

***Firing Line* broadcast archive: Preface to the program catalogue**

The Preface below was copied verbatim from the program catalogue compiled by the *Firing Line* staff. It provides an overview of the program's broadcast history, format, and numbering system.

Preface

With 1,504 installments over 33 years, *Firing Line* is the longest-running public-affairs show in television history with a single host, William F. Buckley Jr.

The *Firing Line* archives consist of: tapes of all the shows; transcripts of all the shows; for about two-thirds of the shows, the newsletter that went out to the individual television stations describing the show (the newsletter was not begun immediately, and only sporadic copies survive for the first several years); and research packages for nearly all the shows.

Firing Line kept substantially the same basic format throughout its life, but with certain variations.

(1) It began as an hour-long show for commercial television (i.e., with time subtracted for commercial breaks), syndicated by WOR in New York City.

In 1971, under the auspices of the Southern Educational Communications Association (SECA), it moved to public television and became a full hour. This move is reflected in a numbering change in the attached catalogue: shows numbered 1 through 240 were on commercial television; the SECA series then begins with S1, taped on May 26, 1971. The WOR shows were numbered according to the order in which they were taped; the SECA shows were numbered according to the order in which they were first broadcast.

In 1988 the length of the regular shows was changed to a half-hour.

(2) Starting in 1978, interspersed among the regular shows are occasional specials and two-hour debates--formal debates, with opening statements, cross-examination, and closing statements. The debates were initially numbered as regular shows (the first *Firing Line* Debate was #S306, although a debate sponsored by Columbia College's Debate Council was filmed as shows #S296 and #S297 a few weeks earlier). Beginning in 1986, a separate numbering system was instituted for *Firing Line* Specials (with the number prefaced by the letters FLS). (*Note:* Debates listed as "Part I" and "Part II" were shown on consecutive weeks in the regular time slot rather than being shown all at once in a special two-hour time slot.) We have listed *Firing Line* Specials in their chronological places, interspersed among the regular shows.

Starting with #S961, in March of 1993, the formal debate would often be followed by two or more shows in which roughly the same participants were released from the debate format for informal discussion.

(3) Over the years Mr. Buckley and his producer, Warren Steibel, used various methods of bringing an extra perspective to the discussion. In the early years there would often be a panel of three questioners--sometimes students, sometimes adults.

Starting in 1977 there would often be a single "examiner," who would play a larger part in the proceedings than the panel of questioners had typically done. We have not listed the examiners in this catalogue, but the ones who appeared most frequently were Jeff Greenfield, Michael Kinsley, Harriet Pilpel, and Mark Green.

In 1988, when the show went to half an hour, the examiner was eliminated, but there was often a "moderator," whose role was similar to that of the moderator in a formal debate. The moderator would introduce both host and guest, and then ask the opening question. The moderators are listed in the catalogue; the most frequently appearing was Michael Kinsley.

[Some early programs included a person called a chairman, who functioned like a moderator. For programs discovered to have a chairman, he or she has been designated in the online database by including the chairman's name in the guest field and the word "chairman" in the biography field. Some early programs had a three- or four-person panel. When located, these have been designated by including the names of persons in guest fields and the word "panelist" in the respective biography fields. *Hoover Institution Archives staff*]

(4) Beginning with show #171, in October of 1969, approximately twice a year the tables would be turned, with a panel of questioners putting Mr. Buckley "on the firing line."