

# When Cotton Blossoms

The Inspiring Life & Legacy of Dr. Laurence C. Jones

## Synopsis

In the spring of 1909, a young man named **Laurence Jones** stepped off the train in Braxton and walked into the piney woods of rural Mississippi. Carrying only a few clean shirts, a Bible, a couple of textbooks, his diploma and \$1.65, he had little more than a dream and simple faith in following God's call.

Against all odds — including racism, tornadoes, financial woes and persecution — he succeeded in starting a school to educate the sons and daughters of impoverished sharecroppers: **The Piney Woods Country Life School**. Exactly 100 years later, Dr. Jones' inspiring story and enduring legacy are finally celebrated on film using an artistic blend of archival and reenacted imagery.

## Background

Ever since **Director Scott Magie** read about the life of Dr. Jones, he has had an unrelenting passion to see his story told on film. Originally scripted as a dramatic feature film, the format changed when he was asked by The Piney Woods School to submit a proposal for a short documentary to be shown at the Mississippi school's Centennial Anniversary celebration in the Autumn of 2009. Magie's proposal was accepted, but he had just a few short months to complete the project. In addition to never seen archival footage, the documentary would feature imagery reenacted by students, faculty and staff families and recordings by the school's **Cotton Blossoms Singers**. With graduation just a few weeks away, production began in earnest.

## Production

Years of research and months of preparation culminated in a single week of film production on location in Mississippi. The soundtrack featuring the Cotton Blossoms Singers was recorded at the new state-of-the-art recording studio at **Delta State University**. Most filming took place at the Piney Woods campus as students, faculty and staff helped reenact various scenes around the farm as they took on the roles of early students, sharecroppers, millworkers and more.

The production crew traveled to **Small Town Mississippi** at the Forestry and Agriculture Museum in Jackson for many of the interior locations like Webster's sawmill, the post office and Uncle Ed's home. The crew also filmed scenes in a rustic church in Louisville and an old train depot in Greenwood. The week finished with the commencement ceremonies for the Centennial Class of 2009.

With shooting wrapped, the editing team spent the next several months combining the new footage with archival elements, including the famous 1954 episode of **This Is Your Life** with **Ralph Edwards** and a 1972 interview with Dr. Jones.

The entire project was a result of the enthusiasm, dedication and talents of **The Piney Woods School**; **The Flipbook Moving Picture Company** of East Lansing, MI; **Distant Lands Entertainment** of Greenville, MS; **The Lighthouse Film Company** of Wilmington, NC; and the generosity of the **Jessie Ball duPont Foundation**.



pineywoods.org

PineyWoodsMovie.com



flipbookpictures.com

# When Cotton Blossoms

The Inspiring Life & Legacy of Dr. Laurence C. Jones

## Profiles

### **Writer/Director/Producer/Editor: SCOTT A. MAGIE**

Since learning of Dr. Jones a decade ago, Mr. Magie has dreamed of capturing his legacy on film. An artistic and entertaining storyteller, he has earned three national Telly Awards and a Best Screenplay award for *No Limit*.

### **Executive Producer: DR. REGINALD T.W. NICHOLS**

An educator for 24 years, Dr. Nichols earned degrees from Gordon College, Fuller Theological Seminary and the University of San Francisco. He now serves as president of The Piney Woods School.

### **Producer/ 2nd Unit Director: JAMES MATHEWS**

A Mississippi native, Mr. Mathews has produced documentaries about Myanmar, Thailand & Bhutan, as well as several feature films, including *Beyond the Forest*.

### **Producer/Coordinator: HEATHER MATHEWS**

In her seven years with Distant Lands Entertainment, Ms. Mathews has worked on documentaries, videos and films, including *The Obsessed*, *Beyond the Forest* and *A Stone's Throw*.

### **Producer/Cinematographer: BRAD WALKER**

During his 17 years in the industry, Mr. Walker has photographed over 100 productions, including nine feature films, and has garnered many honors along the way, including 23 national Telly Awards.

### **Music Director: SHAWN AUSTIN**

Mr. Austin is the current director of The Piney Woods School Cotton Blossoms Singers, who are responsible for the archival and present-day recordings featured on the film's soundtrack.

### **Young Laurence Jones: BELLO S. LUBIN**

Born in France, Mr. Lubin is a tri-lingual actor who has been featured in various television roles.

### **Narrator/Uncle Ed Taylor: DEXTER WHITLEY**

Piney Woods' Assistant Head of School, Mr. Whitley holds degrees from Tougaloo College and Jackson State University.

### **Older Laurence Jones: JR HARRIS**

Mr. Harris' recent appearances include *The Year One* directed by Harold Ramis and *Leaves of Grass*.

### **Barefoot Boy: EDDIE KOULEH**

Debuting in this film, Liberian-born Mr. Kouleh is a Piney Woods student in the class of 2012.

## The Piney Woods School

Located on an expansive 2,000-acre campus, The Piney Woods School is the flagship of the four remaining historically African-American boarding schools in the United States. With thousands of alumni who have come from all over the world, The Piney Woods School has a great mission: to continue to fulfill the legacy began 100 years ago by Dr. Laurence Jones and to continue to train young men and women leaders who are educationally astute, morally responsible, civically engaged, socially equipped, technologically proficient and globally perceptive. But most of all, the school seeks to train leaders who have hearts that are full of compassion, energy and faith.

