



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

***American Idealist*, the Story of Robert “Sargent” Shriver,
To Air on PBS on Martin Luther King Day
Shriver’s Social Inventions—Peace Corps, VISTA, Head Start—
Inspired a Generation of Young Americans
His Relationship with Martin Luther King Jr. Helped Shape American
History**

National Airdate: Monday, January 21 at 9:00 p.m.

Chicago -- Although his much celebrated social programs -- Peace Corps, VISTA and Head Start among them -- have transformed countless lives, Robert “Sargent” Shriver remains relatively unknown to most Americans. Given Shriver’s relationship with Martin Luther King Jr. and his commitment to volunteerism, it is fitting that public television present ***American Idealist***, a film about his life and vision, on Martin Luther King Day, January 21 at 9 p.m. ET/PT (Check your local listings).

Produced by the Emmy Award-winning Chicago Video Project, ***American Idealist*** tells the story of a man who arguably touched more lives than any American since Franklin Roosevelt through the launch of unprecedented social initiatives, including the Peace Corps, Head Start, Legal Services for the Poor, VISTA, Job Corps, and Foster Grandparents. Yet for all his achievements, Shriver was constantly embattled. President Eisenhower ridiculed the Peace Corps as the “Kiddie Corps,” his commitment to civil rights and the poor led powerful conservative senators to charge that his antipoverty programs exceeded the role of the federal government and many Democratic governors and mayors resented how Shriver’s call for community action stirred social protest. Even the man who picked Shriver to run the war on poverty, President Lyndon Johnson, complained that Shriver had created a “damn revolution.”

Bill Moyers, Coretta Scott King, former U.S. Senator Harris Wofford, Marian Wright Edelman, Peace Corps volunteers, and leading historians are among those who bring Shriver’s story to life.

Present at many of the watershed events of modern history, Shriver's vision took shape in a momentous era that included the Depression, the Holocaust, World War II and the mass struggle for black freedom. His story is interwoven with those of the young Americans whose lives were transformed by participation in his Peace Corps and War on Poverty programs. Significant events highlighted in the film include how Shriver convinced John F. Kennedy to make a phone call to Coretta Scott King while her husband was locked in a Birmingham jail and how that led to a tide of black voter support that tipped the 1960 presidential election, the whirlwind of invention that included the Peace Corps and the tragedy that came over the Kennedy family and the nation as Shriver made arrangements for the funeral of his murdered brother-in-law.

American Idealist is written, directed and produced by Bruce Orenstein, founder and executive director of the Chicago Video Project. Maria Shriver served as executive producer. ***American Idealist*** is funded in part by the Essilor Vision Foundation and is also made possible by the Shriver Peace Worker Program, Inc., Public Welfare Foundation, Wolf Foundation, Omega Foundation, Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver, & Jacobson Law Firm, Rockefeller Bros. Foundation, Robert Stuart Family Foundation, Paul L. Newman, Senator and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, The Joyce Foundation, Blue Ridge Foundation, City Bridge Foundation, New York Community Trust, The Whitehead Foundation and others. A complete list is available from PBS.

About Chicago Video Project

Since 1990, the Chicago Video Project (CVP) has produced educational documentaries and public policy videos about social and economic issues for more than sixty non-profit advocacy and social change organizations

On seven separate occasions, from 1993 to 2006, the Council on Foundations Annual Film and Video Festivals recognized CVP productions for excellence in "how media can play an important role in advancing grant making goals." No other producer has been recognized on as many occasions in Festival's thirty-eight year history.

CVP's Emmy award-winning WTTG special, *No Place To Live: Chicago's Affordable Housing Crisis*, helped a coalition of housing groups move state legislation promoting the development of affordable housing. CVP also co-produced the PBS special, *The Democratic Promise: the Life and Legacy of Saul Alinsky*, which was nominated for an Emmy.

About WTTW National Productions

WTTW National Productions is a premier producer and presenter of original, high-quality television programs for both public and commercial television broadcast. WTTW National Productions is a division of Window to the World Communications, Inc., the parent company of WTTW11 Chicago, the nation's most-watched public television station. For more than 50 years, WTTW11 and WTTW National Productions have introduced a wide array of ground-breaking television programming – reflecting the world's rich and diverse arts and entertainment scene as well as education, politics, public affairs, business, and religion – to a national audience. Its landmark innovative series and original productions include the critically-acclaimed performance showcases *Soundstage* and *Legends of Jazz with Ramsey Lewis*; *Grannies on Safari*; *CEO Exchange*; *David Broza at Masada: The Sunrise Concert*; *MEXICO -- One Plate at a Time with Rick Bayless*; and *WordWorld*, the first of four children's properties to come from the Ready to Learn Partnership.

About the Essilor Vision Foundation

The Essilor Vision Foundation is a 501(c) (3) public, non-profit organization, based in Dallas, Texas, dedicated to helping people achieve better lives through better sight by creating and supporting activities that advance good vision and its benefits and offering special help to those who need it most. www.essilorvisionfoundation.org

Downloadable photography available at: www.pbs.org/pressroom

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