

Special Report: Black History Month

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Celebrating Black History Month

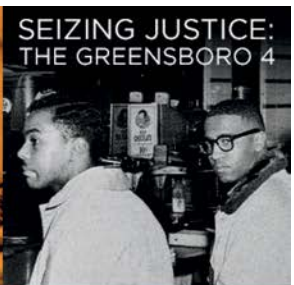
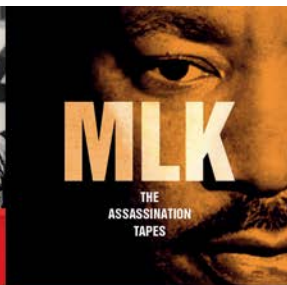
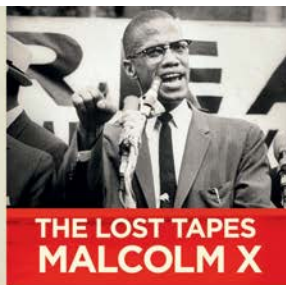
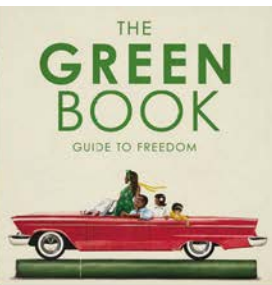
Black History Month highlights the contributions of African Americans from all over the world. And once again, cable is helping to shine a light on those accomplishments.

For the sixth year in a row, **Smithsonian Channel** is showcasing a film for Black History Month. This year, it's the groundbreaking documentary "Black In Space: Breaking the Color Barrier." Last year's doc, "The Green Book: Guide To Freedom," told the true story behind the historic guide for African American travelers on road trips. This year, Smithsonian is delving into the history behind the world's first black astronauts. "I see this one as a companion to the 'Hidden Figures' story," *Charles Poe*, svp, global production and emerging technology for Smithsonian Channel, told **Cablefax**. The documentary looks at the personal stories of several African American pioneers in the Space Race and the efforts to integrate the astronaut corp itself. "This story is the intersection between Civil Rights, the Space Race and the Cold War, and we had access to terrific experts already," said Poe. The doc features the stories of legends *Guion Bluford*, the first African American to go to space,

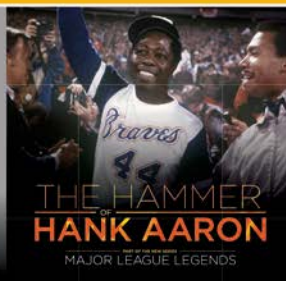
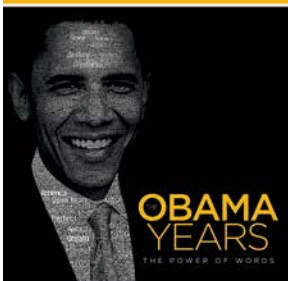


Smithsonian Channel's documentary 'Black In Space: Breaking the Color Barrier' tells the stories of the first black astronauts Ronald McNair, Guion Bluford and Frederick Gregory (pictured). It premieres Feb 24 at 8pm. (Credit: NASA)

Frederick Gregory, the first African American to pilot and command a NASA mission; and *Ronald McNair*, who perished in the Challenger disaster, including interviews with his widow and brother. The special also features



Honoring the achievements. Remembering the struggle.



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an interview with the Soviet Union's contender, Cuban Air Force pilot *Arnaldo Tamayo Méndez*, who became a national hero. The doc premieres on the linear channel Feb 24 at 8pm, but will be available to stream on Smithsonian Channel Plus all month.

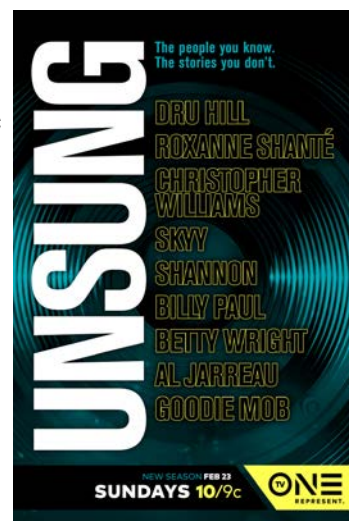
However, the story is too important to remain just on the network. Continuing the tradition of taking its films on the road, Smithsonian is one-upping itself and bringing Black in Space on its largest tour to-date. It will roll into 20 individual markets in partnership with **Comcast, Charter, Altice USA, ViacomCBS, Hulu and Google X/YouTube TV**. "The screening tours have been a great way for distributors to connect with their local communities and for us to support these efforts by delivering diverse content directly to their subscribers," said Poe. "It's also exciting to experience each film with live audiences. The post-screening discussions are always fascinating, and we often discover surprising local angles to our stories." The conversations include various astronauts from the doc, Smithsonian institutions curators and historians, Emmy-award winning filmmaker *Laurens Grant* and "Entertainment Tonight's" *Kevin Frazier*.

It's impossible to celebrate black history and culture without talking about music. Throughout the month, **TV One** is diving into the theme "Represent Black History," headlined by its longest-running docuseries "Unsung." Each week of the month, the net will celebrate 40 years of music and feature Unsung episodes from a specific decade, kicking off Feb 5 with the '60s and ending with the '90s. "Music is really representative of African-American culture," said TV One marketing svp *Lori Hall*. "It's relationship-based, it's emotional. It drives not just African-American culture, but pop culture. I think that's one of the things we're seeing in today's culture as well."

Over on **BET**, the net is gearing up for its first time broadcasting the **NAACP** Image Awards (Feb 22, 8pm). "The Image Awards, BET, we were all birthed at a time where there was no platform to celebrate and honor excellence for black Americans," said *Connie Orlando*, BET's evp of specials, music programming & music strategy. "Black History Month is the one month that the world dedicated to honoring the black community, but we do it 365 days a year. It's always important to honor and celebrate, and we love celebrating excellence and showing our community that we've come a long way and we're not going anywhere."

For the seventh consecutive year, **AMC Networks** is airing its Black History Month PSAs across all five of its national nets as well as its SVOD services. The campaign is in partnership with **NAACP**. The PSAs feature seven members of the Congressional Black Caucus discussing topics such as HBCUs, black women in history and voting. **SundanceTV** will kick off its month-long celebration with the all-day marathons of the most watched mini-series of all time, "Roots," beginning Feb 2 and again on Feb 16. **IFC's** "Sherman's Showcase" is taking BHM into the summer, with an hour-long "Black History Month Spectacular." "Who decided that Black History only gets one month, and a cold one at that?" said *Blake Callaway*, executive director of IFC and SundanceTV. **Revolt TV's** Black History Month Excellence initiative features its largest offering yet of network premieres, including the return of talk show "State of the Culture," new seasons of "Funny AF" and new episodes of "The Breakfast Club." The net also will be publishing articles and artist interviews dedicated to black excellence on its social media channels all month long. **History** is premiering "Black Patriots: Heroes of the Revolution" featuring NBA legend and activist *Kareem Abdul-Jabbar*, airing Feb 19 at 10pm. The special dives into the African American experience during the Revolutionary War.

Distributors aren't missing out on the importance of the month, on both the programming and platform side. On its On Demand platform, Charter will be promoting collections of black history themed movies, including Classic Cinema ("Dreamgirls," "Precious,"), Historic Heroes ("Ali," "Harriet," and New Favorites ("Get Out," "Queen & Slim"). Charter's **Spectrum News Networks** across the country will produce and air special series and reports throughout the month, including a feature on *Dr. Dudley Flood*, former educator and administrator in the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction who was instrumental in de-



TV One's series 'Unsung' is highlighting four decades of musical history throughout the month.

segregating North Carolina schools. Other stories on tap include a profile of *Jonathan Gregg*, an 86-year-old civil rights activist in Kentucky; the history behind the iconic Watts Towers that took 30 years to build, and survived two riots to stand as one of six national historic landmarks in L.A.; an in-depth story about the Milton House for a look at Wisconsin's Underground Railroad past; and the untold stories of four African Americans who had a unique influence on local sports and/or educational history in Central New York. Charter is also one of the first pay TV providers signed on to offer the upcoming **Black News Channel**, set to launch Feb 10. The channel, co-founded by former Congressman *J.C. Watts*, also has a carriage secured with **Comcast** and **DISH**.

SVODs like **CuriosityStream** are doing it a little differently than traditional programmers. "Traditional broadcast rules have flown out the window," said *Jorge Franzini*, director of content and development. "Not everything needs to be



Curiosity Stream's series 'Bright Now - The Last American Slave Ship' tells the story of what happened after the last known slave ship *The Clotilda* went down in Alabama's Mobile River. Generations later, the ship has been found.

an hour, not everything needs to be a huge series. Sometimes a nine-minute piece can hit you and impact you in an amazing way." CuriosityStream's original series "Bright Now" has a new installment with "Last American Slave Ship," which premiered Jan 30 and tells the story of the last known American slave ship and the community that rose from its destruction. "We have this amazing flexibility to actually follow the story and keep going with it," said Franzini. CuriosityStream is truly international, now boasting a subscriber base of over 13m in worldwide. "Being a global service is quite different," said Franzini. "We should be telling these stories all the time, not just this one month. It's incredibly important to highlight anything that at times can make us feel uncomfortable and the atrocities that occurred, and sometimes people want to turn a blind eye. To understand where you're going, you have to know your history." — *Mollie Cahillane*



The survivors of *The Clotilda* built a new life, and their descendants may finally have the details of their enslaved ancestors' experience. The series premiered on Jan 30.

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