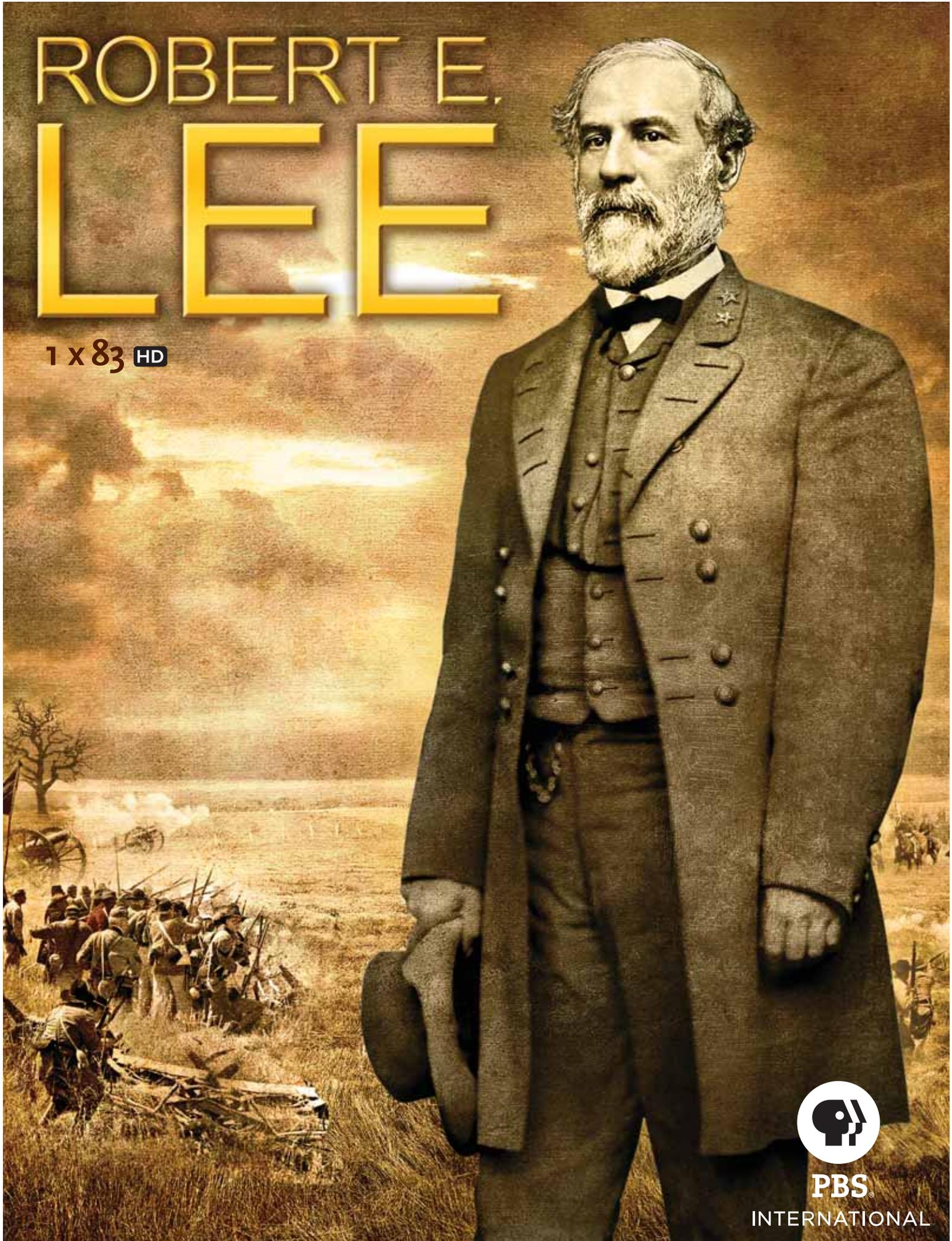


ROBERT E. LEE

1 x 83 HD



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He is celebrated by handsome equestrian statues in countless cities and towns across the American South, and by no less than five postage stamps issued by the government he fought against during the four bloodiest years in American history. Nearly a century and a half after his death, Robert E. Lee, the leading Confederate general of the American Civil War, remains a source of fascination and, for some, veneration. In life, he became the personification of the Confederate nation at war. In death, he became the marble hero of the Lost Cause, and later a national hero. And like his fellow occupants of the national pantheon, Washington and Lincoln, his legendary status has all but subsumed his flesh-and-blood humanity.

Robert E. Lee was a central character in America's defining national trauma, the Civil War. His wartime experience sheds a bright light on Civil War military strategy and tactics, and on the nature of wartime leadership, but it also reveals much about a myriad of less muscular aspects of the war—about the importance of food, clothing, morale, chance, and faith, to name only a few. It puts flesh on that bloated abstraction, “the Confederacy,” and reminds us that Lee fought for a democratic nation (albeit one, like the United States at the time, that denied equal rights to many of its citizens) whose leaders needed to command the support of its citizens, and its soldiers.

While the story of Lee's life is full of rich historical insight, so too is the story of his reputation after his death in 1870. Lee was immediately memorialized as the ideal Southerner, the Confederate without fault. An understanding of the process by which Lee was appropriated by the adherents of the Lost Cause is central to understanding the crucial role played by memory in shaping history. That Lee, the military leader of the Southern rebellion, would one day enter the pantheon of national heroes speaks volumes about the longstanding contest over the meaning of the Civil War.

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CREDITS

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