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Rights renewed, 'Eyes on the Prize' returns

The Boston Globe

By Catherine Foster, Globe Staff | May 26, 2006

Thirteen years after it last aired, the legendary documentary series "Eyes on the Prize" will return to television this fall.

"Eyes on the Prize," which chronicles the history of the civil rights movement, was first shown in 1987 but has not been rerun since 1993, after which rights to much of the abundant archival footage in the series expired.

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After an arduous process of renewing rights, the first part of the series is scheduled to run in two-hour blocks on Oct. 2, 9, and 16 on WGBH's "American Experience."

Henry Hampton and his South End-based Blackside Inc., the largest black-owned documentary film company at the time the film came out, produced the two-part, 14-hour series, which won numerous awards. The first six hours took 10 years to fund and produce. The second part will be aired at a future date, a spokeswoman for PBS said.

"I'm ecstatic, and very grateful to all the people who worked on [renewing the rights]," said Judi Hampton, who has been Blackside's president since the death of her brother, Henry, in 1998.

The series tells the story of the civil rights movement from the point of view of leaders and ordinary citizens alike, using material from more than 80 footage sources and 95 still archives. One hundred songs were also used.

The clearance rights for the astounding amount of material, which had originally been negotiated to be used for varying periods of time by Blackside, gradually expired.

It took four or five years to raise \$915,000 for research, rights clearance, and post-production costs, said Sandra Forman, Blackside attorney and director of the "Eyes on the Prize" Renewal Project.

"It's a good time to bring 'Eyes' back to the world," said Forman. "I think people recognize that. It's very gratifying to be where we are today."

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Judy Richardson , who worked for Blackside on the production staff of ``Eyes," as well as in the educational department, is happy it's back for other reasons.

``In the professional development workshops I continue to do with teachers where I use the series, what was horrible was that the teachers loved it but couldn't get it anywhere," she said. ``The school and public libraries no longer had the series because people took them. So what's wonderful about the re-airing is that the series will again be available to schools and colleges and social change organizations. It's a whole second life for `Eyes,' one that so needs to be told, particularly today." ■

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