

Film chronicles twin towers

David DiCerto/CNS

NEW YORK — The men, mechanics and myths behind the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center, including the dark events of Sept. 11, 2001, are explored in "The Center of the World" premiering Monday, Sept. 8, 9 p.m.-midnight EDT on PBS.

Eighth in a series of documentary films chronicling the history of New York City by award-winning filmmaker Ric Burns, the three-hour saga, narrated by David Ogden Stiers, paints a portrait, at once both sweeping and intimate, of buildings which were — as described in the film — "two of the tallest, most instantly recognizable structures on earth, the mightiest and most ambivalent monuments of their age and, in the end, the most tragic."

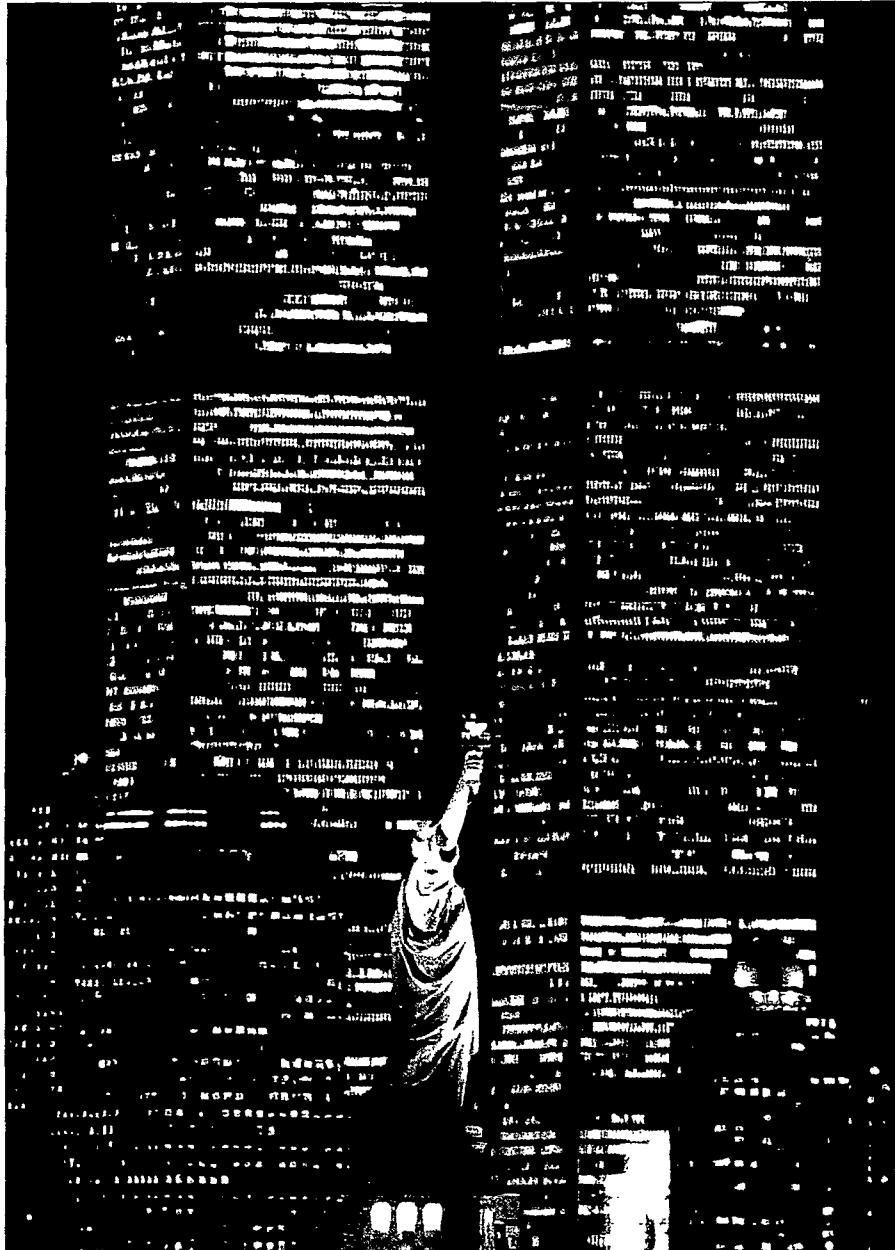
Part history lesson, part modern Tower of Babel parable, the program blends archival footage and rare photos of the towers with interviews of those involved in their construction, as well as journalists and historians, who offer insights into the urban, economic, architectural and symbolic significance of the late, great skyscrapers.

Much of the program is devoted to the extraordinary story of the buildings themselves, a story that finds its genesis in the days of America's post-war boom, as the nation began to flex its global muscle. The idea of a "World Trade Center" was originally proposed in New York as early as 1946, as a way of re-establishing the city's fading pre-eminence on the international stage as the hub of world finance, as well as a practical means to reinvigorate the lagging economy of lower Manhattan.

The show also spotlights the personalities who took one of the greatest real-estate gambles in history and propelled the project forward.

Among those discussed are David and Nelson Rockefeller, whose vaulting ambitions and Promethean egos transformed the venture — initially envisioned as a modest 60-story complex — into a white whale of "catalytic bigness," composed of 192,000 tons of steel, which would eventually soar a quarter of a mile into the New York sky. Using period news clips, the film touches on many of the bitter political controversies surrounding the World Trade Center project, including an amusing feud with the twin towers' uptown rival, the Empire State Building, for skyline supremacy.

Also examined in depth are the many engineering and architectural challenges that were posed by the daunting undertaking.



PBS/Corbis/CNS

PBS will present a documentary Sept. 8 exploring the men, mechanics and myths behind the twin towers, including the dark events of Sept. 11, 2001.



At their completion in 1973 — during a period of national fiscal crisis — the towers were deemed a failure. In a twist of foreboding irony one critic referred to them as "the biggest tombstone of the world." But as the tides of change swept out the anemic 1970s, replacing them with the financially robust 1980s and '90s, the towers would become an apt metaphor for New York's renaissance, as well as the symbol of America's indomitable spirit and hubris.

In its final 90 minutes the film takes a dark turn, as it revisits the terrible events of Sept. 11. Many of the all-too-familiar images still prove disturbing to watch, the years and resumption of relative normalcy

unable to strip them of their power to devastate and enrage. The film points out that while the towers took eight years to complete, they each took less than 10 seconds to fall. Equally chilling is the grim statistic that through those eight years of construction not a single ironworker's life was lost, while on a clear late summer morning 2,792 lives were extinguished.

The film ends on a hopeful note, confident that the heroism exhibited on Sept. 11 will inspire the hearts of New Yorkers and all Americans to rise like the phoenix from the ashes of the World Trade Center — or, in Christian parlance, be resurrected from the death and despair of Good Friday to the joy of Easter Sunday.

DiCerto is on the staff of the Office for Film & Broadcasting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

U.N. leader's job examined

Henry Herx/CNS

NEW YORK — Examining how the secretary-general of the United Nations has led the world organization through the crises of the past decade is "Kofi Annan: Center of the Storm" to be rerun Friday, Sept. 5, 10-11:30 p.m. EDT on PBS.

The program begins with the U.N. meeting condemning the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on America that engendered, according to one observer, a "new-found unity" among the member states.

It also documents the role of U.N. organizations in providing desperately needed food, shelter and medical assistance for the Afghan people after their Taliban leaders were driven from power.

In another U.N. initiative, Annan convened a meeting in Tokyo to elicit funding for the reconstruction of war-torn Afghanistan, the result of which brought pledges of some \$4.5 billion from member states.

Sharply contrasted with the success of these Afghan aid programs, however, is a segment recalling the tragic failure of U.N. peacekeepers to stop the genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

These two examples illustrate how the secretary-general's power is limited to carrying out policies established by the General Assembly, though the office of the secretary-general has a moral force of its own that reaches out to the public while influencing the U.N. agenda.

In other words, Annan failed to convince the U.N. to intervene in Rwanda but had no trouble in marshaling U.N. support for Afghan aid.

Along the way, viewers learn Annan grew up in Ghana, studied economics in an American college and worked in a number of U.N. agencies before being elected as the first secretary-general to come from the ranks of U.N. officials.

The documentary provides a compelling portrait of Annan, who as U.N. secretary-general has been confronted by one crisis after another.

Herx is retired director of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office for Film and Broadcasting.

Mod

Mark Pattison/CNS

WASHINGTON — see history brought another to see in the present.

But that's what vision viewers will with "Joan of Arc of Arc story is by temporary times.

The drama, w CBS this fall 8-9 on Fridays, featuring bly as 16-year-old who's moved to the of Arcadia with his brothers. God selects he wants to speak God isn't always episode God takes high school cafeteria.

Series creator producer Barbara Hall last three years of ing Amy," said she talk "all the time scripts about Godifests himself.

"Every writer was an hour, and they take 20 minutes Catholic News 5 phone interview where they were.

"We talk about can do in this part not the real universe he angry? Is he planning about what qu

'Pancho

Gerri Pare/CNS

NEW YORK — can rebel leader for lution to finance dramatized in the Starring Pancho V airing Sunday, 8 p.m. EDT on the H

In 1914, Fort Le Lywood — was the the world. Director (Colm Feore) was: ing "Birth of a Nation" received a unique none other than re cisco "Pancho" Videras).

For gold and 2 profits, Griffith could record the first action movie of the struggle against the ment soldiers. Int partner (Jim Bro