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**FRONTLINE INVESTIGATES THE 25 YEARS OF MISSTEPS THAT MADE
HIV/AIDS ONE OF THE GREATEST PLAGUES IN HISTORY**

**FRONTLINE presents
*THE AGE OF AIDS***

May 30 and 31, 2006, from 9 to 11 P.M. ET on PBS

www.pbs.org/frontline/aids



On the 25th anniversary of the first diagnosed cases of AIDS, FRONTLINE examines one of the worst pandemics the world has ever known in *The Age of AIDS*, airing Tuesday and Wednesday, May 30 and 31, 2006, from 9 to 11 P.M. ET on PBS (check local listings). After a quarter century of political denial and social stigma, of stunning scientific breakthroughs, bitter policy battles, and inadequate prevention campaigns, HIV/AIDS continues to spread rapidly throughout much of the world, particularly in developing nations. Over 25 years, roughly 70 million people have been infected with the virus and 22 million have already died of AIDS.

“It’s a very human virus, a very human epidemic. It touches right to the heart of our existence,” says Dr. Peter Piot, executive director of UNAIDS. “When you think of it, that in let’s say 25 years, about 70 million people have become infected with this virus, probably coming from one [transmission] ... it’s mind blowing.”

And the crisis continues: over the next decade, an estimated 50 million more people will contract HIV. “We cannot continue just to treat patients as they become infected,” says Dr. David Ho, AIDS researcher and Time magazine’s 1996 Man of the Year for his work on the life-prolonging “triple cocktail” treatment for HIV. “The real solution to this epidemic is to curtail the spread of the virus.”

Why humanity has failed to stop the spread of HIV is the central question of *The Age of AIDS*. Over four hours, the series examines one of the most important scientific and political stories of our time: the story of a mysterious agent that invaded the human species and exploited its frailties and compulsions—sexual desire and drug addiction, bigotry and greed, political indifference and bureaucratic inertia—to spread itself across the globe.

Filmed around the world in 16 countries, *The Age of AIDS* features interviews with major players in the battle against HIV/AIDS: scientists, including James Curran of Emory University and formerly with the Centers for Disease Control, Anthony Fauci of the National Institute for Allergic and Infectious Diseases, and Dr. Helene Gayle of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; political figures, including former President Bill Clinton, U2 front man and AIDS activist Bono, and evangelist Franklin Graham; and innovative activists, including Cleve Jones, creator of the AIDS quilt; Noerine Kaleeba, founder of Africa's first AIDS support organization; and Mechai Viravaidya, “the condom king” of Thailand.

In the first night's two-hour broadcast, *The Age of AIDS* begins with the medical and scientific mystery that emerged in 1981 when five gay men in Los Angeles were diagnosed with a new disease. The film documents the frantic search by American and European scientists and epidemiologists to find the source of the deadly infection as they tracked its spread among gay men, intravenous drug users, and hemophiliacs, and then into the general population. The trail led them back in time, from major American and European cities, to Haiti, and finally to the Congo.

“It has become incontrovertible,” says virologist George Shaw, “that the HIV-1 virus that currently infects over 60 million humans arose as a consequence of a single transmission event from a single chimpanzee in West Central Africa to one human.”

The story then moves from the mysterious virus to the fear, stigma and political controversies during the Reagan administration. Attempts to prevent the spread of the disease, most prevalent among gay men and intravenous drug users at the time, sparked furious public debate. As the film tracks the devastating spread of HIV around the world, it documents how some countries—in Europe, Africa and Asia—found tools to slow its progress, including needle exchange programs and massive condom distribution campaigns.

“Without question, politics has been one of the driving forces in the spread of this disease,” says Merv Silverman, former president of the American Foundation for AIDS Research. “AIDS is the most political disease I’ve ever seen.”

The second night of *The Age of AIDS* begins by exploring the chasm that emerged between rich and poor following the development of the miraculous “triple cocktail” HIV treatment. In the mid-1990s, when doctors discovered the cocktail, it seemed to signal a new era in which AIDS was no longer a fatal disease. But the high price of the drugs meant they were unaffordable to patients in developing nations. *The Age of AIDS* tracks the political struggle to lower those prices, in countries like Brazil, and documents the South African government’s tragic failure to battle the epidemic that was overwhelming their country.

“This is a movement and a government that fought for the equality of black people,” says South African activist Zachie Achmat. “To find out that the movement does not care about the lives of poor people and the lives of black people and is prepared to consign us to the graveyard, was actually quite shocking.”

The film also examines the next wave of the AIDS epidemic, in some of the most populous and strategically important nations in the world, including Russia, India and China, and tracks the same pattern of official denial and political indifference that characterized the epidemic in so many other countries. Globally, pressure was building around the political struggle to finance AIDS prevention and treatment in the developing world, between the UN-backed Global Fund and the Bush administration’s AIDS initiative, which was heavily influenced by the president’s evangelical Christian political supporters.

Twenty-five years after the first cases were diagnosed, a scientific solution to the AIDS pandemic remains elusive. Despite billions of dollars being poured into research, most scientists believe a breakthrough on an effective vaccine against HIV is years, perhaps decades away. “Even if we come up with a cure or vaccine tomorrow, just think about the time that would be needed to implement all these measures widely throughout the world,” says David Ho, who was a young medical resident in Los Angeles in 1981 when he saw his first AIDS patient. “So to me it’s clear that I’m not going to see the end of this epidemic. And it’s also pretty clear that my children won’t see the end of this epidemic.”

“The story of this pandemic shows how AIDS is a lens that reveals the flaws in the social fabric of every country it enters,” says Renata Simone, series producer and reporter for *The Age of AIDS*. “AIDS always was a preventable pandemic. And it still is—the lessons for the future are here in the history.”

The Age of AIDS is a co-production of WGBH/FRONTLINE and Paladin InVision Ltd. with Silverbridge Productions Ltd. and Granada International in association with Channel Four (UK). The Series Producer and Reporter is Renata Simone. Part I is produced and directed by William Cran, and is written by William Cran & Renata Simone. Part II is produced and directed by Greg Barker, and is written by Greg Barker & Renata Simone. FRONTLINE is produced by WGBH Boston and is broadcast nationwide on PBS. Funding for FRONTLINE is provided by The Park Foundation and through the support of PBS viewers. Additional support for *The Age of AIDS* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Michael W. McCarthy Foundation, the Esmond V. Harmsworth Charitable Foundation and the B.W. Bastian Foundation. FRONTLINE is closed-captioned for deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers and described for people who are blind or visually impaired by the Media Access Group at WGBH. FRONTLINE is a registered trademark of WGBH Educational Foundation. The FRONTLINE executive producer for special projects is Michael Sullivan. The executive producer for FRONTLINE is David Fanning.

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