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# EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET: The Life and Work of Piri Thomas

For more information, please  
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Director

Outreach Extensions

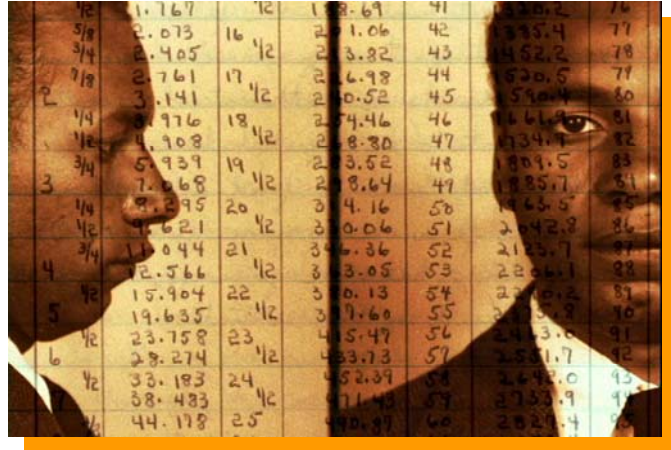
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**Airing April 6,  
2004 on PBS**  
(check local listings for  
confirmation)



An incendiary mix of documentary, poetry, storytelling, drama, and performance, **EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET** explores the life and work of Piri Thomas, the 75-year-old Afro-Cuban-Puerto Rican author of the classic autobiographical novel, *Down These Mean Streets* (1967). The film traces Thomas' path from childhood to manhood in New York City's Spanish Harlem, El Barrio, from the 1930s through the 1960s: his parents' immigrant experience, home life during the Great Depression, membership in barrio youth gangs, his struggle to come to terms with his mixed-racial identity, travels as a teenage merchant marine, his heroin addiction, his notorious armed robbery of a Greenwich Village nightclub, his six years spent in prison, and his emergence as a writer.

Thomas' coming-of-age story is counter-pointed with verité scenes of his on-going work of 45 years as an educator and activist empowering marginalized and incarcerated youths. A stylized, genre-spanning production, **EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET** includes rare archival footage and still photographs, and provocative mixed-media artwork, as it examines Thomas' use of creative expression as a means of confronting poverty, racism, violence, and isolation. Pulsating with an original Latin jazz score, **EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET** is a riveting portrait of a life lived through struggle, self-discovery, and transformation.

Airing April 6, 2004, **EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET** is produced by When In Doubt Productions, Inc. in association with the Independent Television Service (ITVS) and Latino Public Broadcasting with major funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

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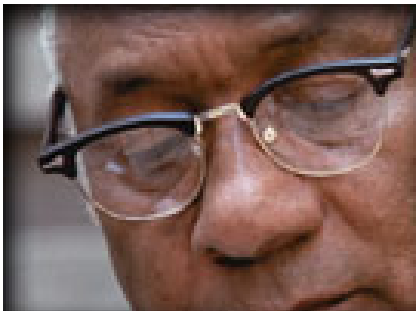
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More people are leaving prisons across the country to return to their families and communities than at any other time in our history. Nationally, over 600,000 individuals will be released from state and federal prisons this year, a fourfold increase over the past two decades. From a number of perspectives, the issue of how people fare after they exit the prison gates has received renewed attention. Many will have difficulty managing the most basic ingredients for successful reintegration—reconnecting with jobs, housing, and their families, and accessing needed substance abuse and health care treatment.

**EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET** is one of the documentaries featured under the umbrella effort called The Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign. The campaign will expand public awareness and dialogue, provide media-based resources, and work in partnership with key organizations engaged in local initiatives to strengthen families and neighborhoods. The campaign will facilitate discussion and decision making about solution-based reentry programs that foster public safety and support healthy communities.



Critical to the success of the campaign will be its focus on issues that are of primary concern to policy leaders, faith- and community-based organizations, and public television stations; and that can lead to desired outcomes. Public safety gains are typically measured in terms of reduced recidivism. Reintegration outcomes would include increased participation in social institutions such as the labor force, families, communities, schools, and religious organizations. Both financial and social benefits are associated with successful reentry.

Outreach resources for **EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET** include VHS copies for screening events, along with a discussion guide. Additional online resources, including streamed video, can be found on the Reentry Web site ([www.reentrymediaoutreach.org](http://www.reentrymediaoutreach.org)). Local PBS stations in The Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Making Connections* sites can apply for outreach grants.

The REENTRY NATIONAL MEDIA OUTREACH CAMPAIGN is funded by a generous grant from



The Annie E. Casey Foundation