

NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER

525 Arch Street | Independence Mall
Philadelphia | PA 19106 | T 215 409 6600 | F 215 409 6650
www.constitutioncenter.org

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CONTACTS: Denise Venuti Free
Director of Public Relations
215.409.6636
dvfree@constitutioncenter.org

Ashley Berke
Public Relations Coordinator
215.409.6693
aberke@constitutioncenter.org

NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER PREVIEWS “AMAZING GRACE” IN HONOR OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Philadelphia, PA (January 16, 2007) - To mark the start of Black History Month, the National Constitution Center, National History Day, Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation, and Bristol Bay Productions (the company that produced the Academy Award-winning film “Ray”) present the Philadelphia preview of the new feature film “Amazing Grace” on Thursday, February 1, 2007 at 6:30 p.m. Admission to the screening at the National Constitution Center is free, but reservations are required and can be made by calling 215.409.6700.

The film is based on the life of anti-slavery pioneer William Wilberforce. “Amazing Grace” introduces viewers to the 18th century backroom politics that culminated in the end of the slave trade in the British Empire and influenced the abolitionist movement in America. The release of “Amazing Grace” coincides with the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade in Britain (1807) and the United States (1808). The powerful film is directed by Michael Apted (“The World is Not Enough”, “Coal Miner's Daughter”) from an original screenplay by Academy Award® nominee Steven Knight (“Dirty Pretty Things”).

Ioan Gruffudd (“Black Hawk Down”) plays Wilberforce and veteran actor Albert Finney (“Erin Brockovich”) plays John Newton, a confidante of Wilberforce who inspires him to pursue a life of service to humanity. Benedict Cumberbatch (“Hawking”) plays William Pitt the Younger who, at the age of 24, became England's youngest ever Prime Minister and encouraged Wilberforce to take up the fight to outlaw slavery in Parliament.

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ADD ONE/AMAZING GRACE PREVIEW

They waged what some consider the first modern political campaign, using petitions, boycotts, mass meetings, and even badges with slogans to take their message to the country at large. Wilberforce steered this cause and ultimately paved the way for the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire.

Philadelphia is the perfect setting for the screening of “Amazing Grace.” The city had close alliances with the British activists and was central in the American anti-slavery crusade. Quakers and Mennonites in the Mid-Atlantic were at the forefront of anti-slavery protesters. In 1688, Germantown was the site of the first anti-slavery protest in America. The Philadelphia Quakers carried anti-slavery petitions to their Yearly Meeting in England and provided support to William Wilberforce in Parliament. As America's "First City" with the largest free black community in the north, Philadelphia is also home to the world's first anti-slavery society (Pennsylvania Abolition Society), the founding church (Mother Bethel AME) of the denomination that established Wilberforce University, and a network of anti-slavery activists who ran the Underground Railroad.

Marshall Mitchell, Wilberforce University Executive Vice President, will introduce the program. Wilberforce University in Ohio was founded prior to the end of slavery in 1856 and is the nation's oldest, private African-American university.

The National Constitution Center, located at 525 Arch St. on Philadelphia's Independence Mall, is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing public understanding of the U.S. Constitution and the ideas and values it represents. Opened on July 4, 2003, the Constitution Center is a museum, an education center, and a forum for debate on constitutional issues. The museum dramatically tells the story of the Constitution from Revolutionary times to the present through more than 100 interactive, multimedia exhibits, film, photographs, text, sculpture and artifacts, and features a powerful, award-winning theatrical performance, “Freedom Rising”. The Center also houses the Annenberg Center for Education and Outreach, which serves as the hub for national constitutional education. Also, serving as a nonpartisan forum for constitutional discourse, the Center presents – without endorsement – programs that contain diverse viewpoints on a broad range of issues. The National Constitution Center's programs earned the organization a 2006 Best of Philly® award from *Philadelphia* magazine as the “Best Place To Smarten Up”. For more information, call 215.409.6700 or visit www.constitutioncenter.org.