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CONTACT

Lisa Tawil, ITVS	415-356-8383	lisa_tawil@itvs.org
Mary Lugo	770-623-8190	lugo@negia.net
Cara White	843-881-1480	cara.white@mac.com

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***A FRAGILE TRUST: PLAGIARISM, POWER, AND JAYSON BLAIR AT
THE NEW YORK TIMES PREMIERES ON INDEPENDENT LENS
MONDAY, MAY 5, 2014 ON PBS***

(San Francisco, CA) — *A Fragile Trust: Plagiarism, Power, and Jayson Blair at The New York Times* is a portrait of the most infamous serial plagiarist of our time, and an investigation of the massive scandal he unleashed that rocked not only *The New York Times* but the entire world of journalism. Produced and directed by Samantha Grant, *A Fragile Trust* premieres on the PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Stanley Tucci, on Monday, May 5, 2014; 10:00-11:30 PM ET on PBS ([check local listings.](#))

In 2003, *New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair was discovered to have boldly plagiarized the work of other reporters, and supplemented his own reporting with fabricated details in dozens of published stories. The ensuing media frenzy was an unprecedented blow for the paper which, just a year earlier, had won a record seven Pulitzer Prizes for its coverage of 9/11. The daily operations of the *Times* newsroom soon became a public spectacle as every major news outlet picked up the story. The fact that Blair is African American was emphasized again and again as accounts of the “Blair Affair” served up a soap opera-style tale of deception, drug abuse, racism, mental illness, white guilt, and power struggles inside the hallowed halls of the *Times*. Accusations of favoritism, lowered standards for minorities, and an editor gone rogue were hotly debated by pundits. Ultimately, the scandal ended the careers of two top *Times* editors and changed standards in newsrooms everywhere.

A Fragile Trust features an exclusive and revealing interview with Blair — the first time he has spoken about his actions at the *Times* since the weeks immediately following the scandal. In addition, Blair provided unprecedented access to his notes, reflections, and even his private email account from the months leading up to the discovery of the scandal. When asked why he agreed to participate in the film he wrote, “I became convinced that while the documentary would hardly be flattering to me, it would provide the depth that would answer some questions people had, including me.”

Starting with the plagiarized article that ultimately led to his undoing, the film traces Blair’s spectacular rise and fall as he desperately clings to his career even as his lies and

deceptions mount. Also featured are interviews with several of his *Times* colleagues and editors, who share their insights about how Blair's flagrant transgressions went unnoticed for so long.

With more and more publications moving to online-only formats and plagiarism on the rise, this cautionary tale about the slippery slope of ethical transgressions is more relevant than ever.

Visit the *Fragile Trust* companion website (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/fragile-trust/>) which features information about the film, including an interview with the filmmaker and more information. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film, and more.

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About the Participants, in Order of Appearance

Jayson Blair is the journalist who incited the worst plagiarism scandal in modern journalism. He is currently a certified life coach in Virginia.

Macarena Hernandez is a journalist and educator who, like Blair, also got her start at *The New York Times*. Blair's blatant plagiarism of Hernandez's *San Antonio Express-News* story on a missing serviceman was brought to the attention of the *Times* editors and launched the investigation into Blair's reporting.

Howell Raines was the Executive Editor of *The New York Times* during the Blair scandal.

Seth Mnookin is a journalist and author of *Hard News: Twenty-one Brutal Months at The New York Times and How They Changed the American Media*. As a media reporter at *Newsweek*, Mnookin was involved from the beginning in reporting the Jayson Blair scandal.

Howard Kurtz is a former media reporter for *The Washington Post* and is credited with being the first journalist to break the news of the Blair scandal.

Lena Williams is a veteran *New York Times* journalist and Newspaper Guild representative.

William Schmidt was the Associate Managing Editor at *The New York Times* who was responsible for personnel issues and disciplinary actions during Blair's years at the paper.

Jerry Gray is a reporter at *The New York Times* who was assigned to mentor Blair during his first days as an intern at the paper.

About the Filmmaker

Samantha Grant (Producer/Director) is an award-winning documentary filmmaker, journalist, and educator. Her approach to storytelling is influenced by both her undergraduate degree in American Studies/Literature from Yale University and her Master's of Journalism from the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism. Through her San Francisco-based production company GUSH Productions, Grant has created work for clients including MTV, ABC, PBS, CNN, NPR, FRONTLINE, FRONTLINE/World, and Al Jazeera International. In 2007, Grant was named a Carnegie/Knight fellow as part of the News 21 Initiative on the Future of Journalism. In 2011, she was named a BAVC MediaMaker Fellow. Grant is currently creating the educational alternate reality game *Decisions on Deadline*, which teaches journalism ethics through an interactive and entertaining gaming experience. She is also the Director/Cinematographer of the upcoming feature documentary *Girls in the Forest* and lectures at UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism and Stanford's Knight Fellowship Program.

CREDITS

Producer/Director	Samantha Grant
Co-Producer	Brittney Shepherd
Editor	Richard Levien
Writer	Samantha Grant, Richard Levien
Cinematographer	Singeli Agnew, Samantha Grant
Composer	Justin Melland
Associate Producer	Jessica Jones
Animator	Mike Nicholson, Picturebox
Color Finisher	Gary Coates
Sound Mix	Philip Perkins

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The senior series producer is Lois Vossen. More information at www.pbs.org/independentlens. Join *Independent Lens* on Facebook at www.facebook.com/independentlens.