

The HUGO CHAVEZ SHOW



1 X 90 HD



International

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He's been portrayed as a savior and an autocrat; a hero to his nation's poor, and a bombastic, would-be dictator eager to launch himself onto the world stage. But who is the real Hugo Chavez?

In *The Hugo Chavez Show*, FRONTLINE producer Ofra Bikel travels to Venezuela to offer an illuminating portrait of the Venezuelan president famous for calling George Bush a devil and cultivating a close friendship with Fidel Castro. Through interviews with former government officials, Chavez associates and ordinary Venezuelans, this documentary chronicles Chavez's relatively swift ascent to power and his efforts to use the powers of the presidency to stay there.

The film also reveals the key role that Chavez's savvy use of the media played in his rise to power. *The Hugo Chavez Show* begins by introducing viewers to "Alo, Presidente"—or "Hello, President"—a weekly televised, five-hour variety show in which Chavez speaks directly to the people, mixing in a smattering of songs, poetry and whatever else strikes his fancy.

"Chavez is easily caricatured, because he can be funny, he can seem buffoonish on his Hello Presidentes," journalist Jon Lee Anderson tells FRONTLINE. "He sings, he gets involved in wordplay...he's probably the world's first virtual president in the age of the communication revolution."

It was Chavez's keen grasp of the power of the media that propelled him to power, observers say. The film recounts how Chavez got his first taste of the media limelight when he participated in a failed 1992 coup. Chavez, who was commanding the group's forces in Caracas, agreed to surrender in exchange for a chance to go on the air and address his comrades—and the people. The failed coup would send Chavez to prison for two years—but the media exposure planted the seeds of a folk hero in the making.

Upon his release from prison in 1994, Chavez began laying the groundwork for his eventual rise to the presidency in 1998. *The Hugo Chavez Show* chronicles the highs and lows of Chavez's 10-year tenure—from his successes to push through radical laws that sent Venezuelan society veering to the left—to injecting billions of dollars in oil revenue into socialistic government missions and cooperatives. Yet he also faced an attempted coup and suffered last year's stinging defeat at the polls, when Venezuelan voters rejected his attempts to pass laws that would allow him to stay in office indefinitely.

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CREDITS

FRONTLINE Executive Producer: David Fanning
Writer, Producer, Director: Ofra Bikel

A FRONTLINE co-production with Ofra Bikel Productions for WGBH/Boston

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