

Black History Month

PBS Airs Documentary on Slavery

Feature brings light to unsung minority heroes

(AP) - The names Colonel Tye, Robert Smalls and Harriet Jacobs aren't as familiar as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Betsy Ross, but they, too, are the forefathers and foremothers of America.

They also were slaves. So were Denmark Vesey, Mum Bett, Emmanuel and Frances Driggus, and millions of other black pioneers instrumental in building a barely charted territory into one of the strongest and richest countries in the world.

Yet their stories have been largely ignored in U.S. history.

"The reason we don't know what we ought to know about them isn't because these people haven't been telling their stories," said George Washington University historian James Horton.

He's among 25 scholars who provide an unparalleled look at slavery and the remarkable stories of individual slaves in "Slavery and the Making of America," airing on PBS on Feb. 9 and 16 at 9

p.m. "The diaries, the novels, the letters that we are finding now have been there for a couple hundred years. How come we didn't find them before?" Horton questions. "Part of the reason has to do with what we thought worthy of looking for."

Narrated by actor Freeman, the unique, four-hour series is told through a collage of filmed re-enactments, providing a detailed visual history of American slavery.

ends in late 1876, Grant contends that the story of slavery is extremely relevant today.

"President Bush said recently that Americans do not like to look in the rearview mirror, that we are a forward-looking - not backward-looking - people," Grant said of the president's inaugural address.

"However, as Peter Wood, one of the historians from Duke University, said in the show, 'Slavery is ground zero for race relations in

The first were brought in 1619. The last freed in 1865. In the intervening 250 years, slaves labored to make America what it is today.

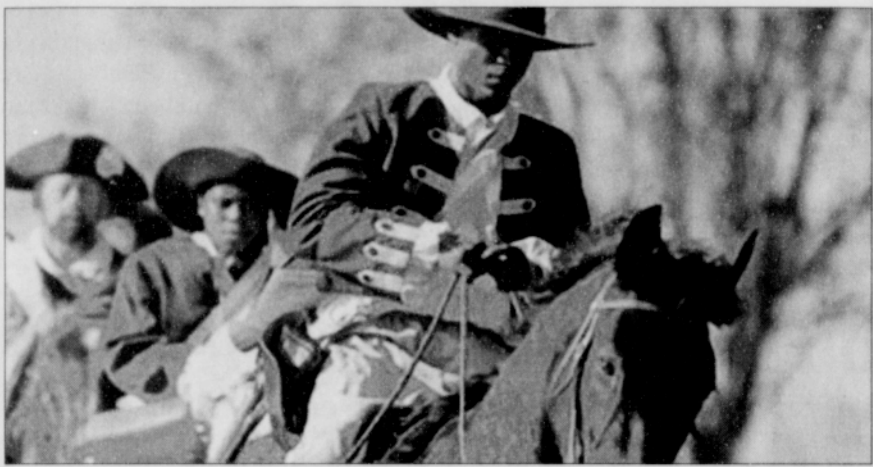


PHOTO PROVIDED BY PBS
Colonel Tye is one of the many African American forefathers mentioned in PBS' "Slavery and the Making of America."

"This is not African American history, it's American history. It's the history of all of us," notes executive producer William R. Grant, director of science, natural history and feature programs for WNET in New York, which produced the series.

And while the documentary

'America.' If you don't understand that, it's hard to get a grip on what's going on today. Or as Jim Horton said, 'Slavery wasn't the sideshow in America, it was the main event in American history.'"

"I hope people can look at this project in a holistic context and keep going back to it," said series producer Dante J. James.

"African Americans have the right and, armed with the necessary knowledge, can take pride in the way that enslaved people maintained, as best they could, their families, their spirituality, developed a new culture, brought new technology to this country and were an essential element in this nation becoming the economic and culture power that it is today."



(AP PHOTO/PBS, JEREMY LOCK)

In this promotional photo released by PBS, three of the first 11 enslaved Africans arrive in Dutch New Amsterdam in 1626 for purchase by the Dutch West India Company, as shown in a reenactment from PBS' "Slavery and the Making of America," part of the network's observation of Black History Month.

OPB Black History Month

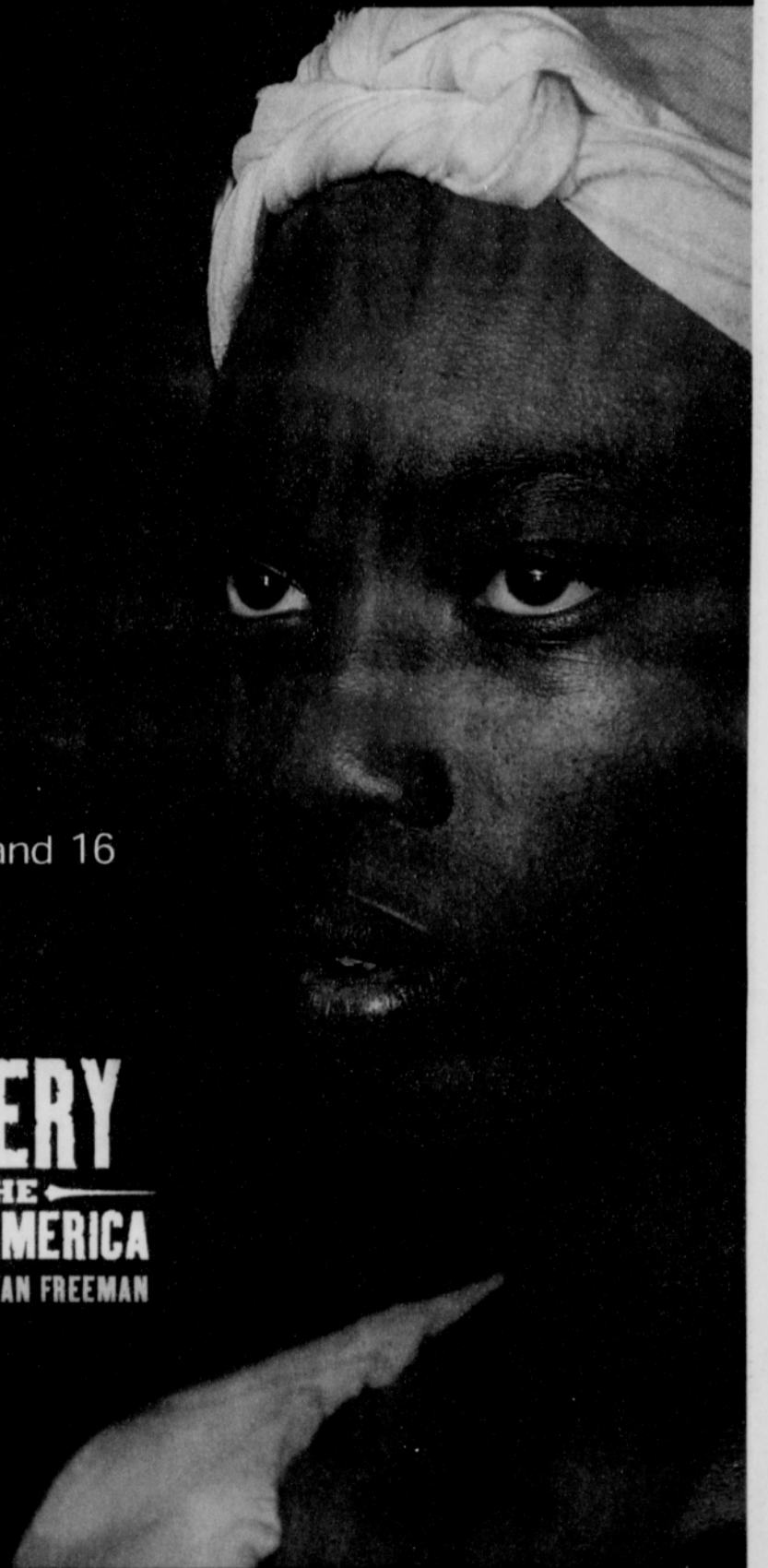
I am more than
my arm.
My back.
My sweat.

I am a fighter.
Mother.
Survivor.
Crusader.

I am one.
I am many.
I am America.

Wednesday
February 9 and 16
at 9pm

SLAVERY
AND THE
MAKING OF AMERICA
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