

The Screen

'American Revolution 2,' Story of Chicago '68

AMERICAN REVOLUTION 2, made by the Film Group Chicago and released by Cannon Releasing Corporation. At the 55th Street Playhouse, east of Seventh Avenue. Running time: 80 minutes. (Not submitted at this time to the Motion Picture Association of America's Production Code and Rating Administration for rating as to audience suitability.)

By ROGER GREENSPUN

AMONG the major educational experiences of the current decade, the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago offered so many lessons that the enterprising communications industry has only now begun to extract the profit. But even in the movie business, traditionally the last with the least, the returns have started coming in. We have had Haskell Wexler's "Medium Cool," and now we have the imperfect but highly interesting "American Revolution 2," made by the Film Group, a Chicago association of filmmakers that prefers not to indicate individual credits.

"American Revolution 2" doesn't so much explore the meaning of the Democratic Convention or its immediate products, as make use of it and of the shapes and sounds that emerged in reaction to it. That is to say, the film is less interested in what it means to call a policeman a pig than how "pig" sounds when repeated with such insistent reiteration that individual insult merges into over-all pattern. "American Revolution 2," which opened yesterday at the 55th Street Playhouse, would have to be counted as failed documentary, if documentary were really its intention. But I suspect it is after bigger game than merely the reasonable understanding of events.

The events begin with the convention, continue through a series of interviews, some teasingly brief and some maddeningly drawn out, and end with several meetings of the Young Patriots, an uptown Chicago group of emigré hillbillies. The Young Patriots are of interest because, with the voices of the rural poor, they speak the language of urban radicals, and because, with a minimum of apologetic sophistry, they are able to form what seems like a viable coalition with Black Panthers from the southern part of the city.

The materials are otherwise by now so familiar as ritual to form a radical's litany: confrontations between young people and "pigs," Mayor Daley, enraged militant blacks telling you where they think you're at, put-downs of middle-class liberals, embarrassments for a slightly conciliatory policeman. Everything really happened, and everything is photographed with that frantic insistence on zooming in and zooming out that seems to beset contemporary photographers of real events—as if none of them believed in what he saw with the level gaze of his own eyes.

"American Revolution 2" differs not in its searing immediacy—which like searing immediacy everywhere is a conventional and crushing bore—but in its willingness to push involvement to such an extent that ultimately form follows function and the babble of voices and the progression of spokesmen (most of them carefully not identified) begin on their own terms to move out of chaotic communication and into hermetic style. Although it is rarely fun to watch, and is aggressively boring for long stretches, and although its message will be news only in the last recesses of the liberal imagination, its approach to the medium is sufficiently inventive (except for the dreadful zooms) to justify the "revolution" of its title.

The movie ends with a minor cinematic coup. As the voices continue in claim and counter claim, the images suddenly cut from angry people to graceful statuary, from a protest meeting to a cemetery, from indoors to outdoors, from feverish close-up to studied perspective, from the living to the dead. The juxtaposition is made quite without comment, and with only the largest, most humane kind of irony. The point is that if the film can push forward, it can also draw back, and from the pressures of our miseries it can shock us into calmness by no more than a change in scene.

The New York Times

Published: October 21, 1969

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