

*DIY Media: Movement Perspectives on Critical Moments*, produced by Mark Read. A DVD Series from Deep Dish TV (1988-2010).

A Review in Two Parts

Part I by Martin Wallace

The DIY Media: Movement Perspectives on Critical Moments series is a [five] part series “curated from the best material in Deep Dish TV’s 22 year-old grassroots media archive.”<sup>1</sup> Each multi-disc part of the series includes several original Deep Dish TV features, a compilation screener consisting of clips from the features and “bonus materials”, and a panel discussion of media activists commenting on the series.

The overall film and video production quality of the series is about what one would expect from a project titled “DIY Media”. However, there are several DVD production errors that could have been caught and corrected before this series was released. Examples include typos and misspellings in the on-screen descriptions of the features, broken menu navigation links, and incorrectly listed play lengths. These are most obvious in Part One, but I found problems like these in all three parts that I reviewed.<sup>2</sup>

The bonus materials included in the compilation screeners are not easily identifiable. One must watch the screener fully, even after watching the full-length features, in order to find the bonus footage. Of the three parts that I reviewed, only Part One: Expression=Life has its bonus material listed on the DVD package. I can’t help but wonder why the additional footage is hidden away in such a manner.

*Expression = Life – ACT UP, Video, and the AIDS Crisis*

Of the parts of the DIY Media series that I reviewed, this one has by far the most dated material and the roughest production quality. Expression=Life includes three features: Angry Initiatives, Defiant Strategies (1988), DIVA TV (1990), and Transformation AIDS (1991). Beside clips from the three features, the compilation screener also includes scenes from “Book of James” by Ho Tam and James Wentzy (c2004) and interviews with AIDS

*This series is dedicated to the memory of author, historian, activist, and colleague, Howard Zinn, whose intellectual honesty and political courage inspired generations of Americans to look more critically at the history they are taught. Ten percent of all proceeds from the sale of this series will be donated to Voices of a People’s History, a non-profit co-founded by Dr. Zinn to promote the under-represented voices of social and political activists in U.S. History.*

from DeepDishTV website

activist Ray “Jesus” Navaro that highlight his protest against the Catholic Church’s disinformation campaign on AIDS and homosexuality (date unknown). The panel discussion focuses on the strides made by AIDS activists and the state of AIDS activism today.

The first feature in this part, *Angry Initiatives, Defiant Strategies*, is a compilation of local DIY features from sources such as public access cable programs, art films, recorded plays, and educational videos. *ACT UP* and the *Testing the Limits Collective* are introduced and explored. The second feature, *DIVA* (a.k.a. “Damned Interfering Video Activists”) TV, includes footage from protests, scenes from non-violent civil disobedience training, and public service announcements (PSAs).<sup>3</sup>

The final feature in this part, *Transformation AIDS*, is the best segment of this segment of the series. Bob Kinney provides historical, critical analysis of Ronald Reagan’s first speech acknowledging AIDS, detailing a grab bag of indictments against Reagan, Congress, and corporate interests.

As stated above, Part One is the most dated of the entire series, and most of it looks as though it was shot on VHS and copied directly to DVD without any cleanup. I found the audio to be too low in the first feature. In the second feature, a strung-together succession of short video pieces, the audio goes from too low to too high and I found myself constantly adjusting my headphone volume. The panel discussion is nearly unwatchable due to an annoying buzz (microphone feedback) throughout much of the session; and, about six minutes in, the audio falls out of sync with the video causing speakers’ mouths not to coincide with their voices. Two other production flaws with the panel discussion are that the on-screen title says the discussion was held in April 2008, whereas the DVD cover lists 2007; and, this session is only 42 minutes, not 90 minutes as noted on the DVD cover.



Photo from: EXHIBITION: ACT UP NEW YORK: ACTIVISM, ART, AND THE AIDS CRISIS, 1987–1993 9 Oct. 2009, <http://newsgrist.typepad.com/.a/6a00d8341c66f153ef0120a6153160970c-800wi> accessed 2 Dec. 2010

*Many Yeses, One No – Confronting Corporate Globalization*

Of the three parts that I reviewed, this part is probably the most compelling in subject matter and the most provocatively and creatively produced. *Many Yeses, One No* includes five features: *The Debt Game* (1992), *A Cry for Freedom and Democracy* (1994), *Redwood Summer and Beyond* (1994), *Showdown in Seattle* (1999), and *Breaking the Bank* (2000). In addition to

clips from the five features, the screening compilation also includes clips from *The Fourth World War* (2003). The speakers in the concluding panel try to answer the questions: “is the anti-globalization movement dead? If not, what happened to it after 9-11?”<sup>4</sup>

The first feature in this part, *The Debt Game*, comes across as an educational reel and includes film and video clips interlaced with cute animations in the “Schoolhouse Rock” style. A voiced-over narrator tells the story of how Latin America – using Brazil as its primary example – became victim to the IMF and World Bank’s structural adjustment schemes.

The second feature, *Redwood Summer and Beyond* – the features do not follow the same order specified on the DVD cover – explores issues surrounding clear cutting forests in the U.S. and then later exposes the human disaster caused by militarily enforced, corporate-backed clear cutting in poorer, undeveloped regions of the world such as Central America and Malaysia. This film is shot in true documentary style, drawing out the tension between environmentalists, working class loggers, and the logging companies. Earth First is introduced, and the positions of activists along with forestry experts in academia (as well as “forestry experts” in corporate marketing and the U.S. forest service) are juxtaposed. The second half of this feature shows how first-world demand has led to monoculture cash crops (bananas, cotton, coffee, and beef) which have in turn led to clear cutting of forests in Central America and Malaysia. This has caused the removal and relocation of indigenous peoples and even the genocide of Sarawak natives in Borneo.

The third feature, *A Cry for Freedom and Democracy*, is another compilation of film and video featurettes highlighting the plight of the Zapatistas, the cause of their struggle and the reasons for their armed uprising in Mexico after the passing of NAFTA in 1994. “Celebrity guest” interviews include Super Barrio (A flamboyantly caped and masked Zapatista spokesperson in Southern California) and indigenous rights leader Leonard Peltier.

The fourth feature, *Showdown in Seattle*, is perhaps the Grand Opus of anti-globalization documentary films. This was the first large-scale production of the emerging Indymedia network, filmed at the front lines of the WTO protests in 1999, Seattle. With a production style affectionately labeled “activist porn” in some circles, *Showdown* is fast paced and energizing and includes a modern urban soundtrack. The provocative film makes you want to do something--NOW. Though the film does provide critical glimpses into the dark heart of the WTO, at its core are vignettes of passionate protesters non-violently struggling to shut down the WTO meetings at all costs, even when confronted violently by pseudo-militaristic police thugs.

The fifth and final feature in this part, *Breaking the Bank*, is a reprise of the above, produced by Indymedia at the front lines of the World Bank protests in 2000, Washington D.C. *Breaking the Bank* again takes the “activist porn” approach, but this time interweaves footage of action from the

streets with level-headed critiques of the World Bank provided by experts on IMF & World Bank policies from various social justice organizations. Also explored are the “Black Bloc”, and a revealing survey of corporate media coverage of the protests.

The compilation screener for this set includes teaser clips from the feature documentary *The Fourth World War*. Since a lot of the panel discussion for this set revolves around the compilation screener, including Fourth scenes, it is worthwhile to skim the screener before viewing the discussion. This panel discussion is quite interesting, extremely informative and also a very good production – leaps and bounds above in terms of quality compared to the production quality of the panel discussion in Part One. Notables such as Rick Rowley (producer, *This is What Democracy Looks Like*) and David Solnit (author, *Army of None*) are among the panelists.

Other than the disordered sequence of features mentioned above, and a few misspellings in the subtitles in *A Cry for Freedom and Democracy*, Part Three contains far fewer of the glaring production issues that *Expression=Life* contained. The video quality is also much better, and in this part we even see some professional quality documentary style, as well as the introduction of digital video.

*Resistencia Y Solidaridad – El Salvador, Colombia, and  
the U.S. Solidarity Movement*

Of the three parts that I reviewed, this one is debatably the most optimistic, as it portrays just how far movements of social justice have advanced in Central and South America. *Resistencia Y Solidaridad* includes four features: *A Dish of Central America* (1988), *No Hay Paz* (1992), *Flying South* (1994), and *We Fight with Our Staffs of Authority* (2006). The compilation screener also includes clips from *The Sanctuary Movement* (date unknown). The panel discussion emphasizes progress that has been made in Central and South America over the past 20 years, and the role that activist media has played in that progress.

*A Dish of Central America*, the first feature in Part Four, is a pastiche of film and video footage that introduces the viewer to Central America and the many struggles for dignity and social justice, and against dictatorship and corporate control in the region. The one-hour feature provides a timeline of U.S. intervention in Central America, as well as its support for undemocratic and dictatorial regimes. The most notable of these include the kidnappings, disappearances and mass killing of students, labor leaders and peasants in Guatemala and El Salvador. The second feature, *No Hay Paz*, introduces the El Salvadoran refugee community in Boston and explores their difficulties in attaining refugee status in the U.S. and the constant threat of deportation. Mostly in Spanish and subtitled in English, I found the subtitles to be too lengthy and to move too fast to keep up.

The third feature in this part, *We Fight with Our Staffs of Authority* (again, not in the same order as listed on the DVD cover), documents the 2006 National Itinerant Congress, a gathering of over 300,000 indigenous rights supporters, in North Cauca, Colombia. The Congress is tricked by and then brutally overtaken by the Colombian National Guard, their belongings, including transportation and housing, are burned. This footage is shocking and heart wrenching, as all of the action unfolds before our eyes on video. The final feature of the series, *Flying South*, is a documentary exploring the civil rights movement of the Afro-Colombian segment of Colombia. Relegated to urban slums with poor quality of life, this minority community is contrasted to its rural indigenous counterpart but shares many common struggles. African American ambassadors from the U.S. visit black leaders in Colombia to share their experiences and learn about the ongoing civil rights movement anew, from the Afro-Colombian perspective.

The panel discussion following this part and thus concluding the series provides a hopeful message to depart with. Panelists discuss recent advancements for social justice and democracy in Central and South America, including Bolivia, Venezuela, and perhaps most importantly, El Salvador. There is still much work to do in Colombia, but even there, advances benefiting the disadvantaged have been marked in social and economic terms; and the alternative and independent media have shed a spotlight on abuses that have gone on for decades in the region.

#### *Conclusion*

It is difficult to give a series of this size and variety a detailed content review, but in a nutshell, I find the entire series to be of extreme importance and value. With the wide variety of subject matter included in this series, and the fact that each part includes its own compilation screener, it is easy to say that there is something here for everyone. The hefty price tag may make it unattainable for the casual viewer, or even for grass-roots organizations. Institutional licensing is available it is recommended that public libraries with larger budgets for DVDs and academic libraries, especially those that serve Peace Studies and Latin American Studies programs, purchase the entire series for use in their respective communities. The series can also be purchased in part, with individual or institutional licenses.

#### *End Notes*

1. Quoted from the Deep Dish TV Web page: <http://deepdish.tv/Series/Default.aspx?id=38>
2. I reviewed three of four parts of this series. Part Two: *Access To Oxygen – Environmental Justice Hits the Small Screen* is being handled by another reviewer.
3. This feature is only 32 minutes, not 58 minutes as stated on the DVD cover.
4. Paraphrased, not quoted, from the panel moderator