

## AMERICAN EXPERIENCE Presents Encore Broadcast of *The Abolitionists*

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

Parts One and Two air Tuesday, July 7, 2015, 8:00-10:00 p.m. ET

Part Three airs Tuesday, July 14, 2015, 8:00-9:00 p.m. ET



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.

First broadcast in 2013, *The Abolitionists* will have an encore play of Parts One and Two on Tuesday, July 7, 2015, 8:00-10:00 p.m. ET, and Part Three on Tuesday, July 14, 2015, 8:00-9:00 p.m. ET (check local listings) on PBS. 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.

### 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.

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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 firstborn 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 Filmmakers

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

### About AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

For more than twenty-seven years, **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE** has been the nation's most-watched television history series. It has been hailed as "peerless" (*The 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 industry award, including thirty Emmy Awards, four duPont-Columbia Awards, and seventeen George Foster Peabody Awards; the series received an Academy Award® nomination for Best Documentary Feature in 2015 for *Last Days in Vietnam*.

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### 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 explores 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** has populated 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 are also able to upload their own photos, videos, and audio files to the map. Visit the Abolitionist Map of America at [www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/interactive-map/abolitionists-map/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/interactive-map/abolitionists-map/).

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