

THE MAKING OF THE PRESIDENT

The 1960s



A VIEWER'S GUIDE

Athenä:

DAVID WOLPER AND THE ART OF THE DOCUMENTARY

By Theodore H. White

Those of us who work with the living documentary know that it probably must remain forever an imperfect art form. For how can one ever subdue the stubborn truth of reality, and make it flow with the fluid grace that film invites?



David Wolper

Yet the goal of the perfect documentary—ever-tantalizing, ever-unrealizable—remains. On the long road to this goal of perfection, the names of certain pioneers in the art will remain as permanent guideposts. And on this road there is an entire plaza, which might be called Plaza David Wolper, ornamented with his name and the artists who work with him.

It is useful to go back and see where Wolper fits in on this long road. No one knows exactly when the documentary art first tantalized the imagination of filmmakers. It was probably as early as 1898 when Thomas Edison sent the first hand-crank movie operators out to China. Later in the '20s, many a primitive documentarian tried to sneak two or three minutes of artistic reach into the old newsreels whose only soundtrack was the snap of popcorn and the pop of bubble gum.

When, however, in the late '20s and early '30s, the documentary was finally recognized in its own right—as an independent art form in the work of men like Pare Lorentz, John Grierson, Robert Flaherty—it was recognized as a form of esoterica. It was a handmaiden's art—a trailer for the movies on Saturday afternoon, or an enticement for the avant-garde at campus playhouses.

What made the American documentary the robust and vigorous popular art it is today was its explosive incubation in the late '40s and early '50s by the television industry. Television needed documentaries—not for the sake of art, but because the law so required: the law obligated the nets [networks] to repay the free governmental gift of their multimillion-dollar franchises by devoting part of their airtime to uplifting and informing the American public. This had been an obligation easily met in the days of radio, when radio newscasters and commentators wrote a proud new chapter of their own in the history of journalism. But news, married to the new picture form of television, was something else again.

Thus, television documentaries developed as the bastard offspring of the radio newscasters and the Saturday newsreels of the movies. The great radio correspondents of the late '40s/early '50s knew how to explore the truth. But where to get the visual partnership? For network television, the problem was brilliantly solved in the early 1950s by the marvelous imaginations and inventions of the Ed Murrow-Fred Friendly partnership.

Make no mistake about it. At their best, these network documentaries are a superb form of American art. Yet the essence of their artistry is their immediacy, the dazzling light they throw on today's events, as did Murrow-Friendly in their half hour on Joe McCarthy, or CBS, ABC, and NBC in their shows on the civil rights struggle. Such shows are like star shells that rise above the dark wasteland of American television programming, illuminate the cratered surface of reality, then fade and are gone.

The documentary, as conceived, however, by David Wolper and executed by Wolper artists is something else again. Its goal is permanence. To reach that goal, it must ignore the “now.” Its thrust cannot be, like a news documentary's, horizontal, reaching for tonight's audience; it must be vertical, reaching for tonight's audiences and 10 years away at the same time. To do this, it must go back to the storyteller's art, and somehow grapple, cut, and struggle with film that tells at once a truth—and a story.

For the essence of the Wolper art is narrative: narrative style, pace, sense, structure. And at its best, it's matchless.

The object in those Wolper documentaries I have participated in or watched being made has never been to compete with the “now” of the great news documentaries. It is more to ask and then answer the “how” or the “why.” And Wolper's ineffable goal has always been to find in the answer the same sheer excitement in reality as feature makers in films of fiction. As in all art forms, and all effort, this goal is missed as often as gained. Yet among the hundreds of Wolper films are a good round dozen which must rank with the permanent classics of American documentary filmmaking. They are a major effort of American art to capture the nature of our times and pass it on to posterity. There is, however, one caveat that you, the viewer, should bear in mind before watching Wolper films. If you don't watch out, you may be so carried away by the excitement of some of them as to sit back and watch in pure enjoyment. And this, I think, may have been Wolper's sneaky purpose all along—to make this art form enjoyable.

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CAMPAIGN PLATFORMS

Where the presidential candidates stood on the issues of the '60s

1960: Kennedy vs. Nixon

Economic Growth After years of annual growth at less than 3 percent, the U.S. economy slumped at the beginning of 1960. Republicans looked back on the '50s as a decade of prosperity under President Eisenhower's “sound money” policies, which Richard M. Nixon pledged to continue. For him and his party, private enterprise and cutting



John F. Kennedy

the federal government's budget represented the only sensible routes out of recession. Democrats, however, claimed that Republican policies had actually stunted the economy, which should have at least doubled its growth rate. John F. Kennedy called for an end to "tight money" and more federal spending on programs such as medical care for the elderly.

Civil Rights Both parties' platforms unequivocally supported civil rights. Nixon called for continued progress toward "equality of opportunity for all Americans." Among other measures, Eisenhower's enforcement of court-ordered school desegregation had won him nearly 40 percent of the African American vote in 1956. But on October 19, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested at a sit-in at an Atlanta restaurant and jailed. Within days, Kennedy phoned King's wife to express his concern, and campaign manager Robert F. Kennedy called the sentencing judge to urge King's release. White credits the Kennedys' personal touch—less than two weeks before election day—with driving a decisive shift in African American votes that provided winning margins in Illinois, Michigan, and South Carolina.

Education Kennedy and Nixon didn't differ much on their plans for education; both favored increased federal aid to the states, which could then help defray the cost of school construction and, in Kennedy's plan, higher salaries for teachers. But, as *Time* magazine opined early in the campaign, "Neither Nixon nor any of the Democratic hopefuls have yet grabbed at the real education issue: the troubles of U.S. education arise not from a shortage of federal funds but from a shortage of citizen responsibility—the failure of many parents and local leaders . . . [E]ssentially the problem is one that faraway Washington is incapable of solving."

Communist Expansion With the People's Republic of China having shelled the tiny islands of Quemoy and Matsu in the Formosa Strait and new Cuban leader Fidel Castro strengthening ties with the Soviet Union, Communism seemed more and more threatening. Nixon vowed to defend Quemoy and Matsu with U.S. military forces; Kennedy characterized that stance as

"trigger-happy," saying he would defend the islands only in a general attack on Formosa. Kennedy also accused the Eisenhower-Nixon administration of being "soft" on Cuba and ultimately pledged in his inaugural address to "pay any price, bear any burden" to promote liberty around the world. Eisenhower, meanwhile, had instituted a trade embargo against Cuba in October and severed diplomatic relations right before leaving office.

National Defense Citing reports that the Soviet Union was overtaking the United States in strategic military capability, Kennedy hammered at the theme of a "missile gap." He urged accelerated development and production of the long-range, land-based Minuteman nuclear missile and the submarine-launched Polaris, as well as a buildup of conventional forces. Nixon staunchly defended the Eisenhower administration's record on defense, maintaining that the United States had been—and would continue to be—the world's strongest military power.

American Prestige According to White, "1960 was a year of national concern—but vague, shapeless, unsettling, undefinable national concern . . . It was a year, above all, in which Americans were concerned with their identity." Kennedy maintained that U.S. prestige had eroded under the previous administration, and he cited waning influence in Africa and Latin America as examples. Nixon countered by claiming U.S. prestige was at an all-time high, especially in the United Nations, and relentless criticisms by Kennedy and his fellow Democrats served only to undermine the country's standing in the world.

1964: Johnson vs. Goldwater

Nuclear War In campaign appearances, Senator Barry Goldwater advocated giving NATO military commanders in the field greater discretion over the use of tactical nuclear weapons in an emergency. (As an Air Force Reserve major general, he knew that a few commanders already had such power in certain extreme situations.) Without addressing specifics, President Lyndon B. Johnson said, "We cannot act rashly with the nuclear

weapons that could destroy us all. The only course is to press with all our minds and all our will to make sure, doubly sure, that these weapons are never really used at all.”

Civil Rights Although the Republican platform called for “full implementation and faithful execution of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,” Senator Goldwater had voted against the act on the principle that it was unconstitutional. As a candidate, he said, “One thing that will surely poison and embitter our relations with each other is the idea that some predetermined bureaucratic schedule of equality—and, worst of all, a schedule based on the concept of race—must be imposed.” Johnson considered his civil rights record one of his major political accomplishments.

Social Programs Johnson repeatedly evoked his vision of a “Great Society”: his term for education, antipoverty, and arts-funding programs that aimed to create “a place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce, but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community.” Goldwater decried such measures as “the road to socialism,” an excessive concentration of power in the federal government, and an erosion of individual freedom. “A government that is big enough to give everything that you need and want is also big enough to take it all away,” he declared.

U.S. Economy Under the Kennedy-Johnson administrations, the U.S. Gross National Product grew rapidly—averaging six percent per year. Johnson could proudly point to steadily rising wages, corporate profits, and stock-market worth. Goldwater and his fellow Republicans called attention to worrisome cracks in this otherwise rosy picture: government intrusion into free markets (such as price controls on steel) and growing deficits in the federal budget.



Goldwater (left) and Johnson (right)

Communist Expansion While committing to diplomatic negotiations, Johnson and the Democrats reaffirmed their 1960 pledge to “use all the power, resources, and energy at our command to resist the further encroachment of Communism on freedom.” In his book, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, Goldwater had written, “A craven fear of death is entering the American consciousness . . . The Communists’ aim is to conquer the world . . . If an enemy power is bent on conquering you, he is at war with you; and . . . your objective, like his, will be victory. Not ‘peace,’ but victory.”

Vietnam On the campaign trail, President Johnson declared, “We are not about to send American boys nine or 10 thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves. We don’t want to get . . . tied down to a land war in Asia.” Goldwater, however, would remind audiences, “We are at war in Vietnam. We are at war regardless of what the administration says.” And the only objective in war, said Goldwater, is victory.

1968: Nixon vs. Humphrey vs. Wallace

Vietnam Pledging only to “end the war and win the peace,” Richard M. Nixon scrupulously avoided specifics of a Vietnam policy. In an early interview, he confided to White that spelling out details would only tie his hands if he were to win the presidency. Hubert H. Humphrey tried to appeal to antiwar sentiment without repudiating the Johnson administration’s policies, promising to halt bombing when doing so wouldn’t endanger American lives and to begin de-escalation within a year. George Wallace simply said, “I think we’ve got to pour it on.” In mid-October, President Johnson privately asked all three candidates to drop the issue for fear that politics would jeopardize sensitive negotiations in Paris.



Nixon

Law & Order In response to rising crime rates, two political assassinations, and riots in 100 cities, Nixon pledged to launch a war on crime, with new leadership and a new attorney general. Privately, Humphrey called Nixon's appeal to law and order "subdued racism." Publicly, he said, "We do not want a police state, but we need a state of law and order, and neither mob violence nor police brutality have any place in America. And I pledge to use every resource . . . to end once and for all the fear that is in our cities." Wallace put his position bluntly: people are "fed up with the sissy attitude of Lyndon Johnson and all the intellectual morons and theoreticians he has around him."

Civil Liberties In 1968, wrote White, "the courts now saw their highest duty not as the defense of state or of order, but defense of the individual *against* the state at extremes of judgment unprecedented in jurisprudence." Nixon took up this issue, saying, "Let us also recognize that some of our courts in their decisions have gone too far in weakening the peace forces as against the criminal forces in this country, and we must act to restore that balance." Humphrey refrained from attacking the courts in general or mentioning the Supreme Court. Wallace called the Supreme Court "a sorry, lousy, no-account outfit."

Inflation In response to rising inflation, the Republican platform called for tax reduction and simplification, tighter controls on federal spending, and sound monetary policy to lower interest rates. The Democrats favored selective tax increases to check inflation and "flexible fiscal and monetary policies designed to keep total private and public demand in line with the economy's rising productive capacity." Wallace called for closing tax loopholes (such as removing tax-exempt status for foundations) and cutting welfare programs.

Foreign Policy In foreign relations, both the Republican and Democratic candidates struck conciliatory tones. Nixon announced, ". . . To the leaders of the Communist world we say, after an era of confrontations,

the time has come for an era of negotiations . . . We extend the hand of friendship to all people. To the Russian people. To the Chinese people. To all people in the world. And we shall work toward the goal of an open world, open sky, open cities, open hearts, open minds." Humphrey pledged to go "beyond containment to communication, beyond differences to dialogue, beyond fear to hope." Wallace deplored spending large sums on foreign affairs when there were pressing domestic problems to be addressed, but he also asserted the need "to impress upon [Communist nations] the resolve of the American people" and called for "victory over Communism and Socialism at home and abroad."

THE QUIXOTIC CAMPAIGNERS

Presidential wannabes outside the political mainstream

Presidential campaigns during the 1960s included several candidates who marched to distinctly different drummers, with varying degrees of success. Here are a few.

Harry F. Byrd ('60) In the 1960 presidential election, Senator Harry F. Byrd received 15 electoral votes without having his name appear on a ballot. Unpledged Democratic electors in Alabama and Mississippi and one pledged Republican elector in Oklahoma cast their ballots in the Electoral College for Byrd. As the senior senator from Virginia, Byrd had become a champion of states' rights and something of a hero among certain factions in the South. He had run for the Democratic nomination against Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Deal in 1932; in the late 1950s, Byrd led a resistance movement that shut down public schools in one Virginia county rather than comply with court-ordered desegregation.



Harry F. Byrd

Clennon W. King, Jr. ('60) A history professor at Alcorn A&M College (now Alcorn State University), Clennon King earned the sobriquet “the black Don Quixote” as the presidential candidate of the Independent Afro-American party. Though perhaps not the first African American man to run for U.S. president (some historians give that distinction to George Edwin Taylor in 1904), King certainly became the first African American candidate to win more than a smattering of support at the polls. His slate of electors in Alabama garnered nearly 1,500 votes.

Harold Stassen ('64, '68) As a popular governor of Minnesota (1939-43) and president of the University of Pennsylvania (1948-53), Stassen ran for the Republican nomination nine times, but came close only once. In 1948, he upset Thomas E. Dewey in several early primaries until a narrow loss in Oregon in May effectively ended his momentum. Stassen ran and ran in nearly every subsequent election cycle, despite obviously waning support. In 1968, he managed to win just two delegates at the Republican convention. Wags referred to him as “the Grand Old Party’s grand old loser;” and cartoonists depicted Stassen-for-president rallies held in phone booths.

Dick Gregory ('68) Former stand-up comedian Dick Gregory headed the Freedom and Peace Party’s presidential ticket in 1968, advocating immediate withdrawal from Vietnam, a “Clean Society” (in which he offered half his presidential salary as a reward for exposing government corruption), and the elimination of capital punishment. He also got plenty of attention for his campaign literature: phony one-dollar bills with his picture in place of George Washington’s, urging bearers to write in Gregory’s name on their ballots. In November, his investment paid off to the tune of 47,000 to 1.5 million votes (accounts vary).

Pat Paulsen ('68) Deadpan comedian Pat Paulsen never won an elective office, but he did win an Emmy for his satirical campaign in 1968, conducted largely on *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* TV show. Running under the slogan “We Can’t Stand Pat,” Paulsen lampooned politicians with his

convoluted, incomprehensible stands on issues. (On censorship, he said, “Censors have the right to censor what you hear. The Bill of Rights says nothing about freedom of hearing. This, of course, takes a lot of the fun out of the freedom of speech.”) Paulsen’s campaigns turned into a running joke, in every sense of the term; he declared his candidacy almost every four years until his death in 1997. In 1968, he received over 100,000 votes; as late as 1996, some people were still casting their ballots for Paulsen.

Pigasus ('68) During the 1968 Chicago protests, in a parody of the political process, the Youth International Party (or “Yippies”) nominated a 200-pound, black-and-white pig for president. Bought by folk singer Phil Ochs from an Illinois farmer and christened Pigasus, the animal made one public appearance in a campaign that ended immediately after it began. Police confiscated Pigasus while arresting Jerry Rubin, Abbie Hoffman, and five other Yippies outside Chicago’s Civic Center, where they had gathered to officially announce the animal’s candidacy. The unlikely candidate was taken to an area animal shelter and subsequently retired from political life.

A LIFE IN SEARCH OF HISTORY

A brief biography of Theodore H. White

With his blockbuster book *The Making of the President, 1960*, Theodore H. White set a standard that today’s political journalists still try to live up to. Until he came along, no one had begun covering a campaign so early. No one had portrayed the candidates and their staffs so deeply or so personally. And no one had analyzed the social and demographic trends affecting an election so meticulously. Today, when hundreds of newspapers, websites, and cable news programs deliver such detailed political reportage, it’s easy to forget that White paved the way.

Born in a Jewish neighborhood in Boston in 1915, White won a scholarship

to Harvard, where he studied Chinese and majored in history. After graduating summa cum laude, he traveled to China on a fellowship in 1939, became a stringer for *Time*, and eventually rose to bureau chief. He covered the war and China's political struggles, but his skepticism of Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek led to a break with the magazine.



Wolper (left) and White (right)

White turned his China experience into a book, *Thunder out of China*—a detailed portrait of the emerging nation's culture and politics. Returning to the States in 1953 after a five-year stint as a European correspondent, he worked for *The Reporter* and *Colliers* and wrote two novels, both of which became Book-of-the-Month Club selections and caught Hollywood's attention. Gary Cooper bought the movie rights to White's second novel for \$80,000, giving White financial freedom for the first time.

The result of this newfound freedom was *The Making of the President, 1960*, which topped bestseller charts and earned White a Pulitzer Prize. To some later critics, the techniques that White pioneered—a near-novelistic exploration of motivation, for example, and deep background probes of the candidates and their aides—colored his objectivity. Indeed, White openly admired the Kennedys and even served as an informal advisor to JFK in the White House.

White himself came to recognize—and regret—some of that closeness. In 1963, a week after JFK's assassination, he interviewed Jacqueline Kennedy in Hyannis Port for an essay in *Life* magazine. Besides detailing her anguish, the president's widow revealed that her husband had loved the last lines of the Broadway musical *Camelot*: "Don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot." She wanted White to make Camelot the theme of the essay. He did, hurriedly writing and then dictating his work from the Kennedys' kitchen phone. Back

in New York, *Life's* editors balked. They wanted White to tone down the Camelot references, but Mrs. Kennedy insisted. The resultant compromise appeared in the December 6 issue and launched the meme of the Kennedy administration as the Arthurian Round Table, a magic moment in history "when gallant men danced with beautiful women, when great deeds were done . . . and the barbarians beyond the walls held back," White wrote later in his autobiography. "Which, of course, is a misreading of history. The magic Camelot of John F. Kennedy never existed."

Besides the *Making of the President* series, which ended with the 1972 election, White also wrote *Breach of Faith* (a history of Nixon's fall from



power), his autobiography (*In Search of History: A Personal Adventure*), *Caesar at the Rubicon* (a play exploring White's favorite theme: a pivotal moment in history when a political leader exercised power), and *America in Search of Itself* (an examination of the 1980 campaign in a 25-year historical context). He died in New York City in 1986, at age 71.

Letter written by Jacqueline Kennedy to Wolper in appreciation for his contributions to the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library

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ALSO ON DVD

