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Series At-a-Glance

Synopsis

The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. is a six-part, six-hour series that chronicles the full sweep of African American history, from the origins of slavery on the African continent through five centuries of remarkable historic events right up to today—when America has a black president, yet remains a nation deeply divided by race. The series will explore the origins of the people from Africa whose enslavement led to the creation of the African American people, as well as the multiplicity of cultural institutions, political strategies, and religious and social perspectives that African Americans have developed against unimaginable odds. All of these elements define black culture and society in its extraordinarily rich and compelling diversity from slavery to freedom, from the plantation to the White House.

The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross, the 13th and latest documentary film from noted Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr. premieres Tuesdays, October 22, 29 – November 5, 12, 19 and 26, 2013, 8-9 p.m. ET on PBS (check local listings).
Written and presented by Professor Gates, and drawing on some of America’s top historians and heretofore untapped primary sources, the series will guide viewers on an engaging journey across five hundred years and two continents to shed new light on the experience of being an African American. By highlighting the tragedies, triumphs and contradictions of the black experience, viewers of *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* will learn that the African American community, which the black abolitionist Martin R. Delany described as “a nation within a nation,” has never been a uniform entity, and that its members have been actively debating their differences from their first days in this country. Viewers will also learn that the road to freedom for blacks in America was not linear, but instead, like the course of a river, full of loops and eddies, slowing, and occasionally reversing the current of progress.

**Episode One: The Black Atlantic (1500 - 1800)**
Tuesday, October 22, 8-9 p.m.

- *The Black Atlantic* explores the truly global experiences that created the African-American people. Beginning a full century before the first documented “20-and-odd” slaves who arrived at Jamestown, Virginia, the episode portrays the earliest Africans, both slave and free, who arrived on these shores. But the transatlantic slave trade would soon become a vast empire connecting three continents. Through stories of individuals caught in its web, like a 10-year-old girl named Priscilla who was transported from Sierra Leone to South Carolina in the mid-18th century, we trace the emergence of plantation slavery in the American South. The late 18th century saw a global explosion of freedom movements, and *The Black Atlantic* examines what that Era of Revolutions — American, French and Haitian — would mean for African Americans and for slavery in America.

**Episode Two: The Age of Slavery (1800 - 1860)**
Tuesday, October 29, 8-9 p.m.

- *The Age of Slavery* illustrates how black lives changed dramatically in the aftermath of the American Revolution. For free black people in places like Philadelphia, these years were a time of tremendous opportunity. But for most African Americans, this era represented a new nadir. King Cotton fueled the rapid expansion of slavery into new territories, and a Second Middle Passage forcibly relocated African Americans from the Upper South into the Deep South. Yet as slavery intensified, so did resistance. From individual acts to mass rebellions, African Americans demonstrated their determination to undermine and ultimately eradicate slavery in every state in the nation. Courageous individuals, such as Harriet Tubman, Richard Allen and Frederick Douglass, played a crucial role in forcing the issue of slavery to the forefront of national politics, helping to create the momentum that would eventually bring the country to war.

**Episode Three: Into the Fire (1861 - 1896)**
Tuesday, November 5, 8-9 p.m.

- *Into the Fire* examines the most tumultuous and consequential period in African-American history: the Civil War and the end of slavery, and Reconstruction’s thrilling but
tragically brief “moment in the sun.” From the beginning, African Americans were agents of their own liberation — forcing the Union to confront the issue of slavery by fleeing the plantations, and taking up arms to serve with honor in the United States Colored Troops. After Emancipation, African Americans sought to realize the promise of freedom — rebuilding families shattered by slavery; demanding economic, political and civil rights; even winning elected office. Just a few years later, however, an intransigent South mounted a swift and vicious campaign of terror to restore white supremacy and roll back African-American rights. Yet the achievements of Reconstruction would remain very much alive in the collective memory of the African-American community.

Episode Four: *Making a Way Out of No Way (1897 - 1940)*
Tuesday, November 12, 8-9 p.m.

- *Making a Way Out of No Way* portrays the Jim Crow era, when African Americans struggled to build their own worlds within the harsh, narrow confines of segregation. At the turn of the 20th century, a steady stream of African Americans left the South, fleeing the threat of racial violence, and searching for better opportunities in the North and the West. Leaders like Ida B. Wells, W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey organized, offering vastly different strategies to further black empowerment and equality. Yet successful black institutions and individuals were always at risk. At the same time, the ascendance of black arts and culture showed that a community with a strong identity and sense of pride was taking hold in spite of Jim Crow. “The Harlem Renaissance” would not only redefine how America saw African Americans, but how African Americans saw themselves.

Episode Five: *Rise! (1940 - 1968)*
Tuesday, November 19, 8-9 p.m.

- *Rise!* examines the long road to civil rights, when the deep contradictions in American society finally became unsustainable. Beginning in World War II, African Americans who helped fight fascism abroad came home to face the same old racial violence. But this time, mass media — from print to radio and TV — broadcast that injustice to the world, planting seeds of resistance. And the success of black entrepreneurs and entertainers fueled African-American hopes and dreams. In December 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man on a city bus in Montgomery, Alabama, heralding the dawn of a new movement of quiet resistance, with the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as its public face. Before long, masses of African Americans practiced this nonviolent approach at great personal risk to integrate public schools, lunch counters and more. As the civil rights movement scored one historic victory after another, non-violence was still all too often met with violence — until finally, enough was enough. By 1968, Dr. King, the apostle of non-violence, would be assassinated, unleashing a new call for “Black Power” across the country.
Episode Six: *A More Perfect Union (1968 – 2013)*
Tuesday, November 26, 8-9 p.m.

- After 1968, African Americans set out to build a bright new future on the foundation of the civil rights movement’s victories, but a growing class disparity threatened to split the black community in two. As hundreds of African Americans won political office across the country and the black middle class made unprecedented progress, larger economic and political forces isolated the black urban poor in the inner cities, vulnerable to new social ills and an epidemic of incarceration. Yet African Americans of all backgrounds came together to support Illinois’ Senator Barack Obama in his historic campaign for the presidency of the United States. When he won in 2008, many hoped that America had finally transcended race and racism. By the time of his second victory, it was clear that many issues, including true racial equality, remain to be resolved. Now we ask: How will African Americans help redefine the United States in the years to come?

**Educational Outreach**

WNET is launching an ambitious national outreach initiative to extend the impact, utilization, and “life after broadcast” of *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross*, which will include digital educational resources, an educational poster and an educator’s premium. The initiative will also include partnerships with PBS stations across the country, which will produce local broadcasts and host live professional development workshops. Here is a brief description of each component:

- **Digital Educational Resources**- WNET will create six middle and high school lesson plans—one to accompany each episode of the series—to reside on the production website. These lesson plans will adhere to national learning standards and will contain embedded video segments, comprehensive instructions for classroom implementation, printable student handouts, and links to additional online resources. WNET will also create 12 digital learning objects featuring video segments from the series, background information, discussion questions, and tips for utilizing the video in the classroom. All of the digital educational resources created for the project will reside on VITAL, a free digital media resource for educators, which will enable the series to reach educators across the country—and around the world—who might not necessarily be aware of the series or the PBS production website.

- **Poster and Premium**- WNET will create a double-sided classroom poster, featuring images from and information about the series, as well as related resources, related background information and suggested activities to complete with students. WNET will also create an educator’s premium (such as a notebook, pad, or flash drive.) branded with the series name, logo, and relevant web sites.

- **Partnerships with PBS Stations**- 15 PBS stations from across the country will each receive a grant to create at least one broadcast program (either an interstitial or a longer program) detailing the impact of African Americans on local history and host a live
professional development workshop for at least 120 educators, focusing on the series and related content.

**Website**
The *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* website will include video from the series, including all six full episodes for a limited run, as well scenes not included in the films. In addition to video, the website will elaborate on and explore the rich history covered in the series with text, timelines, images, and other multimedia; include a collection of graphics featuring quotations from well-known African-Americans for individuals to share on a number of social media platforms; feature a blog by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. which highlights 100 interesting and unexpected facts from African-American history; and invite viewers to submit and browse stories about and reactions to significant moments in history. The website will offer visitors the chance to personalize their experience and share series content on social platforms. The anchor of the series’ presence on social media platforms will be Professor Gates himself—sharing content and behind-the-scenes photos from his own accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Fans on social media will be offered early-access to particular content and opportunities to connect with Gates and scholars from the program via live online social viewing events.

**Companion Book**
A companion book of the same name, written by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Donald Yacovone, which further explores the events portrayed in the series, will be published by SmileyBooks on October 1.

**Production Credit**
The *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross*, the 13th and latest documentary from Gates, is a joint production of Kunhardt McGee Productions, THIRTEEN Productions LLC, and Inkwell Films in association with Ark Media. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Peter Kunhardt, Dyllan McGee and Julie Anderson are executive producers. Stephen Segaller is executive in charge for WNET. Rachel Dretzin is senior producer. Leslie Asako Gladsjo is senior story producer.

Funding Credit

Major corporate support for *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* is provided by Bank of America. Additional corporate funding is provided by The Coca-Cola Company and McDonald’s. Leadership support is generously provided by the Abby and Howard Milstein Foundation, in partnership with HooverMilstein and Emigrant Bank. Major funding is also provided by the Ford Foundation, Dr. Georgette Bennett and Dr. Leonard Polonsky in Memory of Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, Richard Gilder, the Hutchins Family Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Support is also provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and PBS.

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About WNET

In 2013, WNET is celebrating the 50th Anniversary of THIRTEEN, New York’s flagship public media provider. As the parent company of THIRTEEN and WLIW21 and operator of NJTV, WNET brings quality arts, education and public affairs programming to over 5 million viewers each week. WNET produces and presents such acclaimed PBS series as *Nature*, *Great Performances*, *American Masters*, *PBS NewsHour Weekend*, *Charlie Rose* and a range of documentaries, children’s programs, and local news and cultural offerings available on air and online. Pioneers in educational programming, WNET has created such groundbreaking series as *Get the Math*, *Oh Noah!* and *Cyberchase* and provides tools for educators that bring compelling content to life in the classroom and at home. WNET highlights the tri-state’s unique culture and diverse communities through *NYC-ARTS*, *Reel 13*, *NJ Today* and *MetroFocus*, the multi-platform news magazine focusing on the New York region. WNET is also a leader in connecting with viewers on emerging platforms, including the *THIRTEEN Explore iPad App* where users can stream PBS content for free.

About Kunhardt McGee Productions

For 25 years Kunhardt McGee Productions led by Peter Kunhardt and Dyllan McGee has been making documentary films about the people and ideas that have shaped our history. Kunhardt McGee is currently in production on the 6-hour series, *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross*. Most recently, the company produced *MAKERS: Women Who Make America*, a broadcast and online initiative with PBS and AOL that aims to be the largest collection of women's stories ever assembled. Other PBS films include: *Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr.* (2012), *Faces of America with Henry Louis Gates, Jr.* (2010), *Looking for Lincoln* (2009), *Oprah’s Roots* (2007) and *African American Lives 1 and 2* (2006 & 2008). For HBO, Kunhardt McGee Productions produced Emmy Award-nominated, *Gloria: In Her Own Words* (2011) and *Teddy: In His Own Words* (2010). Other notable works include *This Emotional Life*, *Looking for Lincoln*, *In Memoriam*, *PT Barnum*, *The American President*, *Bobby Kennedy: In His Own Words*, and *JFK: In His Own Words*. More information can be found at: [www.kunhardtmcgee.com](http://www.kunhardtmcgee.com)

About Inkwell Films


About Ark Media

PBS series' *Frontline* and *American Experience* have won nearly every major broadcast award: the Emmy, DuPont-Columbia, Robert F. Kennedy, Writers Guild and Peabody Awards, as well as earning an Academy Award nomination and official selection to the Sundance Film Festival. In addition to *Many Rivers to Cross*, the company is currently in production on the six-hour PBS series "*Cancer: The Emperor of All Maladies*" and a four-hour series for PBS, *The Italian-Americans*. Ark has also produced documentaries for the *New York Times*, American Movie Classics, ABC, and the History Channel. For more information, visit [www.ark-media.net](http://www.ark-media.net).

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