

Entry on Frontline, Public Broadcasting Series

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The Public Broadcasting System's series Frontline has served as one of the major documentary and public affairs program on American television since its debut in 1983. Emerging at a time when the U.S. television networks were dramatically cutting back on documentary and public affair's television, producer David Fanning and his team have produced a series of award-winning programs on issues ranging from programs on the Gulf War, Afghanistan war, and Iraq to producer Ofra Bikel's investigation of the Little Rascals sexual abuse case to Martin Smith and Lowell Bergman's chronicle of America's drug wars.

Originating from PBS's WGBH Boston affiliate, Frontline has won all of the major awards for broadcast journalism, including Emmy Awards, Peabody Awards, George Polk Awards, and DuPont Columbia University Awards. The series has specialized in current affairs documentaries, producing programs on U.S. military interventions in the Reagan era and on the Panama invasion and Gulf war during the presidency of George H.W. Bush. There have also been documentaries on the presidential candidacies and lives of Bill Clinton and Bob Dole ("The Choice," 1996) and on Al Gore and George W. Bush in 2000.

Frontline has also produced many provocative documentaries on the U.S. economy and political system, such as the investigations of the savings and loan scandal, "Other People's Money" and "The Great American Bailout." It probing investigative studies of the bank BCCI ("The Bank of Crooks and Criminals" and investigation of the Exxon-Valdez Alaskan tragedy "Anatomy of an Oil Spill" are also noteworthy.

Series creator and Senior Executive Producer, David Fanning believes during an era when the commercial U.S. TV "networks have all but abandoned the long-form documentary, Frontline is one place for the literate, concerned, and thoughtful voice on television. But it's clearly not enough. There should be many more places on television for ideas and films to explore our society and our world."

In 2002, Michael Sullivan was promoted to executive producer for special projects after serving as the series senior producer. Sullivan has supervised the production of many major Frontline projects including "Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero" in 2002, a probing of theological questions of the existence of God and good and evil in the face of horrific events such as the 9/11 terror attacks. Sullivan has continued into the 2003-4 season the high-quality production of documentaries for which the series is renown, including "Cyber War!" on hi-tech warfare, "Truth, War, & Consequences" on the chaotic aftermath of the Iraq war, and "Chasing the Sleeper Cell" on the dangers of Islamic terrorism.

Frontline's excellent website makes available transcripts and streaming videos of many of its programs (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/Frontline/>). For instance, one can access "Truth, War, & Consequences" from its website. The program is divided into sections like a DVD with textual commentary surrounding the screen. The program's page also makes accessible transcripts of interviews with the characters in the documentary, textual analysis of the material and issues in the program, and links to other Internet resources. Thus Frontline continues its tradition as a top documentary and public affairs TV series, while providing cutting-edge educational material on the Web.