

AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PRESENTS *THE ABOLITIONISTS*,  
PREMIERING JANUARY 2013 IN  
CONJUNCTION WITH THE 150<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION

Three-Part Series Tells the Intertwined Stories of Five Heroes of the *Original* Civil Rights Movement



Radicals. Agitators. Troublemakers. Liberators. Called by many names, the abolitionists tore the nation apart in order to create a more perfect union. Men and women, black and white, Northerners and Southerners, poor and wealthy, these passionate anti-slavery activists fought body and soul in the most important civil rights crusade in American history. What began as a pacifist movement fueled by persuasion and prayer became a fiery and furious struggle that forever changed the nation. Bringing to life the intertwined stories of **Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, Angelina Grimké, Harriet Beecher Stowe and John Brown**, *The Abolitionists* takes place during some of the most violent and contentious

decades in American history, amid white-hot religious passions that set souls on fire, and bitter debates over the meaning of the Constitution and the nature of race. It reveals how the movement shaped history by exposing the fatal flaw of a republic founded on liberty for some and bondage for others, setting the nation on a collision course. In the face of personal risks — beatings, imprisonment, even death — abolitionists held fast to their cause, laying the civil rights groundwork for the future and raising weighty constitutional and moral questions that are with us still.

Vividly bringing to life the epic struggles of the men and women who ended slavery, *The Abolitionists* interweaves drama with traditional documentary storytelling. Directed by Rob Rapley, *The Abolitionists* stars Richard Brooks, Neal Huff, Jeanine Serralles, Kate Lyn Sheil, and T. Ryder Smith, and will premiere as a special presentation in three parts on **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**, Tuesdays, January 8th, 15th, and 22nd, 2013 from 9:00-10:00 p.m. ET on PBS (check local listings).

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## **Part One: 1820s - 1838**

Part One introduces the five principal characters, whose intertwined lives and shared beliefs come together to form a powerful movement that forever changed the nation. Angelina Grimké, the outspoken daughter of a wealthy Charleston, South Carolina plantation family, abandons her life of privilege and moves to the North, becoming a persuasive and authentic public speaker against slavery.

Frederick Douglass, a young slave growing up in Maryland, becomes hopeful when he hears about the abolitionists and their push to end slavery. William Lloyd Garrison finds his life's purpose in the crusade against slavery, founding the newspaper *The Liberator*, which becomes a powerful voice for the movement. Harriet Beecher Stowe witnesses the brutality of slavery in her first trip to the South, the searing memory of which will change her forever and impact her greatest work. And John Brown, galvanized by the murder of an anti-slavery activist, devotes the rest of his life to the cause. By the end of Part One, the growing abolitionist movement finds itself in disarray. Increasing violence raises doubts as to the efficacy of its pacifist tactics. But the fatal weakness in the Union has been exposed, and the nation is on a course towards the greatest crisis in its history.

## **Part Two: 1838 - 1854**

As Part Two begins, Frederick Douglass escapes slavery, eventually joining Garrison in the anti-slavery movement. He becomes a powerful orator, reaching tens of thousands more with the publication of his autobiography. When threatened with capture by his former owner, Douglass flees to England, where he experiences life as a free man for the first time. Returning to the U.S. in 1847, he launches his own anti-slavery paper, *The North Star*, causing a rift with his mentor Garrison. John Brown meets with Douglass and reveals his radical plan to raise an army, attack plantations and free the slaves.

Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, following the tragic death of her young son and moved by the plight of slave families being torn apart by the Fugitive Slave Law. A huge bestseller, and then wildly successful on the stage, this most influential work of fiction changes the hearts and minds of millions of Americans by allowing them to see slavery for the first time through the eyes of its victims.

In the spring of 1854, a fugitive slave held in Boston's city jail becomes a focal point for both pro- and anti-slavery advocates. Angry Bostonians attempt to free him, but President Franklin Pierce, an ardent Southern sympathizer, sends in the military to transport him to a ship in the harbor and back to enslavement.

All the attempts at compromise and resolution have only deepened the divide between North and South, touching off a crisis that is about to careen out of control.

## **Part Three: 1854 - Emancipation and Victory**

Part Three begins as the battle over admitting new territories is at a fever pitch. Kansas is the front line of a bloody battle between pro-slavery and free-soil contingents. John Brown summons Douglass to a secret meeting and reveals his plan to capture Harpers Ferry; Douglass refuses to join him. Brown goes ahead with the raid, is captured and executed, but not before he turns himself into a martyr for the cause.

In 1860, Abraham Lincoln is elected president. The country descends into chaos as Southern states secede. War breaks out. What is almost universally expected to be a quick and bloodless conflict drags on. On September 22, 1862, news breaks that Lincoln will sign the Emancipation Proclamation. For Lincoln, the carnage is unendurable, unless it can be given over to a higher purpose.

On New Years Day 1863, Bostonians gather at two celebrations: Garrison and Stowe attend a concert at the Music Hall; Douglass is at Tremont Temple. At midnight, the crowds erupt with joy when it is announced that Lincoln has emancipated the slaves in rebel territory. Not only are slaves free, but African American men can now enlist in the Union forces. Two of Douglass' sons go to war; even William Lloyd Garrison, the "ultra peace man," allows his first born to sign up.

In December 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment is ratified, banning slavery in all states — forever. For almost four decades, the abolitionists have dedicated their lives to this moment. It is a triumph of perseverance, steadfastness, and in the logic and moral power of a movement that never wavered.

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## About the Cast

**Richard Brooks** (*Frederick Douglass*) is an actor, singer, and director best known for his role as Assistant District Attorney Paul Robinette on the NBC drama *Law & Order*. His television credits include performances as the notorious bounty hunter Jubal Early in Joss Whedon's *Firefly*, and as the iconic Henry McNeil on the Syfy/USA network cult favorite *Good vs. Evil/G vs. E*. Film roles include the arch-villain Judah in *The Crow: City of Angels*, the troubled Babe Brother in the award-winning *To Sleep with Anger*, and the battle tested sergeant OD in the critically acclaimed Vietnam War saga *84 Charlie Mopic*. On stage he originated the role of Hammond Wilkes in the world premiere of August Wilson's *Radio Golf*, written by the late great playwright with Brooks in mind. Upcoming roles include BET's groundbreaking new movie/TV pilot *Being Mary Jane*, as the title character's brother Patrick. Brooks also directed the feature film *Johnny B*, in which he starred, as well as numerous music videos.

**Neal Huff** (*William Lloyd Garrison*) has appeared in films such as *Moonrise Kingdom*, *Meek's Cutoff*, *Cantuckee*, *Why Stop Now?*, *Jack and Diane*, *Vanishing On 7<sup>th</sup> Street*, *Monogamy*, *Motherhood*, *Michael Clayton*, *Stephanie Daley*, *Bernard and Doris*, *The Good Shepherd*, *Dealbreakers*, *The Shovel*, *Hollywood Ending*, *Poster Boy*, *Happy Accidents*, *Big Daddy*, *Love Walked In*, and *The Wedding Banquet*. Television appearances include the role of Michael Steintorf, Chief of Staff to the Mayor on HBO's *The Wire*, and roles in *Fringe*, *John Adams*, *Six Degrees*, *Starved*, *Law and Order* and *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*. His theatre credits include leading roles on Broadway in *Take Me Out*, *The Lion in Winter*, and *The Tempest*. Other recent credits include Will Scheffer's *The Green Book*, *When I Come To Die*, and the world premiere of William Inge's *The Killing*.

**Jeanine Serralles** (*Angelina Grimké*) will be seen in the upcoming Coen Brothers movie, *Inside Llewyn Davis*. Other film and television credits include *All Good Things*, *Two Lovers*, *Across the Universe*, *The Good Wife* and *Sex and the City*. Off-Broadway credits include *Paris Commune*, *Maple and Vine*, *The Maids*, *Stunning*, *The Glass Cage*, *The Misanthrope*, *The Black Eyed* and *Hold Please* (Drama Desk Nomination for Featured Actress). Serralles is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama.

**Kate Lyn Sheil** (*Harriet Beecher Stowe*) has appeared in films such as *Knife Point*, *The Color Wheel*, *Gabi on the Roof in July*, *Green, Silver Bullets*, *You're Next*, *Sun Don't Shine* and *Somebody Up There Likes Me*. She is a graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts.

**T. Ryder Smith** (*John Brown*) has appeared on television in series such as *Nurse Jackie*, *Damages*, *Blue Bloods*, and *Law & Order: SVU*. Film credits include *Happy Tears*, *Brainscan* and *Horrible Child*. On Broadway, he was part of the original company of the Tony Award-winning *War Horse* at Lincoln Center, and appeared opposite Daniel Radcliffe in *Equus*. Other stage work in New York includes work with Playwrights Horizons, Target Margin and the Classical Theatre of Harlem in the world premieres of plays by Sarah Ruhl, David Greenspan, Richard Foreman, Anne Washburn, and Will Eno. He has acted around the country at the Goodman Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, the Center Theatre Group and many others in the world premieres of plays by Charles Mee, Tanya Barfield, Jeffrey Hatcher and Doug Wright. Awards include a Drama Desk Award as part of the three-actor, forty-character play *Lebensraum* Off-Broadway, and a nomination for a Drama Desk Award as Outstanding Solo Performer in Glen Berger's *Underneath the Lintel*. He won a Craig Noel Award for Outstanding Lead Performance in the premiere production of John Strand's *Lincolnesque*. He supplies voices for the cartoon series *The Venture Brothers*, for the videogame *Bioshock* and for many audiobooks. He works with the traveling theatre group Theatre of War, collaborates with Christopher McElroen and his theatre group The American Vicarious, and appears in the annual Bloomsday readings of James Joyce's *Ulysses* on WBAI Radio.

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## About the Participants

**Carol Berkin** is Presidential Professor of History at Baruch College and a member of the history faculty of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Her publications include *Civil War Wives: The Life and Times of Angelina Grimké Weld, Varina Howell Davis, and Julia Dent Grant* and *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence*.

**David W. Blight** is a Professor of American History at Yale University and Director of the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance & Abolition. He has written numerous books and articles including *A Slave No More: Two Men Who Escaped to Freedom, Including Their Narratives of Emancipation*. Blight is also a frequent book reviewer and has written many articles on abolitionism, American historical memory, and African American intellectual and cultural history.

**Lois Brown** is the Class of 1958 Distinguished Professor at Wesleyan University and has a joint appointment in African American Studies and English. Brown has lectured widely and published articles on African American literature, women's writing, early American education, and African American history and religion. Brown's biography, *Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins: Black Daughter of the Revolution*, published in 2008, has been hailed as "the definitive Hopkins biography for decades to come."

**Erica Armstrong Dunbar** is an Associate Professor of History with joint appointments in Black American Studies and Women's Studies at the University of Delaware. Her first book, *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City*, positioned her as a scholar of early African American Women's history. In 2011, Professor Armstrong Dunbar was appointed the first director of the Program in African American History at the Library Company of Philadelphia. Professor Dunbar's newest book project is *Never Caught: The Life of Oney Judge Staines*.

**R. Blakeslee Gilpin** is Assistant Professor of History at the University of South Carolina and the author of *John Brown Still Lives!: America's Long Reckoning With Violence, Equality, and Change*. Gilpin's work has appeared in *The Boston Globe*, *The American Scholar*, *The New England Quarterly*, *Slavery and Abolition*, *Biography: an Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, *The Journal of American Studies* and *The Journal of Mississippi History*.

**Joan D. Hedrick**, Charles A. Dana Professor of History at Hartford's Trinity College, received a Pulitzer Prize in 1995 for her biography of Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life*. A member of the Trinity faculty since 1980, Hedrick holds a bachelor's degree from Vassar College and a doctorate from Brown University.

**Tony Horwitz** worked for many years as a reporter, first in Indiana and then during a decade overseas in Australia, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, mostly covering wars and conflicts as a foreign correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*. After returning to the U.S., he won the Pulitzer Prize for national reporting and worked as a staff writer for *The New Yorker*. He is the author of *Midnight Rising: John Brown and the Raid That Sparked the Civil War*. Four of his books have been national and *New York Times* bestsellers: *A Voyage Long and Strange*, *Blue Latitudes*, *Confederates in the Attic*, and *Baghdad Without A Map*.

**Julie Roy Jeffrey** is Professor of History at Goucher College in Baltimore, where she has also served as Chair of the History Department. Her publications include the books *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism* and *Converting the West: A Biography of Narcissa Whitman*. She also co-authored and co-edited *The American People: The History of a Nation and a Society*. Jeffrey recently served as the Fulbright Chair in American Studies at Odense University in Denmark and previously received a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship.

**W. Caleb McDaniel** is Assistant Professor of History at Rice University in Houston, where he teaches graduate courses in nineteenth-century American history and social and cultural history methods. The author of numerous articles and essays, McDaniel's first book, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform*, will be published by Louisiana State University Press in 2013.

**Manisha Sinha** is Associate Professor of Afro-American Studies and History at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and author of *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina*. She is the co-editor of both volumes of *African American Mosaic: A Documentary History from the African Slave Trade to the Twenty First Century* as well as *Contested Democracy: Politics, Ideology and Race in American History*. She is currently at work on a history of abolitionism.

**John Stauffer** is Professor of English and African American Studies at Harvard University and the author of *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race*, and *GIANTS: The Parallel Lives of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln*. Currently, he is completing a book with Sally Jenkins on radical interracialism and Unionism in Civil War era Mississippi.

**James Brewer Stewart** is James Wallace Professor of History Emeritus at Macalester College. A leading historian of abolition, he is the author of numerous works on the subject, including *Abolitionist Politics and the Coming of the Civil War*, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, *William Lloyd Garrison and the Challenge of Emancipation*, and *Liberty's Hero: Wendell Phillips*.

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## About the Filmmakers

Written, Produced, and Directed by	Rob Rapley
Edited by	John Chimples and Aljernon Tunsil
Cinematography by	Tim Cragg
Executive Producer	Sharon Grimberg

**Rob Rapley (Writer/ Producer/Director)** recently received a Writers Guild Award, a Western Heritage Award, and a Western Writers of America Award for *Wyatt Earp*, which aired as part of the **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE** series. His other work for **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE** includes *The Greely Expedition*, *Buffalo Bill*, and *We Shall Remain: Trail of Tears*. He previously produced two episodes of the acclaimed PBS series, *The Supreme Court*, which *The Boston Globe* called “as good as it gets when it comes to history on public television.”

**Sharon Grimberg (Executive Producer for *The Abolitionists*)** plays a key role in the origination, development, acquisition, and editorial oversight of films for **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**. Since she joined the staff in 2000, films made for the series have won more than forty honors including Peabody Awards, Primetime Emmys, Writers Guild Awards and an Oscar nomination. Grimberg was the executive producer of *We Shall Remain*, a multi-platform mini-series for **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE** that looks at U.S. history from a Native American perspective. She also served as supervising producer of *They Made America*, a series on innovation based on award-winning writer Sir Harold Evans’ book of the same title. Previously, Grimberg was a writer for CNN Headline News. She did her undergraduate work at the London School of Economics and received an M.A. from the University of Michigan.

**Mark Samels (Executive Producer for **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**)** was named executive producer of **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**, PBS’s flagship history series, in 2003. Under Samels’ leadership, the series has been honored with nearly every industry award, including the Peabody, Primetime Emmys, the duPont-Columbia Journalism Award, Writers Guild Awards, Oscar nominations, and Sundance Film Festival Audience and Grand Jury Awards. Samels also serves on the Board of Governors at the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. Prior to joining WGBH, Samels worked as an independent documentary filmmaker, an executive producer for several U.S. public television stations, and as a producer for the first co-production between Japanese and American television. A native of Wisconsin, he is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

## About AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Television's most-watched history series, **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE** celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2013. The series has been hailed as "peerless" (*Wall Street Journal*), "the most consistently enriching program on television" (*Chicago Tribune*), and "a beacon of intelligence and purpose" (*Houston Chronicle*). On air and online, the series brings to life the incredible characters and epic stories that have shaped America's past and present. Acclaimed by viewers and critics alike, **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE** documentaries have been honored with every major broadcast award, including 30 Emmy Awards, four duPont-Columbia Awards, and 16 George Foster Peabody Awards, one most recently for the series represented by *Freedom Riders*, *Triangle Fire*, and *Stonewall Uprising*.

Exclusive corporate funding for **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE** is provided by Liberty Mutual Insurance. Major funding provided by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. Major funding for *The Abolitionists* provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities: Exploring the Human Endeavor. Additional Funding provided by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations: Dedicated to Strengthening America's Future Through Education; the Yawkey Foundations; Members of the Documentary Investment Group, The Gretchen Stone Cook Charitable Foundation, Robert & Marjie Kargman and Gloria & Burton Rose; and by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and Public Television Viewers. **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE** is produced for PBS by WGBH Boston.

## The Abolitionist Map of America

Available both as an iPhone app and interactive website, the Abolitionist Map of America makes clear that the legacy of the abolitionists' long struggle resides not in the remote past, but in the living present. Featuring walking tours of the key abolitionist strongholds of Boston, Cincinnati and Philadelphia, as well as the formerly slave-holding city of Charleston, the map will explore important moments, characters, and locations connected to the story of the abolitionist movement. In partnership with hundreds of museums, libraries, archives and member stations, **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE** will populate the map with photographs, documents, and video clips from *The Abolitionists* to illustrate how the anti-slavery movement left indelible marks on local communities. Users will also be able to upload their own photos, videos and audio files to the map. The Abolitionist Map of America will be available in December 2012.

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