

# AMERICAN MASTERS



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## W.E.B. DU BOIS: REBEL WITH A CAUSE SET TO PREMIERE MAY 19, 2026 ON PBS AMERICAN MASTERS

*New Documentary on the Prolific Scholar and Civil Rights Pioneer is  
Narrated by Viola Davis and Features Readings by Common, Courtney  
B. Vance, and Jeffrey Wright*

New York, NY - February 11, 2026 — *American Masters* today announced the new documentary ***W.E.B. Du Bois: Rebel With A Cause*** from Peabody Award-winning director **Rita Coburn** will premiere May 19, 2026 at 9 p.m. ET on PBS (check local listings). The two-hour film examines Du Bois's remarkable life from his birth, just five years after the Emancipation Proclamation; to his death, on the eve of the March on Washington in 1963, and how his legacy as an activist continues to resonate today.

Born on February 23, 1868, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois lived through the collapse of Reconstruction through two World Wars to the rise of the Civil Rights Movement. The film follows his life chronologically, enriched by commentary from leading scholars, historians, artists, and biographers including **Raymond Arsenault, Karida Brown, Eric Foner, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Eddie Glaude Jr., Nikole Hannah-Jones, David Levering Lewis, Imani Perry**, and more.

For Du Bois, the power of the pen was his greatest weapon. He authored more than 20 books and fused scholarship with activism, deploying literature, data, and groundbreaking infographics to expose the roots of systemic racism. Drawing from his books, articles, speeches, and archival audio, ***Rebel With A Cause*** illuminates the poetry and force of his language through dramatic readings by **Common**, **Courtney B. Vance**, and **Jeffrey Wright**, with narration by **Viola Davis**.

***Rebel With A Cause*** charts this visionary's singular journey by exploring both his monumental achievements and his deeply personal struggles. From the loss of his infant son to his lifelong battles with systemic racism, Du Bois's humanity shaped his activism, enabling him to transcend the social constraints of the early 20th century and elevate the lives of Black people worldwide — inspiring leaders from the Harlem Renaissance to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

A rebel against the status quo, Du Bois relentlessly spearheaded the fight for racial justice. By showing the world “The Souls of Black Folk,” through his 1903 book by that same name, he prophetically declared: “The problem of the 20th century is the color line.” He co-founded the NAACP, helped launch the Niagara Movement, challenged contemporaries such as Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey, and contributed to the founding of the United Nations.

“My hope is that this documentary invites reflection and sparks dialogue, not only about who Du Bois was, but about the world we continue to shape in his wake,” said director Rita Coburn. “His life reminds us that scholarship and art, grounded in truth, can be weapons against oppression. To tell his story is to affirm that the pursuit of justice is as urgent today as it was in his time.”

Coburn previously directed and produced ***American Masters*** documentaries about trailblazers Maya Angelou and Marian Anderson. Her film *Maya Angelou: And Still I Rise* (co-directed with Bob Hercules), which premiered on **American Masters** in 2017, was an official selection at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival and won the AFI Docs Audience Award. *Marian Anderson: The Whole World In Her Hands*, which aired on ***American Masters*** in 2022, received the highest documentary production grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and was recognized with a Christopher Award.

“Dr. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois lived from 1868 to 1963, and he devoted his life to helping us all understand what he called ‘the problem of the color line,’” said Michael Kantor, Executive Producer of ***American Masters***. “Though even the brilliant Dr. Du Bois couldn’t solve this problem, his teachings and his influence couldn’t resonate more strongly today.”

Now in its 40th season on PBS, ***American Masters*** illuminates the lives and creative journeys of our nation's most enduring artistic giants — those who have left an indelible impression on our cultural landscape — through compelling, unvarnished stories. Setting the standard for documentary film profiles, the series has earned widespread critical acclaim: 28 Emmy Awards — including 10 for Outstanding Nonfiction Series and five for Outstanding Nonfiction Special— two News & Documentary Emmys, 14 Peabodys, three Grammys, two Producers Guild Awards, an Oscar, and many other honors. To further explore the lives and works of more than 290 masters past and present, the [American Masters website](#) offers full episodes, film outtakes, filmmaker interviews, the podcast “American Masters: Creative Spark,” educational resources, digital original series and more. The series is a production of The WNET Group.

***American Masters*** is available for streaming concurrent with broadcast on all station-branded PBS platforms, including [PBS.org](#) and the [PBS App](#), available on iOS, Android, Roku streaming devices, Apple TV, Android TV, Amazon Fire TV, Samsung Smart TV, Chromecast and VIZIO. PBS station members can view many series, documentaries and specials via [PBS Passport](#). For more information about PBS Passport, visit the [PBS Passport FAQ](#) website.

***W.E.B. Du Bois: Rebel With A Cause*** is produced, written and directed by Rita Coburn. The Executive Producers are Andrew T. Carr, Sandra Evers-Manly, Leslie Fields-Cruz, B.K. Fulton, Denise A. Greene and Michael Kantor. The Archival Producer is Prudence Arndt and the Associate Producer is Eleanor Levine. The Director of Photography is Henry Adenbonojo, the Editor is K.A. Miille, and the musical score is by Kathryn Bostic.

Funding for ***W.E.B. Du Bois: Rebel With A Cause*** was provided by National Endowment for the Humanities, University of Pennsylvania, Larry Chatman, Una Jackman, John W. Rogers and Ariel Investments, The New School, Artemis Rising Foundation, John McArthur Forbes, Omega Educational Foundation, Inside Outside Communications Foundation, The Leslie and Roslyn Goldstein Foundation, The Better Angels Society and its members: Bobby and Polly Stein, Maureen Jane and Mark Perry, The Fullerton Family Charitable Fund, Diane and Hal Brierle, Gilchrist and Amy Berg.

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[The WNET Group](#) creates inspiring media content and meaningful experiences for diverse audiences nationwide. It is the community-supported home of New York's [THIRTEEN](#) – America's flagship PBS station – [WLIW](#), THIRTEEN PBS KIDS, WLIW World and Create; [NJ PBS](#), New Jersey's statewide public television network; Long Island's only NPR station WLIW-FM; [ALL ARTS](#), the arts and culture media provider; newsroom [NJ Spotlight News](#); and FAST channel PBS Nature. Through these channels and streaming platforms, The WNET Group brings arts, culture, education, news, documentary, entertainment, and DIY programming to more than five million viewers each month. The WNET Group's award-winning productions include signature PBS series ***Nature***, ***Great Performances***, ***American Masters***, and ***Amanpour and Company*** and trusted local news programs like ***NJ Spotlight News with Briana Vannozzi***. Inspiring curiosity and nurturing dreams, The WNET Group's award-winning Kids' Media and Education team produces the PBS KIDS series ***Cyberchase***, interactive ***Mission US*** history games, and resources for families, teachers and caregivers. A leading nonprofit public media producer for more than 60 years, The WNET Group presents and distributes content that fosters lifelong learning, including initiatives addressing poverty, jobs, economic opportunity, social justice, understanding, and the environment. Through Passport, station members can stream new and archival programming anytime, anywhere. The WNET Group represents the best in public media. Join us.

**About Black Public Media (BPM)**

BPM supports the development of visionary content creators and distributes stories about the global Black experience to inspire a more equitable and inclusive future. For nearly 50 years, BPM has addressed the needs of unserved and underserved audiences. BPM-supported programs have won five Emmys®, 10 Peabodys, five Anthem Awards, 14 Emmy® nominations and an Oscar® nomination. BPM continues to address historical, contemporary, and systemic challenges that traditionally impede the development and distribution of Black stories.