

Civil Rights Documentary 'Eyes on the Prize' on PBS

Written by Robert ID2271

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Eyes on the Prize, the award-winning landmark series documenting the history of the civil rights movement, will be aired on PBS for the first time since 1993. Originally broadcast on PBS in 1987, Eyes on the Prize will air on American Experience in fall 2006 as part of the series' 19th season. Three, two-hour programs will be presented this fall, with an additional eight hours made available at a later date.

"American Experience is committed to telling challenging stories about the diverse communities that make up this nation," said Mark Samels, executive producer. "We are honored to present this groundbreaking work."

Through contemporary interviews and historical footage Eyes on the Prize traces the civil rights movement from the Montgomery bus boycott in 1954 to the Voting Rights Act in 1965; from early acts of individual courage through the flowering of a mass movement and its eventual split into factions. Julian Bond narrates.

Eyes on the Prize, produced by Blackside, tells human stories of the movement for social change in the words of both famous and less-known participants. Since the documentary was completed, a number of key figures who appear in the films (including George Wallace, Ralph Abernathy, and Kwame Ture, also known as Stokely Carmichael) have died, making this record of their testimony all the more valuable.

"Every American, every generation should have the chance to see this epic series," said John F. Wilson, Sr. Vice President, PBS. "It's a great victory for all of us to have it return to PBS this fall."

The driving force behind Eyes on the Prize was Henry Hampton. A participant in many civil rights landmark events -- including the 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery -- Hampton set out to share his vision of what he called "the remarkable human drama that was the civil rights movement" through the Eyes on the Prize documentary and a book of the same title by Juan Williams.

After Hampton's death in 1998, his sisters, Judi Hampton and Veva Zimmerman, assumed

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control of Blackside, Inc., his production company. "So many people have contributed to the making of "Eyes on the Prize" and so many lives have been impacted by its message," said Judi Hampton. "We are very grateful to The Ford Foundation and The Gilder Foundation whose generosity made it possible to bring this important series back to public television."

When Eyes on the Prize premiered in 1987, The New York Times called it "the most ambitious documentary undertaken by black filmmakers, and one of the largest television series ever undertaken by a black-owned company." The series went on to win six Emmys and numerous other awards.