

# Television at its best: A gripping history lesson on PBS

By **HAL BOEDEKER**  
SENTINEL TELEVISION CRITIC

Fox, fresh from its ratings triumph with the padded bore that was the *Joe Millionaire* finale, tonight turns its entire prime-time schedule over to Michael Jackson.

The strangely morphing singer answers the devastating documentary

## 'The War Behind Closed Doors'

★★★★★

on him that ABC's *20/20* aired two weeks ago. In all, the King of Weird will have logged 10 hours in sweeps month: six on ABC, two on NBC and two on Fox.

Michael, we know ye too well. Beat it.

Over on PBS tonight, *Frontline* offers a remarkable program that deserves a wider audience than Jackson's silly musings. *The War Behind Closed Doors* examines U.S. policy on Iraq and how it developed.

The smartly produced hour transforms talking-head television into a

PLEASE SEE **TV, E3**

gripping history lesson, one filled with behind-the-scenes intrigue.

The documentary, airing at 10 tonight on WMFE-Channel 24, confirms why the public has reason to feel uncertainty about Iraq. After the speeches at the United Nations and protests in the streets, the program explains that the toughest fights on the policy might have been inside the Bush administration.

The documentary examines the clash between Secretary of State Colin Powell, who embodies the pragmatic diplomacy of the first Bush administration, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, who represents the neo-Reaganites or hawks. The two men have been at odds before over

American power, especially after the Gulf War, when Wolfowitz fumed that Saddam Hussein hadn't been removed.

In 1992, Wolfowitz advocated a controversial policy of preventing long-term threats with military action in trouble spots like Iraq. When a draft of his position was leaked to the press, the first Bush administration disavowed it and reiterated its belief in containing foreign enemies.

Four days after the terrorist attacks, the once-rejected view and Saddam's overthrow became rallying points for the hawks. They include Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

Powell, however, would fight that change in policy. "Powell's reaction was that Wolfowitz was fixated on Iraq, that they were looking for kind of any excuse to bring Iraq into this," says *Washington Post* reporter Dan Balz.

The two schools of thought have competed for the president's favor, with the hawks enjoying more access to Bush.

"I think Powell wins a lot of technical arguments, because he's the one who talks to all the allies," says *Weekly Standard* editor Bill Kristol. "But I would still say it's ultimately Powell's tactics in the service of Bush's and Cheney's and Rumsfeld's and Wolfowitz's ends."

Kristol initially describes Dick Cheney as having feet in both camps, but the program explains the vice president's shift to the hawks' side and his call for a regime change in Iraq.

A Bush speech to the country on the night of Sept. 11, 2001, was a turning point in U.S. policy. In it, the president

said the country would "make no distinction between the ter-

rorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them."

"When he laid down those principles, I don't know whether he foresaw all of their implications," says former Bush speechwriter David Frum. "I don't know if he understood fully, and philosophically, the true radicalism of what he had just said."

Afghanistan was phase one, and Iraq represents phase two. The published Bush doctrine, so close to Wolfowitz's draft in 1992, explains how the country will intervene elsewhere.

"This is a strategy that's ultimately targeted at the Saudis and at the Egyptians and at the Pakistanis — at these authoritarian regimes that, in fact, have been the biggest breeders of terrorism in recent years," says Yale Professor John Gaddis. "Iraq has not been."

*The War Behind Closed Doors* touches briefly on the idea, as narrator Will Lyman says, that former President Bush is considered the "most formidable force against the hawks." Otherwise, the program explains the crucial debate in clear, concise terms and notes the irony that Powell would present the tougher stance to the United Nations after all the private arguments.

Certainly, *Frontline* offers a lot more to contemplate than the changes in Michael Jackson's face. The documentary won't do record ratings, but it could be the most important program this month.

Hal Boedeker can be reached at  
hboedeker@orlandosentinel.com or  
407-420-5756.

**'The War Behind  
Closed Doors'**

★★★★★

**Cast:** Bill Kristol, Richard Perle,  
David Frum, many others.

**Where and when:**

The *Frontline* program airs  
at 10 tonight  
on WMFE-Channel 24.

**Parents' guide:**

No objectionable material.

Reviewing key:

★★★★★ Excellent

★★★★ Good

★★★ Average

★★ Poor

★ Awful