

American MASTERS

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Production Bio

A Production of
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New York for PBS

AMERICAN MASTERS Walter Cronkite: Witness to History



PBS®

WALTER CRONKITE

Journalist

Walter Cronkite has covered virtually every news event during his more than 65 years in journalism – the last 54 affiliated with CBS News. He became a special correspondent for CBS News when he stepped down on March 6, 1981 after 19 years as anchorman and managing editor of the CBS Evening News. Affectionately nicknamed “Old Iron Pants” for his unflappability under pressure, Cronkite’s accomplishments – both on-air and off – have won him acclaim and trust from journalism colleagues and the American public alike.

Born in St. Joseph, Missouri on November 4, 1916, Cronkite began his career in journalism as a campus correspondent at *The Houston Post* during high school and his freshman year at college. He also worked as a sports announcer for a local radio station in Oklahoma City and joined the United Press in 1937, where he remained for 11 years.

It was as a United Press correspondent that Cronkite covered World War II – landing with the invading Allied troops in North Africa, covering the battle of the North Atlantic in 1942, taking part in the Normandy beachhead assaults in 1944 and participating as one of the first newsmen in B-17 raids over Germany. After reporting the German surrender, Cronkite established United Press bureaus in Europe, was named United Press bureau chief in Brussels and covered the Nuremberg trials of Goering, Hess and other top Nazis. From 1946 to 1948, he was chief correspondent for United Press in Moscow.

In July 1950, Cronkite joined CBS News in Washington as a correspondent and was anchorman for

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their political convention and election coverage from 1952 to 1980. He assumed his duties on the CBS Evening News on April 16, 1962, which began as a 15-minute broadcast. On September 2, 1963, it debuted as network television's first half-hour, weeknight news broadcast with Cronkite's headline-making interview with President John F. Kennedy.

Following his departure on March 6, 1981 from the CBS Evening News, Cronkite hosted several acclaimed CBS documentary programs, including the Emmy-winning *Children of Apartheid* and the CBS News science magazine series *Walter Cronkite's Universe*. In 1985, Cronkite was inducted into the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Hall of Fame.

Cronkite was the only journalist to be voted among the top 10 "most influential decision-makers in America" in surveys conducted by *U.S. News and World Report* and also was named the "most influential person" in broadcasting. In a nationwide viewer opinion survey conducted as recently as 1995, more than a decade after leaving the CBS anchor desk, he again was voted "Most Trusted Man in Television News."

As an avid sailor of his then 48-foot yacht, *Wyntje*, Cronkite recorded his experiences sailing waterways from the Chesapeake Bay to Key West in his book *South by Southeast* (Oxmoor House, 1983), with paintings by artist Ray Ellis accompanying his text. Other collaborations with Ellis resulted in *North by Northeast* (Oxmoor House, 1986), which covered his trips sailing the northeast coastal waterways, and in *Westwind* (Oxmoor House, 1990) he recounted his sailing tour of America's West Coast. His most recent sailing book, *Around America*, was published in August 2001 (W.W. Norton). Cronkite's first book, *Eye on the World* (Cowles, 1971) is an edited compendium of CBS News' reporting on the major trends and stories of 1970, for which he provided analysis and commentary.

He co-founded The Cronkite Ward Company in 1993, which has produced more than 100 award-winning documentary hours for The Discovery Channel, PBS and other networks. In 1996, his

production company, in collaboration with CBS and The Discovery Channel, produced his memoirs, titled *Cronkite Remembers*. The two-hour CBS special aired in May of that year, and the eight-hour series premiered later on The Discovery Channel. Also in 1996, he completed his autobiography, *A Reporter's Life*, published by Knopf.

Cronkite wrote a weekly, syndicated newspaper column in 2004 which appeared in more than 186 newspapers throughout the country.

In addition to his ongoing assignments as a special correspondent for CBS, Cronkite maintains a demanding, international lecture and public appearance schedule and also hosts many public affairs and cultural programs.

Still an avid sailor, Cronkite enjoys free time aboard his recently acquired 64-foot yacht, *Wyntje*, sailing the waters of the northeast and the Caribbean. He is a resident of New York City.

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Thirteen/WNET New York is one of the key program providers for public television, bringing such acclaimed series as *Nature*, *Great Performances*, *AMERICAN MASTERS*, *Charlie Rose*, *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, *Wide Angle*, *Secrets of the Dead*, and *Cyberchase* - as well as the work of Bill Moyers - to audiences nationwide. As the flagship public broadcaster in the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut metro area, Thirteen reaches millions of viewers each week, airing the best of American public television along with its own local productions such as *The Ethnic Heritage Specials*, *The Thirteen Walking Tours*, *New York Voices*, and *Reel New York*. With educational and community outreach projects that extend the impact of its television productions, Thirteen takes television "out of the box." And as broadcast and digital media converge, Thirteen is blazing trails in the creation of Web sites, enhanced television, CD-ROMs, DVD-ROMs, educational software, and other cutting-edge media products. More information about Thirteen can be found at: www.thirteen.org.

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