

Title: *Birthing A Nation: The Resistance of Mary Gaffney*

Genre: Documentary Short

Runtime: 19:54

Director: Nazenet Habtezghi

Producer: Nazenet Habtezghi, Lauren Wimbush

Executive Producer: Sheila Nevins, Stanley Nelson

Distributor: MTV Documentary Films/Paramount Plus

****World Premiere:** BlackStar Film Festival, August 4, 2023 (Philadelphia)

Logline

Birthing A Nation: The Resistance of Mary Gaffney explores the story of forced reproduction in the antebellum South and reveals the agency of Mary Gaffney, an enslaved woman who takes control of her body and fertility.

Brief Synopsis

We've heard of Harriett Tubman's operation to free enslaved people through the Underground Railroad and Sojourner Truth's fiery speeches calling for abolition and women's rights. These stories have been portrayed as heroic efforts by "extraordinary" women... and they were. But the story rarely told is of the quiet rebellion and daily acts of defiance by "ordinary" enslaved women.

Birthing A Nation: The Resistance of Mary Gaffney explores the story of forced reproduction in the antebellum South and reveals the agency of Mary Gaffney, an enslaved woman who takes control of her body and fertility. Hidden in plain sight, the film revisits a 1930's interview of Mary Gaffney by the Works Progress Administration. In her own words, Mary creates a poignant and at times heartbreaking testimony of what it meant to be an enslaved woman in the United States. Mary's testimony is supported by a tapestry of memories and insights from formerly enslaved men and women, who explore the ways in which slavery perverted and exploited the relational and familial bonds of Black men and women.

Harrowing archival imagery is used evocatively to illuminate Mary's world, both real and imagined, her relentless resistance, and her hopes and dreams for the future. The film is informed by a cast of Black women scholars who give historical context and significance, unearthing the buried truths about the American experience that have been omitted entirely from textbooks. Just as slavery was woven into the fabric of our nation, so was rebellion in the soul of who we are.

Director Bio: Nazenet Habtezhgi makes her directorial debut with *Birthing A Nation: The Resistance of Mary Gaffney*. The journalist-turned-filmmaker has contributed to numerous highly acclaimed documentaries for PBS, HBO and Netflix. Prior to working in documentary film, she launched Essence Magazine's video platform with an interactive web series and executive produced a subsequent TV One special. Based in Brooklyn, she received her B.A. in Journalism from the University of Oklahoma.