**Video Script**

**Lecture 24: 1960s TV, Pt. 2**

**Fall 2020**

**Welcome**

Today’s lecture is kind of like a cover version of the last lecture. In Part 1, we focused on how mainstream, lowest common denominator television reflected the social change of the 1960s. Today, we’re going to look at how social change during that same exact time span appeared in a different kind of TV—what I’m calling *nonfiction* television, which includes stuff like news and documentaries.

So, we’ll be tackling two big questions today. How does nonfiction television depict social change? And also, how do protest movements use the moving image and broadcast media to their advantage? These are questions that go way back to our lecture on Oscar Micheaux. We’ll be thinking about media *and* protest, you know, how the powers that be talk about social change through their usual channels. But we’ll also be thinking about media *as* protest. How do people produce media that reflects and rejects a lot of these longstanding, prejudiced notions of how America should be?

**Key Concepts**

Here are your key concepts for today’s lecture. I’ve also included Key Media on this slide. While the only thing you’re required to watch for this lecture is Jimi Hendrix’s performance of the National Anthem at Woodstock, I really recommend checking out these extra links if you’ve got time. If you want to get a feel for how social movements of the 1960s were covered by nonfiction television, there’s no better way to do it than by putting your eyeballs on some of that coverage.

**Kennedy**

Let’s start right at the beginning of the decade, with the 1960 presidential campaign and election. JFK is one of our candidates, and he does something totally different with television. Through Kennedy, we get this new entanglement of politics, stardom, access, and ultimately, tragedy.

I want to start here because Kennedy’s campaign doesn’t see television as a frivolous entertainment that’s *opposed* to serious issues and politics—it sees it as *a tool* to discuss and even influence serious issues and politics. Kennedy effectively turns nonfiction television into a political tool, and that’s a strategy used by social movements across the rest of the decade.

**Kennedy/Jackie**

Before the 1960s, the presidential primaries are not really *that* big a deal. But JFK was able to use television coverage to make the primary race supremely exciting. He brought a documentarian, Robert Drew, along on the campaign trail, and he takes advantage of TV opportunities throughout the campaign.

He’s a really telegenic candidate—he takes advantage of the fact that he’s young, and good-looking, and he’s cool and fresh, and he’s got this great Boston accent, and he has this beautiful wife who records, I *believe*, the first major American campaign ad in Spanish. It’s not great Spanish, mind you—it’s like when I try to say Spanish words during these lectures—but it is this interesting moment where a political campaign uses mid-century television against itself to acknowledge that there are *more audiences* than just the mainstream, middle-class, white ideal.

**Jack Paar**

JFK also takes advantage of popular culture in ways that previous campaigns have not. He’s the first presidential candidate to appear on a late-night talk show, and this, for the time, is a remarkably casual outlet for a candidate. He takes questions from the audience and jokes around a little bit instead of giving the usual stump speech.

**Frank Sinatra**

His friend Frank Sinatra records a campaign song for him. It’s a version of his classic “High Hopes,” and we’ll listen to just a little bit of it. **[PLAY CLIP.]**

**Kennedy/Nixon**

Kennedy’s mastery of the television medium is on display nowhere better than at the 1960 Nixon/Kennedy debate. Kennedy comes across as poised and telegenic—he’s so good at TV by this point—and Nixon, on the other hand, is sweating his face off, and stilted, and unpleasant to look at. Compared to Kennedy, he’s just this boring, weird, old, gross dude.

Kennedy demonstrates during the debate and throughout the campaign the exact star quality that television needs. Remember how we talked about that a few lectures ago, when we looked at Ida Lupino? The Kennedys are beautiful, but they’re also relatable and warm and intimate. And from this point on, being star-like and entertaining becomes an asset for a political candidate.

**Assassination**

JFK is assassinated on November 22, 1963, and it’s important to note that this event is *not televised*. For those of us who didn’t live through this, we do tend to think about it as a filmic event, but that’s because of the Zapruder film—an amateur recording made by Abraham Zapruder that day on the grassy knoll in Dallas that just happened to catch the assassination. That film has since become one of the most important documentary films in American history, and it’s been widely distributed in the ensuing decades—you could go to YouTube right now and watch it, if you want—but at the time it was *not* shown on television.

Zapruder actually sold the film to LIFE magazine, who outbid CBS for his footage, and as part of that deal Zapruder said frame 313 (which captures the fatal shot to the President’s head) could not be published. In later years, Zapruder attributes this decision to a nightmare he had, in which he saw a big billboard in Times Square that said “See the President’s Head Explode!” So, LIFE published other stills from Zapruder’s footage, but the film was not shown in its entirety until much later.

**Jack Ruby**

Lee Harvey Oswald, JFK’s assassin, was himself assassinated two days later on November 24, 1963. Oswald’s assassination by Jack Ruby *was* televised.

**[ANIMATION]** This is a little bit of a detour, but it’s a Texan anecdote, which is why I wanted to include it. The man on the left in the white hat with a grimace on his face is James Leavelle, a Dallas detective, and he’s actually handcuffed to Lee Harvey Oswald as he’s being shot. He just passed away recently, which is why I came across his obituary, and it had this fascinating, eerie story in it.

Leavelle said that as they were leaving the building, handcuffed to each other, he joked “Lee, if anybody shoots at you, I hope they’re as good a shot as you.” To which Oswald replied, “You’re being melodramatic.”

But anyway—through these two assassinations, right on top of each other, as well as other high-profile assassinations throughout the 1960s like Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, television news becomes a medium that must wrestle with how to show grisly violence. Remember, WWII was not a televised war. As politics and war become part of television, so too does political violence. And television delivers that swirling miasma of political and social unrest and resulting violence right into your living room.

**Birmingham Children’s Crusade**

I want to turn for a few moments to the Civil Rights movement and touch on just a few ways that anti-racist protests showed up in television and other moving images. We’ll start here, in Birmingham Alabama in 1963. Birmingham was this hotbed of nonviolent organizing and demonstrations against segregation. In this community, many Black adults were trained in nonviolent protest methods, and so their kids learned too.

In 1963, Black kids and teens in Birmingham wanted to speak to the mayor about desegregating the county fair. As they’re marching and demonstrating, the Commissioner of Public Safety, Bull Connor, turns firehoses on the children. Police use batons and dogs against them as well. The kids are arrested in big groups.

The images that result from this protest and Connor’s violent response to it are horrifying—but they’re also televised, and they turn out to be quite galvanizing to the white public and effective in mobilizing them toward the cause of desegregation and racial justice. When these gruesome images were beamed directly into white homes, some people began to think “Oh my god, what if that was my kid,” a thought that was emotionally *and politically* moving.

I’m choosing to show you this photograph of these girls, who are being detained, rather than the more violent images because they’re truly difficult to look at. But this is a negotiation that might feel familiar, right? The question of circulating violent images—particularly of Black victims—and weighing the trauma they might inflict vs. the political purpose they might serve plays out on Twitter each time police kill a Black citizen. Whether we’re talking about gruesome images on television in 1963 or on Instagram today, it’s the same negotiation.

**SNCC**

One way to negotiate that is to put the means of film and television production in the hands of the people who are being targeted by racial violence. Activists in the 1960s, like Oscar Micheaux in the 1920s, *did* make some of their own media *as* a protest.

SNCC, or the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, is one such group who produced media to advance their cause. The group was formed by Ella Baker in 1960 to support the many Black college students who were staging sit-ins and other protests around the segregated South. By 1962, the group had focused its efforts on getting Black voters throughout the South registered to vote and mobilizing them to get to the polls.

**We’ll Never Turn Back**

As part of that effort, they prepared this film, called *We’ll Never Turn Back*, which let disenfranchised Black citizens in Mississippi tell their own stories about not being able to vote—almost like an oral history.

I’ve included the link to this film for you in the modules and really recommend you give a look, especially since we’re currently in an election and it’s never a bad thing to honor what past generations of Americans had to do to secure our voting rights. One of the activists in the film is Fannie Lou Hamer, pictured here, who went on to become an incredible voice for civil rights, voting rights, and women’s rights. She founded a political party, the Freedom Democratic Party, and co-founded the National Women’s Political Caucus to recruit more women to run for office.

So again, this SNCC film and others like it are an example not of the establishment media covering protests, but of protest movements of the 1960s creating media to push back into the culture.

**Vietnam**

I want to turn now for a few minutes to the Vietnam War, which is a supremely complicated conflict that unfolds over decades. I can’t possibly give you a history of the U.S.’s involvement in Vietnam—it’s kind of like trying to sum up our current involvement in the Middle East. We’ve been there for basically two decades at this point, and it’s a sprawling military endeavor with evolving, hard-to-parse goals; Vietnam was similar.

But in the interest of starting somewhere, let’s go with the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964. It’s the legislation Congress passes after some U.S. warships are supposedly attacked off the coast of Vietnam, and it leads to more direct military intervention by the U.S. The resolution allowed “all necessary measures.” As President Johnson described it, it’s “like grandmother’s nightshirt. It covers everything.” So, the U.S. is involved in war in Vietnam for some years; 53,000 U.S. soldiers died, as did 200-250,000 Vietnamese people. Alongside the war rises a vocal antiwar movement, much of which is organized on college campuses.

So, where does television fit into any of this? Well, Vietnam becomes the United States’ first televised war. As these televisual images of warfare reach American living rooms, the war becomes much more visceral—similar to the way live radio broadcasts from Europe and the Pacific made World War II feel more urgent and real to Americans a few decades earlier. The antiwar movement and its violent clashes with police are also televised, and they use this fact to call attention to their cause. **[ANIMATION]** It’s during antiwar demonstrations of the 1960s that “The Whole World is Watching” becomes a protest chant…

**1968 DNC**

…one that is most memorably associated with the protests at the 1968 Democratic Convention, were 10,000 anti-war demonstrators were met by 23,000 Chicago Police and National Guard. Protestors chanted “The Whole World is Watching” for 17 minutes as cameras caught the violence exploding outside the convention hall—violence that was later deemed a police riot by a government report.

Part of the story of how social change was covered by nonfiction television media of the 1960s is understanding how institutionalized that media was—just a few channels, a handful of anchors, and little access to those platforms for people of color, young people, women, and others agitating for change. “The Whole World is Watching” is an acknowledgement by protestors that they can’t disseminate their own story, but that when they *do* capture the media’s attention, they can direct viewers to confront injustice *and* use that spotlight to shame those standing in the way of their cause.

**Dan Rather**

That’s not to say that the media was always able to stay above the fray. Tension outside the convention hall in 1968 turned up tension inside the hall, and this too was caught on camera. A very young Dan Rather was roughed up by convention security as he tried to interview a Democratic delegate. He was broadcasting live when security guards socked him in the stomach. There’s also a link to this clip in the module.

**Caskets**

The fervor of anti-war protest was both televised and stoked by television news, which had a grim way of illustrating the conflict’s mounting loss of life. The news aired footage of caskets, holding the bodies of fallen servicemembers, continually arriving at Dover Air Force Base from Vietnam. This becomes a pivotal image in the antiwar movement. It is really hard for the government to justify the cost of war when that cost can be measured in flag-draped caskets.

And, in fact, the U.S. government banned this kind of footage for many years after Vietnam. Officials and politicos and journalists have sometimes tossed around this phrase, the so-called “Dover test,” when the government is weighing military action. It means: could support for a war withstand the televised images of loss? The government has since repealed/amended this ban on showing caskets at Dover, but these images of the toll of war were—and I think still are—very powerful for the viewing public.

**Draft**

In 1969, the US government instituted the draft, and there was a televised lottery to determine the order young men would be called to mandatory military service. What you see here is a man pulling little ping-pong balls with days of the year printed on them out of a bucket; the order he pulls them is the order you’d be called up if the day matched your birthday.

I’ve given you a link to watch this as well, and it’s more affecting than you think it might be. It’s hard not to relate each date that they pull to your own birthday and think “wow, that would be me.” It’s easy to imagine yourself as one of those young men across the country tuning in to this broadcast, knowing that their life and death might lie in the draw of a ball.

**Counterculture**

Any discussion of the 1960s would be incomplete without mentioning the counterculture, or as they might be better known: hippies. The counterculture reaches an apex in 1967, the so-called “Summer of Love” when young people move en masse to San Francisco—or, just generally, away from the suburbs where their parents had flocked a decade earlier. They rallied around LSD evangelist Timothy Leary’s mantra to “turn on, tune in, and drop out.” They’re anti-war and pro-free love and generally rejecting the conventions of that idealized middle-class life so prized by 1950s media, culture, and society. In fact, maybe father *doesn’t* know best. Maybe Father can take a flying leap.

**Haight Ashbury**

Cultural images travel faster than ever before through television, and while mainstream news media is generally critical of or sometimes even reactionary about the hippies, the irony is their coverage circulates the hippie message to kids all over the country who might not have otherwise received it. Young people who live very far away from San Francisco can see and hear all about the counterculture by watching the news.

I’ve linked for you in this module one such news broadcast that probably served to make the hippie life enticing through its condescending paternalism toward these young people. It’s a Harry Reasoner special report—think of it like an episode of *Dateline* from the 1960s—all about the “hippie temptation,” or LSD.

**Woodstock**

I’ll end our lecture here, with one of the most iconic events of the 1960s: the 1969 music festival in Woodstock, NY, which the *New York Times* said transformed how media institutions covered popular culture after many of them missed the festival’s significance. Walter Cronkite, a famous news anchor of the era, covered Woodstock by reporting *on* these seemingly crazy youths, but not by talking *to* them. He talked about the number of the crowd, the traffic problems the festival was causing, how the poor business model was unlikely to turn a profit, insurance liabilities, and the likely lawsuits against organizers.

It’s a report about Woodstock that seems to capture nothing of its cultural significance, partially because none of the concertgoers or performers were allowed to speak for themselves about what had driven so many of them there. Young folks simply didn’t have that kind of access to media—and don’t right up until the internet, really.

**[ANIMATION]** What they did have were alternative publications like *Rolling Stone*, a then brand-new magazine. Greil Marcus, now a famous rock-and-roll and culture writer was there, and wrote from the perspective of the youth about the event. He argued in fact that Woodstock wasn’t antagonistic, like the anti-war protests, but was a countercultural respite at the end of a decade that had seen and digested so much turmoil.

“It wasn’t a rebellion,” he said, *“or even rebellious, but rather the citizens of a city doing as they pleased—taking off their clothes, staying up all night——for the pleasure of it. It was a raised finger to no one. Dreams of revolution were replaced by ordinary realities of freedom. The bands people had come to hear responded in kind; from the stage, you could feel musicians straining to reach people sitting hills and hills away, to bring them close enough to touch. At, say, 4am, you could have the sense that a song or a life was just then beginning.”*

**Jimi Hendrix**

Specifically, I want to end with Jimi Hendrix’s performance. Hendrix is himself a veteran (he was trained as a paratrooper) though dishonorably discharged, and he will be dead just over a year after this moment.

He includes a version of the National Anthem in his set. I want to conclude our discussion here because I think it’s perhaps the most interesting, most unusual, and to me, most moving piece of political media we’ve talked about today. How can a guitar solo be political?

Well, it happens when Hendrix abandons a straightforward version of the anthem after a few bars and transforms it into something else entirely. People say that in his version you can hear the sounds of napalm, of bombs, of screams and sirens and war.

Hendrix’s national anthem was controversial. Was it patriotic? Or was it traitorous and blasphemous?

**Woodstock**

**[ANIMATION]** Al Aronowitz, the New York Post pop critic of the time, said “You finally heard what that song was about, that you can love your country, but hate the government.”

**[ANIMATION]** Greil Marcus said Hendrix “began by turning the nation into a giant discord, his great No to the war, to racism, to whatever you or he might think of and want gone. But then that discord shattered, and for more than four-and-a-half long, complex minutes Hendrix pursued each invisible crack in a vessel that had once been whole, feeling out and exploring and testing himself and his music against anguish, rage, fear, hate, love offered, and love refused. When he finished he had created an anthem that could never be summed up and that would never come to rest. In the end it was a great Yes, both a threat and a beckoning: an invitation to America to match its danger, glamour, and freedom.”

**Jimi**

Hendrix himself gave an explanation of his anthem to the Black press in December of 1969. When asked why he included it in his set, he said **[ANIMATION]** “Oh, because we’re all Americans. We’re all Americans, aren’t we?” He said the anthem was written to inspire Americans and make their hearts throb with pride, but he qualifies that, too.

“Nowadays when we play it, we don’t play it to take away all this greatness that America is supposed to have. We play it the way the air is in America today. The air is slightly static, isn’t it?”

The 1960s were revolutionary, and with all that change comes struggle, and pain. Television was there, to document and comment and disseminate images of the struggle and the pain the country was experiencing. But when so few people had the power speak through broadcast media, maybe we needed things like Hendrix’s anthem to carry all the voices—all the static—that television simply couldn’t capture. Give it a listen, and decide for yourself what you hear.