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Freedom Riders film, PBS series honored with Peabody Award

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ST. PETERSBURG (May 25, 2012) – Ray Arsenault, the John Hope Franklin Professor of Southern History at the USF St. Petersburg Florida Studies Program, was in New York City for the Peabody Awards this week as part of the team that produced the PBS documentary Freedom Riders.

The film, based on Arsenault's book *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, was part of the PBS TV series *American Experience*, which won a Peabody Award for 2011. The documentary was one of three films honored under the banner of *American Experience*. The Peabody awards are given each year by the University of Georgia Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication. It is considered the oldest award in electronic media and one of the most prestigious.

The awards were distributed during ceremonies Monday at the Waldorf Astoria in New York. Among the 38 recipients were the CNN, the BBC, HBO, The Colbert Report and Austin City Limits.

"I felt so privileged to join the *American Experience* producers and documentary film makers at the Peabody Awards ceremony," Arsenault said. "The 38 awardees included some of the finest and most courageous journalists in the world, ranging from investigative journalists to war correspondents to documentary film makers. Meeting them and viewing the samples of their work shown during the awards ceremony was both inspiring and humbling."

Arsenault's 2006 book is a harrowing account of one of the most important events in the Civil Rights Movement when some 200 volunteers, black and white, challenged segregation laws by traveling by bus in 1961 from Washington, D.C., through the Deep South, facing down hatred and violence along the way.

The documentary based on Arsenault's book, directed by Stanley Nelson, also won three Emmy Awards and was featured on the Oprah Winfrey Show.

A specialist in the political, social, and environmental history of the American South, Arsenault has also taught at the University of Minnesota, Brandeis University, the University of Chicago and at the Universite d'Angers, in France, where he was a Fulbright Lecturer in 1984-85.

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