

Many died for our rights. Few are famous.

Unsung Martyrs

of the
Civil Rights Movement

A Docudrama Television Series
Created by Eve Black and Mark Bradley

In the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, many people lost their lives in the struggle. Some of their names and stories are familiar: Medgar Evers, gunned down in his driveway; Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley and Addie Mae Collins, killed when their church was bombed; Andrew Goodman, James Chaney, and Michael Schwerner, kidnapped and murdered; and of course, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., shot dead outside his hotel room.





But many other people also lost their lives.
People less well known, from all walks of life, who died in the struggle for
equality for all Americans. Who were these people? How did they die?
And why has so little been done to honor them?

They are the
Unsung Martyrs of the Civil Rights Movement,
and we tell their stories.

DOCUDRAMA FORMAT:

Each one-hour episode will focus on one or more people who lost their lives in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

The Presenter will give factual information over still photographs and archival footage from the period. These images will be in black and white, to reflect the print and broadcast journalism of the day. We will also show present-day footage (color) of the locations where the incidents took place.

Significant events in the stories will be recreated by actors on location (narrated, without dialog).

The Presenter will also relate personal information about the principals on camera and conduct interviews with people who were close to the victims or who were involved in investigating the cases.



How we got here.



In 2012, Eve addressed a labor rally in opposition to voter restriction.

Here is some of what she said.



"On the evening of January 11, 1966, my 76-year-old great-grandmother, Adlena Hamlett, was riding home in a car after attending a secret civil rights meeting in Jackson, Mississippi.

"With her was 58-year-old Birdia Keglur, who had testified the previous year before the federal Civil Rights Commission. Both women had been warned not to participate in civil rights work.



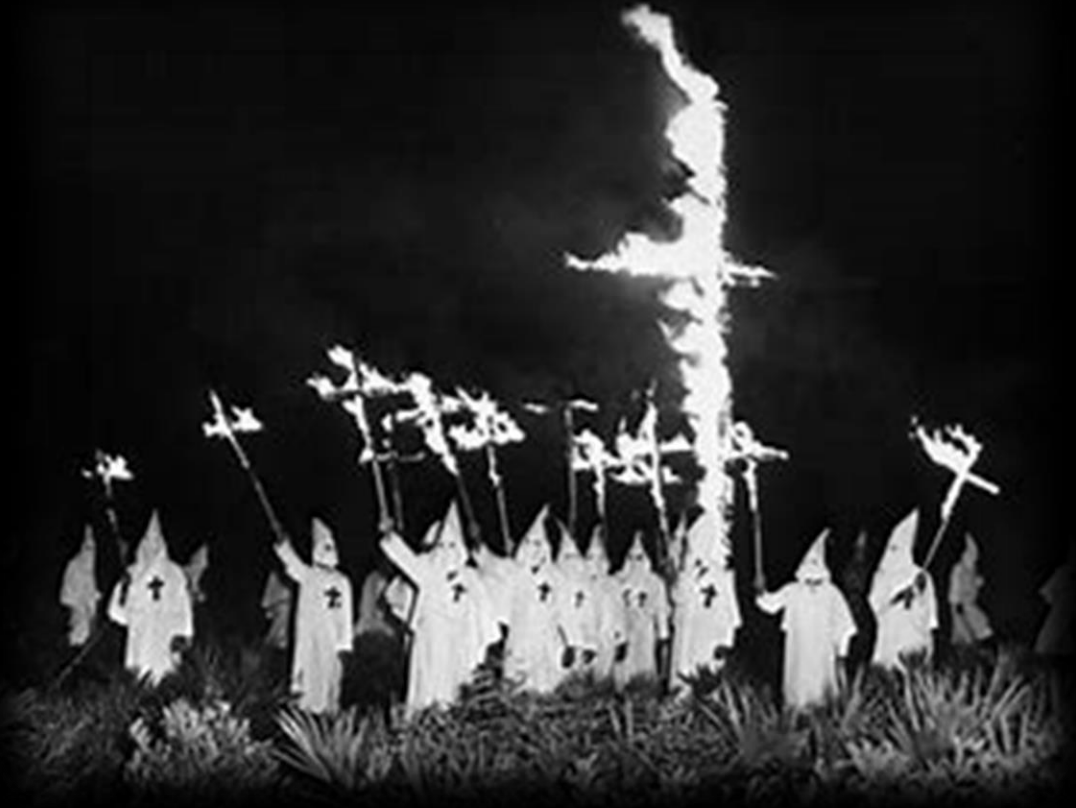


"My great-grandmother had been hung in effigy several months before. In spite of the threats, the women attended the meeting to discuss civil rights and poverty issues.

"Later that night, a Plymouth Fury was found alongside the road, having driven off the pavement. Both Adlena and Birdia were dead. But the fact that both women had been decapitated and their arms severed from their bodies would suggest that they did not die from a simple vehicle accident.



"Engineered car crashes
and that kind of
mutilation were well-
known signatures of the
Ku Klux Klan. No one was
ever charged in their
deaths, and the cause of
the crash is still
listed as accidental."



There was a Federal investigation -- 40 years later under the Emmett Till Law -- but it concluded that there was "insufficient evidence to indicate that the car crash was other than accidental or that their deaths were motivated by their civil rights activism."

Ultimate
dict (b)(7)(C)

cluded that there is insufficient evidence
motivated homicide and, therefore, it is
to close our

The Federal case was finally closed in 2011.

No arrests were ever made.

We discussed several formats to tell this story.
Then Eve suggested docudrama.



The story of the murder of Adlena Hamlett and Birdia Keglars will
be the subject of our pilot episode.

OPENING SEQUENCE OF THE PILOT EPISODE:

Dramatization: Sheriff and Deputy drive down the road at night. They pass a road sign for US49E. A gold 1957 Plymouth Fury is spotted off the pavement, obviously having crashed. They turn on the "cherry top" lights, pull over, and shine their spotlight on the wrecked car.

NARRATOR: Late in the evening of January 11, 1966, a gold Plymouth Fury is found alongside U.S. highway 49E outside the small town of Sidon, Mississippi, in Leflore County, near Greenwood.

Dramatization: Sheriff and Deputy get out of their car and approach the Plymouth, shining their flashlights into the car. The faces of three young men are revealed: Grafton Gray, the driver; and in the back seat, Jessie Brewer, and a young white man.

NARRATOR: There are five people in the car. Civil rights workers Jessie Brewer and Grafton Gray, who was driving, are seriously injured. With Brewer in the back seat is a young white man from Massachusetts, a worker for SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. He has suffered less serious injuries. The other two people are 78-year-old Mrs. Adlena Hamlett and 58-year-old Mrs. Birdia Kegljar. Both women are dead and their injuries are horrific.

Dramatization: Deputy shines his flashlight on Adlena Hamlett and Birdia Kegljar. We do not see their bodies, but the Deputy turns away and vomits.

Opening title and credits:

Credits over montage of still pictures from the Civil Rights movement.

MUSIC: Song "Oh, Freedom," unaccompanied solo female voice.

EVE (on camera in studio): Hello, and welcome to *Unsung Martyrs of the Civil Rights Movement*. I'm Eve Black. In this series, we will tell the stories of people who lost their lives in the struggle. These stories have been neglected; some may have been suppressed; many have been all but forgotten. These people died for our rights, and in this series, we celebrate their work and honor their sacrifices. Today's episode is the story of the deaths of Adlena Hamlett and Birdia Keglur. Their story has special significance for me, because Adlena Hamlett was my great-grandmother.

Dramatization: The scene is illuminated by the rotating lights of emergency vehicles. Grafton Gray and Jessie Brewer are brought from the wreck on stretchers by EMTs. The white SNCC worker is able to walk with assistance. None of the young men speak to the Sheriff, just giving terrified looks.

NARRATOR: The two young black men, Grafton Gray and Jessie Brewer, are taken from the scene on stretchers. The white SNCC worker is able to walk with assistance. The dead women are placed in body bags.

There are immediate suspicions about the car crash. Did Grafton Gray lose control? The road is dry, flat, and relatively straight. Had he fallen asleep? The car is not equipped with seat belts, so why have the women been killed, while the young men have suffered far less serious injuries?

Mrs. Hamlett and Mrs. Kegljar, along with the three young men, were driving home from a civil rights meeting in Jackson earlier that evening. The meeting was supposed to be a secret. Is this just a tragic road accident? Or is there something more sinister at work?

RESEARCH:

This series will need a robust research team to verify the particulars of the cases and to locate people to be interviewed, since most of those close to the cases have died. Travel will be required. We hope that research will shed new light on these cases and connect the dots that have heretofore gone unnoticed. We want to paint a more complete picture of the sacrifices made by these ordinary but heroic people.

Sources will be archives and museums, academic institutions, libraries, journalists, historians, government officials, attorneys, relatives and acquaintances of our subjects, and individuals who investigated the cases.

WRITING & PRODUCTION:

Writers should produce scripts for the reenactments that are both dramatically compelling and true to the facts. We believe that having no speaking in the dramatizations will have more impact than made-up dialog.

We think that having a live on-camera interviewer will draw out the interviewees and deepen the viewer's identification with our subjects, increasing the impact of their stories.

Music will include civil rights songs, hymns, and spirituals. The song "Oh, Freedom" will be the main theme.

CO-CREATOR/PRESENTER:

Eve Black is an experienced actor and on-camera presenter. But she also has the civil rights movement quite literally in her blood. The subject of our first episode will be the death of Eve's great-grandmother, likely at the hands of the Ku Klux Klan; one of Eve's aunts was among the first children to integrate the schools in Topeka, Kansas, following the Brown v. Board of Education ruling; and her grandfather wrote speeches for the great Fannie Lou Hamer.

Eve's genial presence on camera and her unquestionable civil rights credibility will personalize the information about our subjects and her interviews will be more like intimate conversations. We know of no other docudrama series that uses a presenter in this fashion.





Although we hope that research will uncover information that has been forgotten or even suppressed, we have no illusions that we will find totally new evidence or reveal any perpetrators.

The intent of this series is to honor those who lost their lives, not to solve cold cases.

OTHER EPISODE POSSIBILITIES:

Harry and Harriette Moore are said to be the first martyrs of the modern civil rights era, and the only husband and wife to be murdered, when their house was bombed on Christmas night, 1951.



Jonathan Daniels was an Episcopal seminarian and civil rights activist who tutored children and helped people register to vote. In the summer of 1965, he threw his body in front of a shotgun blast aimed at 17-year-old girl.

Clyde Kennard repeatedly tried to desegregate Mississippi Southern College. Convicted of a trumped-up charge, he died in the brutal Parchman Penitentiary after being refused treatment for colon cancer.



William Lewis Moore was a postal worker who staged lone protest marches against segregation. In 1963, he was walking to Jackson, Mississippi. His body was found on the side of the road, shot twice in the head.

Rev. George Washington Lee was a Mississippi businessman as well as a pastor, and used both his pulpit and his printing press to urge people to vote. In May 1955, an assailant fired three shotgun blasts into his face.



Viola Liuzzo was a housewife and mother of five from Detroit. As she was shuttling marchers from Montgomery back to Selma, a car pulled alongside and she was shot twice in the head.

Recent events have made it clear that America has yet to fully realize its promise of liberty and justice for all. The current widespread attacks on voting rights, and the attempts to turn back the clock on civil liberties and perpetuate white supremacy, mean only one thing:



If there was ever a right time for this series,

IT IS NOW.



CATALYST

**OFFICIAL
SELECTION**

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