world has got in the habit of thinking of America as the tough-guy empire; trigger-happy cowboys addicted to the rush of military power. But that's not the way America sees itself," he says. Two of the founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, disagreed about whether America should even have a professional army – a division still evident when Simon visits America's premier military academy at West Point. From the Civil War right through to Mark Twain's denunciation of President Teddy Roosevelt's imperial adventure in the Philippines, war has inspired profound debate. And nowhere more so than San Antonio, Texas, nicknamed Military City because of its high population of veterans and serving soldiers, where Simon finds feelings about the war are deeply divided - it's a debate which forces America to dig deep and rediscover what it stands for.

PART 3 - American Fervor

Simon Schama explores the ways in which faith has shaped American political life. His starting point is a remarkable fact about the recent election: for the first time in a generation it's the Democrats who claimed to be the party of God. It was Barack Obama, not John McCain, who spoke about his faith. The British have long regarded American religion as largely a conservative force, yet Simon shows how, throughout American history, it has played a crucial role in the fight for freedom. Faith helped create America; it was the search for religious freedom that led thousands to make the dangerous journey to the colonies in the 1600s. After American independence, that religious freedom was enshrined in the Constitution, the first country in the world to do so. Simon also looks at the remarkable role the black church has played, first in the liberation of the slaves in the 1800s, and again in the civil rights movement of the Sixties – neither would have happened without it. It's this very church that was been the inspiration for Barack Obama, who traces the roots of his political inspiration to his faith.

PART 4 - What is an American?

Simon Schama looks at the bitter conflict over immigration in American history. Who should be allowed to enter America and call themselves an American has always been one of the nation's most divisive issues. He traces the roots of this conflict to the founding of America. The early

settlers were themselves immigrants but they saw America as fundamentally a white and Protestant nation. Simon looks at the key events that challenged this view: the annexation of parts of Mexico in 1848 that made 100,000 non-whites American citizens, the immigration and subsequent expulsion of the Chinese in the late 19th century, and the massive immigration from Eastern Europe during the industrialization of the Twenties. Each time there have been those who have insisted America must stay white if it is to stay true to itself, and each time they have been defeated by the sheer force of history. John F. Kennedy defined America as a Nation of Immigrants in 1964 and Simon argues that the election of Barack Obama represents the final triumph of the vision of America as a multi-ethnic nation.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Written and Presenter by
Simon Schama

Series Producer.
Nicholas Kent (Oxford Film and Television)

Executive Producer
Eamon Hardy (BBC)

WHAT THE BRITISH PRESS SAID

“Most essential viewing ... the series of the year...” *David Chater, The Times*

“Accompanied only by Simon Schama’s brain and some of the world’s most telling footage, we immerse ourselves here in one of the finest program’s I have seen this year: winning, erudite, accessible, scary.” *Euan Ferguson, Observer*

“Learned, unsensational, original, gripping – what all documentaries should be.”
Marcel Berlins, Guardian

ABOUT PROFESSOR SIMON SCHAMA

Simon Schama is University Professor of Art History and History at Columbia University in New York. Since 1990, he has also written and presented more than 30 documentaries on art and history for the BBC.

He first gained public attention for his 15-part BBC series *A History Of Britain* (2000-2002), which won him the 2001 Voice of the Listener and Viewer Awards for best television contributor and best television series. Those awards were added to two Broadcasting Press Guild gongs (Best Documentary Series and the Writer’s Award) and one WH Smith award, voted for by the public, for the book that accompanied the series (both of which he wrote). He also received three BAFTA nominations for the series, the Huw Wheldon Award for Specialized Program or Series (2001 & 2003) and the Richard Dimbleby Award for the Best Presenter – Factual, Features and News (2002).

His other TV credits include the BBC’s Emmy-winning eight-part *Power Of Art* (2006 – BAFTA nomination for the Huw Wheldon Award for Specialist Factual); the 90-minute BBC film *Rough*

Crossings (2007); *Murder At Harvard* (2003 – based on his novella *Dead Certainties: Unwarranted Speculation*); *Landscape and Memory* (a five-part BBC2 series in 1995); and a film on Tolstoy's *War And Peace*. He has also appeared on BBC1's political discussion show *Question Time*, most recently in the USA in the run-up to the 2008 election.

Professor Simon Michael Schama was born in London on February 13, 1945, the son of second generation immigrant Jewish parents with roots in Lithuania and Turkey. In the late 1940s, the family moved to Southend-on-Sea in Essex before moving back to London. The young Schama won a scholarship to Haberdashers' Aske's School then went on to Christ's College, Cambridge University, from 1966-76 (BA 1966; MA 1969; Hon Fellow 1995) before becoming fellow and tutor in modern history at Brasenose College, Oxford. He then spent 13 years as professor at Harvard. He joined Columbia University in 1993, where he specializes in European cultural and environmental history and the history of art.

Schama's writing career preceded his broadcasting career. From 1995-98, he was art critic and cultural essayist for *The New Yorker* magazine, which gained him the National Magazine Award in 1996. He has written 14 books, translated into 16 languages from China to Brazil: *Patriots and Liberators: revolution in the Netherlands 1780–1813* (1978), which won the Wolfson Prize for History; *Two Rothschilds and the Land of Israel* (1979); *The Embarrassment of Riches: an interpretation of Dutch culture in the Golden Age* (1987); *Citizens: a chronicle of the French Revolution* (1989 – winner of the 1990 NCR Book Award); *Dead Certainties (Unwarranted Speculations)* (1991); *Landscape and Memory* (1995); *Rembrandt's Eyes* (1999 – contrasting the biographies of Rembrandt and Rubens); *A History of Britain, volume 1, 3000 BC–AD 1603* (2000), *volume 2, The British Wars 1603–1776* (2001), *volume 3, The Fate of Empire 1776–2000* (2002); *Hang-Ups: essays on painting (mostly)* (2004); *Rough Crossings: Britain, The Slaves And The American Revolution* (2005) – winner of the USA National Book Critics Circle Prize for non-fiction; and *The Power of Art* (2006). He has also written a book to accompany this series: *The American Future: A History*, published in the UK by The Bodley Head in October 2008.

BBC AMERICA brings audiences a new generation of award-winning television featuring news with a uniquely global perspective, provocative dramas, razor-sharp comedies and life-changing makeovers. BBC AMERICA pushes the boundaries to deliver high quality, highly addictive and eminently watchable programming to viewers who demand more. BBC AMERICA is distributed by Discovery Networks. It is available on digital cable and satellite TV in more than 62 million homes. For up-to-the-minute information on BBC AMERICA, forthcoming U.S. premieres, art work and news from the channel, log on to www.press.bbcamerica.com.