

The Prime Ministers: The Pioneers: Film Review

10:50 AM PDT 10/21/2013 by Frank Scheck

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The Bottom Line

While not as comprehensive or objective as one would hope, this vivid documentary will prove fascinating to history buffs.

Director

Richard Trank

Screenwriters

Richard Trank, Rabbi Marvin Hier

Cast

Sandra Bullock, Michael Douglas, Christoph Waltz, Leonard Nimoy

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Richard Trank's documentary delivers an insider's account of several key prime ministers in Israel's history.

Not quite as expansive in its scope as its title suggests, **Richard Trank's** documentary relates much of Israel's early history as seen through the eyes of 84-year-old **Yehuda Avner**, on whose memoirs the film is based. The avuncular Avner, who serves as the film's primary talking head, delivers a true insider's perspective, having served as an aide and speechwriter to such key Israeli historical figures as **Levi Eshkol**, **Golda Meir**, **Yitzhak Rabin**, **Menachem Begin** and **Shimon Peres**. His often personal recollections form the heart of *The Prime Ministers: The Pioneers*.

Since Avner was not personally connected to such earlier personages as Israel's first prime minister, **David Ben-Gurion**, the film provides only a cursory examination of the country's founding and early years. Its focus begins with Eshkol's tenure, which included the epochal 1967 Six-Day War. One of the highlights is Avner's recollections of a meeting between Eshkol and Lyndon Johnson at the latter's Texas ranch, where Eshkol, who had spent his early years on a kibbutz, impressed the down-home U.S. president with his veterinary skills. More enlightening is Avner's account of spotting a note passed by Johnson to his Secretary of State **Dean Rusk** featuring the instruction, "Dean -- Go slow on this thing," which Avner pocketed and still has to this day.

The film then proceeds to Meir, who led the nation through a series of terrorist attacks and ultimately the 1973 Yom Kippur War. It presents a fascinating portrait of the indefatigable female prime minister who triumphed in wartime despite her utter lack of military experience. Subsequent segments detail the in-fighting that went on between Meir's successors and such figures as Foreign Minister Abba Eban, who Avner cites for his verbosity.

The film is somewhat sketchy in its recounting of its historical details and the use of such Hollywood stars as **Sandra Bullock**, **Leonard Nimoy**, **Michael Douglas** and **Chrisoph Waltz** to voice the speeches of Meir, Eshkol, Rabin and Begin respectively is unnecessarily distracting. It also suffers from its one-sided perspective which often fails to provide sufficient informational context. But it nonetheless provides a vividly personal account of the country's travails during some of its most tumultuous times that will prove fascinating to history buffs. A sequel scheduled for release next year, entitled *The Prime Ministers: Soldiers and Peacemakers*, promises to include segments devoted to such later events as the raid on Entebbe, the Camp David and Oslo accords, and the war in Lebanon.

Opened: Friday, Oct. 18 (Moriah Films)

Cast: Sandra Bullock, Michael Douglas, Leonard Nimoy, Christoph Waltz

Director: Richard Trank

Screenwriters/producers: Rabbi Marvin Hier, Richard Trank

Director of photography: Jeffrey Victor

Editor: Nimrod Erez

Composer: Lee Holdridge

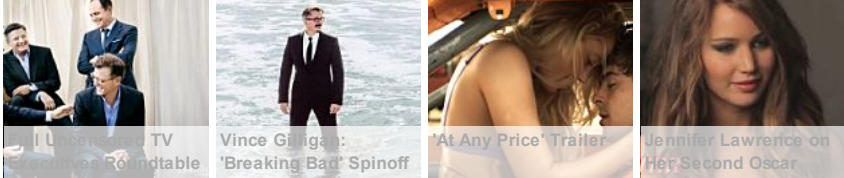
Not rated, 115 min.

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