

# Treatment Forward

Using the Past America PBS docu-drama film “Denmark Vesey’s Rebellion” our purpose is to update the 93-minute presentation. We propose to expand it into a 3-hour series – presented over a 3-week period.

The 93-minute version tells the story of a former African American slave living in Charleston, South Carolina during the 1800’s who wins a local “lottery”, and comes into a small fortune.

He immediately buys his freedom with a portion of his fortune, then allocates a second portion to build the now famous AME Church that made recent news when eight of its members were murdered by a mis-guided young racist leaning visionary.

Wisely investing the balance of his lottery winnings, Vesey quickly became a successful businessman in Charleston’s booming business economy, but quickly discovered that no matter how financially successful he became – many white slave owners were not anxious to sell their valuable “human property,” and this included Vesey’s wife and children.

This stinging rejection led Denmark to begin his slave rebellion. His plan was simple. To create a diversion by setting to several key warehouse, and while the city’s attention was on the fires – Denmark and his escaping black group could board the almost abandoned ships they found in the Charleston Harbor...and set sail for Haiti.

The 3-series episode would include nationally recognized historians such as: Henry Lewis Gates of Harvard, Dr. Edna Medford, Chair of the Howard University History Department and Dr. Lorenzo Morris, Dean of the Howard Political Science Department; actors Bernie Casey, Ned Beatty, Samm-Art Williams, Antonio Fargas and Richard Harris; director Stan Lathan, actress Mary Alice and AME Bishop William P. Deveau.

Celebrity guests will range over a wide spectrum of opinions, but all will possess a solid knowledge of the Denmark Vesey story. We will also give particular attention to guests who can attract millennials to each show.

## **Audience Promotion:**

Colleges and secondary schools should be approached with an offer of the particular program to study help – as well as a suggested credit for those students who elect to watch and do homework paper for their classroom teacher.

Historian and guest celebrities’ appearances will be shot regionally, locally and in East Coast, West Coast and Midwest studios.

## Prologue:

This proposal/treatment represents a bold effort to frame actual historical facts with carefully researched historical background. This is being carefully done in order to correct or amend previously accepted history, and to build up previously neglected history. We meld information from 40-years of Tony Brown's Journal, with a lot of recently researched and discovered information – to attract today's youth (so many of whom are searching for answers), and to once again remind so many of our middle-aged and older television audience.

The working program title for the show is "Tell It."

"Tell It" essentially will be an "Episodic" series of 1-hour shows, made up from previously aired historically-based docu-dramas, with short interjected commentary from nationally recognized and acclaimed historians, nationally known celebrity guest.

Each of the topical EPISODES will be made up of one or more hour programs. (see the individuals "Treatments")

"Tell It" will deal in historical backgrounds and docu-dramas of African American history, but will also look at other racial, religious or cultural histories where understanding and facts have been miss-understood and/or deliberately distorted.

## TREATMENT #7

Originally "Did History Miss Emmett Till" was to be the seventh Episode show, but now because of the massive amount of advance publicity that Janet Langhart Cohen's Broadway play "Anne and Emmett" has generated, and even more is expected once it opens to the public, we should try to take advantage of the Emmett Till story while it is hot.

# **Edited Outlines of Twelve Treatments**

- Premiere Episode – “*Denmark Vesey’s Rebellion*” – This 93-minute Past America docu-drama will be presented in three hour-long weekly segments, with guest appearances by celebrity narrators such as (Lawrence Fishbourne & Ava DuVernay, Antonio Fargas, Mary Alice, Bernie Casey, Samm-Art Williams and Ned Beatty) and notable historians such as (Henry Louis Gates, Harvard; Rachel Medford, History Chair at Howard University and author/historian Dr. Lorenzo Morris, head of Faculty at Howard). Obviously, as a television special, there has to be time for commercials.

Script Outline: Episode opens with a celebrity guest (in front of a “skylight view” of 1820 Charleston, SC) giving us a present-day historical background connection for the murder of the eight people in August 2015 – and the Vesey rebellion in 1826. The August murders took place exactly one day short of 189 years since Vesey and 34 others were public hanged by the state of South Carolina. The celebrity guest (Lawrence Fishbourne) comments will be followed by the film’s opening narration with Brock Peters, on what the southern U. S. was like in the 1820s -- and some of the key events that led up to “free” and “non-free” blacks plotting a rebellion.

Each segment, whether with celebrity guests or historians – will feature personalities with widely divergent views (to add “sizzle” to the views presented). Also, among the historians and celebrity guests – will be widely known millennium admirers...and youth guests.

The Brock Peters narration fades to Denmark Vesey (Yaphet Kotto) and Gullah Jack (Antonio Fargas) hurrying to church, until they run into politically active Charleston store keeper Benjamin Hammett (Ned Beatty). The narrow sidewalk is only wide enough for one person to pass at a time, and Denmark refuses to yield – forcing Hammett into a muddy street pile. We break and exit this first filmed segment with Denmark and Gullah Jack leaving the AME church, and Vesey berating the other church members who do not believe in fighting for their to be free men – “...then you deserve to remain slaves!”

This first break can accommodate commercial insertions as well as a 5-7 minute historical discussion, along with 2-3 celebrity guests.

The next 2-3 breaks will also feature historians representing various perspectives, as well as celebrity guests such as Bernie Casey, Mary Alice, Samm-Art Williams, Ned Beatty, Director Stan Lathan and Richard Harris.

The final 1-hour program will feature several repeat historians and celebrity guests, as well as an originating added story on “Sandy Vesey’s” lifelong work with the national office of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church in Philadelphia, PA.

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Episode – “*America’s Black Eagles*” – This 90-minute theatrical documentary produced by Tony Brown Productions, will also be presented in a 3-week series – with weekly 10-minute

celebrity guest appearances (General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., actor Cuba Gooding, producer Charles Floyd Johnson, former Tuskegee airman ace Roscoe Brown and several current historians) in each week's opening (following an opening teaser) – in the middle and near the end. There will also be an audience “teaser” preview at the end of week 1 and 2 on all shows.

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Episode – “*Charlotte Forten’s Mission*” – This is a 113-minute Past America PBS TV drama about a well-educated African American Quaker from a millionaire Philadelphia family, who in 1860 makes a pact with President Abraham Lincoln to help him in crippling the Southern Rebel armies by having their black slave labor burn their plantation crops and escaping off into the South Carolina swamps. Lincoln agrees to the plan by promising to not only present the escaping slaves their freedom – but also to present them with valuable acres of local land. He insists however that Charlotte and her Quaker friends must teach the new freedmen to “read and write.”

Charlotte and her teachers face not only strong opposition from poor white local farmers, but also northern land speculators who come south to get rich off of gullible free blacks. Again, we would expand this drama into a 3-hour series by expanding the story of Charlotte’s millionaire family. Specifically by focusing on how her grandfather originally acquired their wealth, her father’s trials and tribulations representing the U. S. as a wartime Ambassador in European...and Charlotte’s historic ventures in Washington, DC following the civil war.

This PBS TV drama starring Melba Moore, Ned Beatty and Glynn Turman, would be three 1-hour programs, formatted as is suggested for Episodes 1 and 2. Suggested celebrity guests would be Steven Spielberg, Debbie Allen and “Fresh Prince of Bel Air” producer (as well as “Charlotte Forten...” scriptwriter) Samm-Art Williams, Grammy nominee Janelle Monrae, TV and film producer Mara Brock Akil and bestselling authors Brenda Stevenson, Paula Giddings and Paula Giddings. We would also add several well-known historians such as Dr. Edna Medford and Dr. Lorenzo Morris.

- 4<sup>th</sup> Episode – “*Malcom and Elijah*” – Long before Hollywood discovered this Academy Award winner, Denzel Washington and Woodie King, Jr. were arousing Broadway audiences on stage. It was the striving Denzel’s first appearance before a national audience, and the off-Broadway play and Tony Brown film footage revolves around the conflict between Elijah Muhammad, leader of the fast-growing Nation of Islam – and his verbal whip Malcom X. This footage, along with footage of the Malcom assassination and innumerable heated discussions on that event...and what led up to that fateful day – will make up a 10-week series. The Tony Brown footage, mixed with Malcom book authors (Les Payne and Manning Marable) – as well as expanded guest appearances by Denzel, Tony Brown (current & old footage comments), Woodie King and Malcom’s widow) – should make for award-winning television.
- 5<sup>th</sup> Episode – “*The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiments*” – This infamous government conspiracy to use uneducated black Alabama farmers as “guinea pigs” in this 1930’s experiment, remains to this day (almost 85 years later) one of the most horrendous shames of a brutal and callous U. S. Government. For many, this experiment (although on a smaller scale) was comparable to Nazi Germany’s callous treatment of Jews a decade later. This Tony Brown Productions show is two 1-hour segments, with suggested celebrity guests such as Harry Belafonte, Director Steven Spielberg, political science historian Dr. Lorenzo Morris and USC Political Studies Professor Todd Boyd and former U. S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen. Projected as a 2-hour series.

- 6<sup>th</sup> Episode – “***Black Hollywood: The Way it Was***” – This 90-minute Tony Brown Productions documentary is about the secret history of race movies. Many people today are completely unaware that between 1910 and 1950, over 150 independent film companies were started for the specific purpose of producing black-cast films. Of the 400 black-produced films that were made, Oscar Micheaux produced 10-percent of them. This episode will feature three 1-hour series – mixed with discussions and rare film footage of seldom scene footage. Suggested celebrity guests Harry Belafonte, Cicely Tyson, Spike Lee, Antoine Fuqua, F. Gary Gray, Marla Gibbs, Louis Gossett and Dee Reese. This will be three 1-hour programs augmented with lots of film clips from the Oscar Micheaux era.
- 7<sup>th</sup> Episode – “***Solomon Northrup’s Odyssey: 12 Years a Slave***” – This 98-minute Past America PBS television film stars Avery Brooks as “Solomon,” and premiered as a theatrical release in Santa Monica in 1987. Although it is still owned by Past America, last year it was honored by being inducted into the U. S. National Archives as a national treasure – and currently is entrusted at the U. S. Library of Congress in Washington, DC. This version was directed by the late Gordon Parks. Again, the episode series will be made up of three 1-hour segments. Suggested guest celebrities – Academy Award winning writer John Ridley, Supporting Actress nominee Xxx Xxx Lupo, Samm-Art Williams, David Parks, singer Jidenna, Mos Def and Director Steve McQueen.
- 8<sup>th</sup> Episode – “***Did History Miss Emmett Till?***” – Author Clenora Hudson-Weems examines the gruesome 1955 lynching of teenager Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi. She also challenges the widespread belief that Rosa Parks’ refusal to surrender her bus seat on an Alabama segregated bus was the principle catalyst for the modern civil rights movement. Instead, she believes it was chiefly the gruesome Emmett Till murder. Using the 30-minute footage from the Tony Brown Productions show, and 90 minutes of still photos, new filming and celebrity guest revelation and discussion – we end up with two 1-hour shows. My suggested celebrity guests would be (a) former TV network journalist and Anchor (and now producer of the Broadway hit “Anne & Emmett”) Janet Langhart Cohen; former JET Magazine Editor Simeon Booker (who was responsible for publishing the open casket photo of the mauled and dis-figured teenager – and who covered much of the “kangaroo court trial” of the men who perpetrated the Mississippi lynching; author Clenora Hudson-Weems; “Ms. Jane Pittman” actress Cicely Tyson and “In the Heat of the Night” actor Sidney Poitier.
- 9<sup>th</sup> Episode – “***How Black Civilization Was Destroyed***” – A 3-hour series on how and why did it happen – with Dr. Chancellor Williams, a widely acclaimed historian who explains his soundly researched information (a) on why Africans were the first builders of civilization; giving the world a legacy of mathematics, writing, the sciences, engineering, medicine, religion, the fine arts -- as well as being the builders of the great pyramids. The Tony Brown Productions collection has three 30-minute shows (#70 & #83) on this important topic, but there are also a wealth of historians, archeologists and worldwide documentation on the veracity of these facts.
- 10<sup>th</sup> Episode – “***John Punch***” – A 90-minute Past America script on the trials and tribulation of an Africa-born man serving time in a London debtor’s prison. He is given an opportunity to gain his freedom by serving a number of years as an “indentured servant” in the newly discovered frontier land called “America,” and eagerly accepts. After several years in his new sentence however, John Punch decides to escape into the colonial Virginia wilderness and disappear. That plan quickly goes awry however, and he is quickly captured and once again brought to justice. The Virginia Courts, looking to quell any others who might be tempted to violate the terms of their indenture, as well as to discourage what had been growing signs of black-white insurrection –



ruled that “henceforth black “indentured servants” would not have any right afforded white indentured servants – and black slaves...as well as their kin and children “would forever be the property of their masters, never be given the rights afforded white indentured servants.” This stirring Episode drama, although not yet produced, will be treated in a similar fashion to the other Past America dramas, and can be expanded to three 1-hour programs in the same manner. Suggested celebrity guests and historians will be provided at a later date.

- 11th Episode – **“The Robert Smalls Story”** -- A 90-minute Past America script currently being written about a larger than life South Carolina free black. Smalls boldly pirated a southern rebel gunboat, and went on to sink and win several important rebel naval battles for the northern forces. Following emancipation – Robert Smalls ran for the U. S. Senate from South Carolina. Despite numerous verbal threats, malicious newspaper attacks and physical threats against his family – Smalls went to Washington following the President Lincoln assassination. This production, although also not yet in production -- will be treated in a similar fashion to the other Past America dramas, and can be expanded to three 1-hour programs in the same manner. Suggested celebrity guests and historians will be provided at a later date.
- 12<sup>th</sup> Episode – **“The Jimmy Winkfield Story”** – A 90-minute Estella Productions script on the first black jockey to win a Kentucky Derby, when many of the jockeys were of Negro heritage. Not only did Winkfield win more races than any other American jockey in the history of the sport, he still holds several Derby records that continue to stand today. This production, also not yet in production -- will be treated in a similar fashion to the other none produced dramas, and can be expanded to three 1-hour programs in the same manner. Suggested celebrity guests and historians will be provided at a later date.
- 13<sup>th</sup> Episode – **“Moments Without Proper Names”** – A 65-minute Past America documentary, with the late “Renaissance Man” Gordon Parks outlining his life story – in various locations where the incidents took place. This is a treasury of Parks’ photograph, iconic humor and memorable perspectives as only Gordon Parks could provide. Parks shares himself as only he could, and the added guests – “60 Minutes” Morley Safer, his son David Parks, Sandra Sharpe who was the family young sister in “The Learning Tree” and Richard Roundtree of the hit film “Shaft.” This Episode is projected as two 1-hour programs.