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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

PARIS IS BURNING

1990; 76 MINUTES; COLOR

DIRECTED AND PRODUCED BY JENNIE LIVINGSTON

They call themselves the Children. They are messengers, welfare recipients, salespeople and prostitutes. They see themselves as "Dynasty's" Krystle and Blake Carrington. The Children live in two worlds: the world of poor Blacks and Latinos in New York City, and the world of "Realness," where through costume and competition, dance and inspired performance, they imitate -- and transcend -- the powerful fantasy media that exclude them.

The members of this group of roughly five hundred New Yorkers range in age from fifteen to fifty. They are fluent in the ideas of Dallas, Dynasty, and Vogue, and convert their love of the media into rich improvisational language and culture. PARIS IS BURNING, a seventy-six minute documentary film, reveals members of the group as they meet along the piers in lower Manhattan and at nightclubs. Here they exchange news and sex and practice the competitive dance called VOGUING -- recently popularized by music idol Madonna -- which combines the acrobatics of break-dancing with moves based on fashion models' poses.

On the street or in discos the Children find the HOUSE that is right for them. The House of Chanel, the House of Saint Laurent, the House of Ninja, and about twenty other such groups form the backbone of this explosive subculture. Each House is led by a MOTHER, a man who serves as the group's spiritual and organizational leader. As many have been rejected by their real parents and families because of their homosexuality, members of the Houses look to each other for emotional support and sometimes for money.

People in a House don't necessarily live together, but gather on the street, in each others' apartments, and at the monthly fashion

BALLS. Here, members of rival Houses compete for trophies and cash prizes. Imitating a fashion show's divisions of sportswear, eveningwear, etc., the Children divide the balls into CATEGORIES. Some of the more popular categories are Face, Model's Body, High Fashion Eveningwear, Performance (voguing) and REALNESS. The Realness category lies at the heart of what makes a ball tense, dramatic, and meaningful. In Realness, "femme queens" (also called "drag queens") try to pass for real women, while "butch queens" (the masculine gays) compete to duplicate the look and walk of a 'real' -- or heterosexual -- man.

Realness is a category which encompasses all social classes: in "Bangee Realness" contestants imitate urban toughs, young men and women who hang out on the street and terrorize the neighborhood. In "Schoolboy/Schoolgirl Realness," femme and butch queens wear letter sweaters and loafers and carry books; while in "Executive Realness," ballgoers wear well-cut business suits and carry briefcases well-stocked with plane tickets, American Express cards, and copies of The Wall Street Journal.

By "walking" in the Balls, the members of Houses celebrate their own ability to re-create themselves in the images of a society which excludes, and more often, ignores them. Ball performers don't want to 'fit in' to social and sexual stereotypes, nor are they making fun of them. PARIS IS BURNING takes an audience into a gay subculture in New York; what the audience finds there is a people's profound will to survive. This is a group that converts images of fashion and advertising into its own version of soul, into a world of creativity, sustenance and vitality.

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CONTACTS:

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BARRY SWIMAR

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PARIS IS BURNING: PRODUCER, FUNDING SOURCES, AVAILABLE MARKETS

PRODUCER:

Off-White Productions, Inc.
322 Second Avenue #2
New York, NY 10003 USA
(212) 505-0591 Jennie Livingston: Director/Producer
(212) 505-9748 Barry Swimar: Co-Producer

CO-PRODUCERS

Δ WNYC-Television New York (Channel 31)
Δ BBC-Television, London, for the program "Arena"

NEW YORK GRANTS:

Δ Edelman Family Fund
Δ New York Foundation for the Arts
Δ Art Matters, Inc.
Δ Paul Robeson Fund
Δ New York Council on the Arts
Δ Private Individual Donations

GRANTING ORGANIZATIONS OUTSIDE OF NEW YORK

Δ National Endowment for the Arts
Δ Jerome Foundation
Δ Private Individual Donations

PARIS IS BURNING IS AVAILABLE IN ALL MARKETS, EXCEPT:

~~Δ Public Television in the United States~~
Δ Television in the United Kingdom

PARIS IS BURNING: PROJECT PERSONNEL

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

DAVIS LACY backed PARIS IS BURNING when he was head of TV Programming at WNYC-TV. Mr. Lacy worked at PBS for several years, and recently produced the award-winning documentary series EYES ON THE PRIZE.

NIGEL FINCH produced the TV version of PARIS IS BURNING for the BBC-TELEVISION show ARENA. He has directed ARENA segments about Robert Mapplethorpe, Graham Greene, and Kenneth Anger.

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER

JENNIE LIVINGSTON graduated from Yale in 1983. Since moving to New York, she has worked as a photographer, studied film at the NYU summer program, worked on Laurie Anderson's film HOME OF THE BRAVE, and assisted on Alan J. Pakula's feature ORPHANS. She began work on "Paris is Burning" during the summer of 1985 after she met some boys who were voguing in Washington Square Park.

CO-PRODUCER

BARRY SWIMAR got his M.F.A. in photography from Yale, and photographs people. He also works in film and video, most notably for Mediaworks, a New York film and video production company, and recently on a film project of his own about countertenors.

EDITOR

JONATHAN OPPENHEIM was the associate editor of Martin Bell's STREETWISE. He edited Martin Bell's A MATTER OF TRUST: BILLY JOEL IN RUSSIA, cut an as yet to be released feature, FROZEN ASSETS by Nicolas Hondrogen, and edited several segments of the ABC science special OMNI.

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

PAUL GIBSON has shot numerous documentary and dramatic features, including AS SEEN ON TV, a PBS "Live from Off Center" production by performance artist Bill Irwin; SWEET INSPIRATION, an AFI-funded film about the gospel singer Cissy Houston; and Steve Ning's FRECKLED RICE, an AFI-funded feature and award-winner at the Mannheim film festival.

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ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS

CLAIRE GOODMAN has produced numerous radio and television shows for the BBC and for Channel 4 in England, including *TSIAMELO -- A PLACE OF GOODNESS*; *THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE*; *STREET EVANGELISTS*; and *BEATLEMANIA*. She has lived and worked in New York for six years.

MEG MC LAGAN is currently working towards her doctorate in the Ethnographic Film and Video Program at New York University's Department of Anthropology. She is currently directing a video project on three Tibetan monks in New York.

ADDITIONAL EDITING

KATE DAVIS has worked on documentaries by Ross McElwee and Frederick Wiseman. In 1987 Davis directed and co-edited *GIRLTALK*, a feature-length documentary about the lives of three abused teenagers in Boston.

SECOND UNIT PHOTOGRAPHY MAYRSE ALBERTI

ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY ALYSON DENNY, WILLIAM MEGALOS, FRANK PRINZI

SOUND RECORDING JUDY KARP, CATHERINE CALDERON, SCOTT BREINDEL, ETIENNE SAURET, JT TAKAGI, JAMES ADNER

PRODUCTION MANAGER NATALIE HILL

PRODUCTION COORDINATOR ELISE PETTUS

OUR ADVISORS HAVE INCLUDED:

MARTIN BELL, film director, (Streetwise)

DAVID BYRNE, musician/artist/filmmaker, *The Talking Heads*
the late KEITH HARING, painter

WERNER HERZOG, film director (Fitzcarraldo, Aguirre)

DAVID LEAVITT, writer (Family Dancing, The Lost Language of Cranes)

FRAN LEBOWITZ, writer (Metropolitan Life)

MEN OF ALL COLORS TOGETHER and **GAY MEN OF AFRICAN DESCENT (GMAD)** New York social/political groups

PAUL MARTINO, agent, International Creative Management

ESTHER NEWTON, professor of anthropology, SUNY Purchase

IDA PANICELLI, editor of Artforum magazine

ALAN J. PAKULA, film director (Klute, Presumed Innocent)

VITO RUSSO, film critic, author of The Celluloid Closet

JOHN WATERS, film director (*Pink Flamingos*, *Hairspray*)

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT PARIS IS BURNING:

"STARTLING AND FUNNY"

-JAY SCOTT, TORONTO GLOBE AND MAIL

"ONE OF THE BEST DOCUMENTARIES TO APPEAR IN LOS ANGELES THIS YEAR....SOMETIMES, YOU CAN SEE, ART DOES NOT MERELY IMITATE LIFE; IT GRABS IT BY THE COLLAR AND SLAPS IT AROUND"

-HARRY SHEEHAN, LOS ANGELES READER

"A DYNAMITE DOCUMENTARY"

-KEVIN THOMAS, LOS ANGELES TIMES

"VOGUING IN ITS PROPER CONTEXT"

-JOHN HOWELL, ARTFORUM INTERNATIONAL

"PARIS IS BURNING IS THAT RARE FIND: A DOCUMENTARY THAT COMBINES DRAMA, SOCIOLOGY, CULTURE AND HISTORY INTO A POWERFUL, PASSIONATE AND ENTERTAINING PACKAGE"

-KARL SOEHNLEIN, OUTWEEK, NEW YORK

"THIS IS NOT THE BALL AS CINDERELLA KNEW IT"

-HUGH HEBERT, THE GUARDIAN, LONDON



