

# ***Rosevelt's America* Community Outreach Package**

## ***Community Outreach Video for WAGING A LIVING Media Outreach Campaign***

### **Film and Filmmakers**

***Rosevelt's America*** is a cinema vérité profile of the struggles of a Liberian refugee to build a new life in America. After being tortured and narrowly escaping execution during Liberia's civil war, Roosevelt Henderson makes his way to America with three of his children, but is forced to leave his pregnant wife behind. He works as a janitor, airport van driver, and assembly line worker in order to support his family and help his wife flee their war-torn country. After two years of juggling low-wage jobs, Roosevelt's perseverance pays off and he is reunited with his wife, Frances, and his baby daughter. Frances immediately enrolls in a nursing program and quickly finds a job as a certified nurse's assistant. By capturing Roosevelt's day-to-day struggles, frustrations, and achievements, viewers come to appreciate the distance he has traveled during his harrowing journey from torture and desperation in his native Liberia to security and stability in his newly adopted homeland. Ultimately *Rosevelt's America* becomes an inspiring story of quiet determination and dignity under duress.



A production of **Public Policy Productions**, *Rosevelt's America* was produced and directed by Roger Weisberg and Tod Lending. Lending is an Emmy award-winning producer, director, and writer whose work has aired nationally on ABC, CBS, NBC, PBS, and HBO. His feature documentary LEGACY was nominated for an Academy Award® in 2001. Roger Weisberg's twenty-five previous documentaries have won over a hundred awards including Emmy, Peabody, and duPont-Columbia awards. He received an Academy Award® nomination in 2001 for SOUND AND FURY and in 2003 for WHY CAN'T WE BE A FAMILY AGAIN?

NOTE: The children of Roosevelt and Frances are Maryann, Dashward, Victor, and Chearyl.

### ***Using Roosevelt's America with Outreach Audiences***

#### **OPTION 1: View and Discuss**

Discussing *Rosevelt's America* will deepen people's understanding of the family support and employment challenges facing low-wage earners and their families in America – from the point of view of a newly arrived Liberian family. Since discussion will be most productive if it is followed by a commitment to act, groups will want to clarify the combination of issues that are priorities for them to address.

The following discussion questions concern employment, family, education, and community support systems. Rather than trying to work your way through all of them, choose a few that best fit your goals and group.

### **Audience: Employers, Labor Leaders, and Community Stakeholders**

- Early in the film, Roosevelt says, “There’s a joke in Africa that says, when you come to America, the next place you’ll be going is heaven. That’s why I’m coming straight from Africa to America to improve my life.”  
Do you think Roosevelt had a realistic sense of what life would be like in the United States? Why or why not? What challenges face new immigrants when trying to make a living in the United States? What challenges particularly affect people coming into your community?
- In the film, Roosevelt is upset when he is continuously laid off. He says, “Two years in America and I cannot have a stable job.”  
What do you think are the key supports that were most helpful to Roosevelt in helping his family to get settled and in finding a stable job? What went well and what didn’t? What services would have lessened his struggles?
- How would you assess the assistance provided by the Interfaith Refugee and Immigration Ministries organization in helping first Roosevelt and later Frances Henderson find stable employment? What strategies and/or advice did you find to be particularly effective? What practices will make a difference in your community in helping new immigrants find stable employment?
- Both Roosevelt and his wife Frances came to the United States with an education. What happens to immigrants who have limited education? What can caseworkers or employers do to help them find employment that will help them to “move ahead” on the job and build assets for their families?
- Roosevelt and Frances both spoke English. Aside from communication skills for non-English speaking immigrants, what are the skills they need to achieve success in the United States? What resources are available in your community to help people learn English and acquire needed job-related skills?
- Roosevelt received an Associate’s Degree in Civil Engineering in Liberia but works as a janitor, laborer, and van driver in the United States.  
How can social service organizations help immigrants prepare for employment in their new country? What can employers, labor leaders, and community stakeholders do to assist immigrants in qualifying for employment based on the educational degrees and experiences they gained in their home countries?
- How did his separation from Frances for two years affect Roosevelt’s ability to balance his family obligations and his work? What can your community do to help families in similar situations?

- Based on the story presented in the film, what changes in government assistance need to be made to help immigrant families like the Hendersons?
- Summarize the employment and family support issues presented in *Roosevelt's America*. What were the key challenges faced by the family? What solutions can you recommend that would assist immigrants in your community? What can you do to put these recommendations into practice?

**Audience: Neighborhood Residents**

- Roosevelt says, “If you think America is the land of milk and honey, no. You have to work.” What lessons can you take away from Roosevelt’s story and apply to your own circumstances?
- What, if anything, inspired you about Frances’ story? What actions did she take to find and qualify for employment? What similar opportunities are available in your community?
- Frances recalls that Roosevelt had told her that “America will be what I make it for myself. If I come here and be a law abiding citizen, and take care of my family, live a family life, America will be good for me.”  
Do you agree with Roosevelt and Frances’ beliefs in what life in America holds for them? What services and supports helped the Hendersons take care of their family? Are these resources available in your community? What other factors contributed to their success?
- What are the key employment and family support issues presented in *Roosevelt's America*? What were the key challenges faced by the family? What services could assist families in similar circumstances in your community?
- If you had the opportunity to advise employers, labor leaders, or community stakeholders in your neighborhood, what would you ask these groups to do to help low-wage workers and their struggling families – especially those who are recent immigrants? You may want to focus on employment, job training, health care, housing, education, and helping families to build financial assets.

Employers: \_\_\_\_\_

Community Stakeholders: \_\_\_\_\_

Labor Leaders: \_\_\_\_\_

- What do you predict will happen next to this family? What suggestions do you have that will help the family to improve its income and assets?

## OPTION 2: Budget and Savings Plan

### Audience: Neighborhood Residents

In *Rosevelt's America*, Roosevelt Henderson comes to the United States as a political refugee. In the film, Roosevelt says that he came “straight from Africa to America to improve my life.” He also says that America is not a “land of milk and honey.” Instead, you must be willing to work. Comparing Africa to America, he says, “In Africa, there is no middle class. If you are down, you are down. And there is no way you’re going to get up until it’s the end of your life. But here [in America], you work here, you earn the money.” He goes on to say, “You pay your bills. You’ve got a small savings.” Thus, Roosevelt believes in hard work, earning an income, paying his bills, and saving money as ways to make his life and that of his family better.

From the story, we don’t know whether the Hendersons have a budget. Somehow, we think they do! The following activity will help you to develop a budget and a savings plan. Setting aside money in a savings account on a regular basis will help you to increase your financial assets and that of your family.

### Instructions

**Creating a budget is the first step to achieving financial security.** It is important in helping you to meet your goals, manage your money, set aside funds for a savings account, and stay out of debt. A budget can help you to make decisions about what you really need and what would just be “nice to have” if you had money to spare.

A **savings plan** can help you pay for unexpected expenses due to an emergency or save money for a special vacation. Even more important, saving money can help you achieve long term goals such as buying a home, helping your children attend college, and enjoying a secure retirement. It helps you to increase your assets to build a strong financial future for yourself and your family.

- 1. First things first: create a budget.** The best way to create a budget is to estimate your monthly take home income and expenses. Use the following chart, **My Family’s Budget/Savings Worksheet**, to calculate how much money you make and how much you spend in an average month. Review your expenses and make any adjustments you think are needed so that it can be a realistic monthly spending plan (budget) for you and your family. Take the chart home with you and use it to begin a discussion with your family about the benefits of following a budget, saving money, and building a financially-sound future.
- 2. Start a monthly savings plan.** Review the realistic budget you’ve created with your income and expenses. How much do you have left that you could put in a savings account? Go through each expense line again and think about where you could spend less. Do these changes help you to save money? Are these changes

something you can do? Discuss these changes with your family so that everyone is committed to the same goal. At the bottom of your worksheet, write your monthly savings goal. If you're paid twice monthly, divide it in two. Contribute to your savings FIRST – put this money into a savings account as soon as you receive your paycheck.

- 3. Monitor your spending.** Track all purchases and payments. Record all cash transactions in a small notebook you carry with you and save all receipts for review. Do these payments and purchases fit within your budget? If not, what expenses can you cut? Remember to ask yourself what you need versus what would be nice to have.
- 4. Review your progress,** comparing your actual spending to your budget and savings plan. Are you on track? Are you meeting your savings goal? If not, identify spending habits and activities that may require changing.
- 5. Make changes.** Modify your expenses so you can reach your long-range financial goals. Continue to keep a monthly budget and savings plan. Don't be discouraged if you can't get on track right away. Learning to manage your money, follow a budget, and save on a monthly basis takes time. If you find you're not saving as much as you'd hoped, review your budget and find other ways to reduce your expenses. Resume your savings plan.

**What's next?** What other activities could help you save money and increase your financial assets? Consider the following:

- When you're ready to file your taxes, find a free tax service that can help you to keep all the money you deserve. This may include applying for an Earned Income Tax Credit (refundable tax credit) or Child Tax Credit.
- Find out about free financial literacy workshops in your community and sign up!
- Investigate different types of savings accounts: regular bank savings accounts, money market accounts, or certificates of deposit; credit unions (possibly where you work); Individual Development Accounts.
- Does your employer offer a retirement savings plan? If not, does a Roth IRA make sense to you?
- Beware of predatory lenders and credit card scams.

<b>My Family's Budget/Savings Worksheet</b>	
<b>Monthly Income:</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Salary/Wages (after taxes)	
Social Security Income:	
Other Income:	
<b>Total Income</b>	

<b>Monthly Expenses - Housing:</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Rent/Mortgage:	
Property Taxes:	
Heat/Electricity:	
Water/Garbage:	
Telephone:	
Cable/Internet:	
Maintenance/Repairs:	
Miscellaneous:	
<b>Subtotal</b>	

<b>Monthly Expenses - Insurance and Medical:</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Car Insurance:	
Home Insurance:	
Health & Dental Insurance:	
Medical Expenses:	
Dental Expenses:	
Miscellaneous:	
<b>Subtotal</b>	

<b>Monthly Expenses - Children, Household, and Food:</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Child Care:	
School/Education:	
Groceries:	
Eating Out:	
Household Supplies:	
Clothing:	
Miscellaneous:	
<b>Subtotal</b>	

<b>Monthly Expenses - Other:</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Debt Payments (credit card, loans)	
Entertainment:	
Transportation (bus, car loan, gas, repairs)	
Education/Job Training:	
Newspapers/Magazines:	
Personal Services:	
Gifts:	
Charity/Faith-based Giving:	

Money sent to family in homeland:	
Miscellaneous:	
<b>Subtotal</b>	

<b>Total, All Expenses</b>	
<b>Balance (Total Income Minus Total Expenses)</b>	

<b>MONTHLY SAVINGS GOAL</b>	
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Making Connections Media Outreach Initiative (MCMOI) campaigns are managed by Outreach Extensions, a national consulting firm that specializes in comprehensive, high-profile educational and community outreach campaigns for media projects. For more information and community-use materials for these important programs, please visit the MCMOI Web site at [www.aecfmediaoutreach.org/](http://www.aecfmediaoutreach.org/)

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