

THEY HAD A DREAM

“...*Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years* inspires, but it doesn't comfort. *Lost Empires* stops just short of camp...”

WITH SUCH SONGS, HOW COULD ANY REVOLUTION falter? With such imagery—preachers against bullhorns and billy clubs, churches against bombs, students against Klansmen, children against dogs and fire hoses, extraordinary women against demented crackers—how could any cause fail to engage and transform the imagination? And what did this non-violent revolution want? A place on the bus, a seat at the lunch counter, a desk in the classroom, entrée to the polling booth... nothing more complicated than the promises of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965* (Thursdays, starting January 22; 9 P.M.; PBS) is a six-hour home movie of the American mind at war with itself.

Eyes goes easy on the music; it is only there when needed, along with courage and humor. Nor does Julian Bond's understated narration obtrude. The tale tells itself, mostly in superbly edited TV news footage and in sharp, apposite interviews with participants 20 and 30 years after the events—from the 1954 Supreme Court decision against segregated schools to the 1965 Voting Rights Act; from Little Rock and Ole Miss to Selma; from the bus boycott in Montgomery to marches on Washington. There are lawmen like Jim Clark and “Bull” Connor; governors like Barnett and Faubus and Wallace; waffling presidents; rioting cops; faces frightened and contorted; famous names like Emmett Till, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., Stokely Carmichael, Medgar Evers, and Fannie Lou Hamer; forgotten names like Daisy Bates and Diane Nash and Ella Baker; jeeps and helicopters; paratroopers and fixed bayonets; nurturing and murder.

For this story alone, *Eyes* is required watching. But it is also the history of an organized and coherent movement. “The second American revolution” was not a spontaneous combustion. Goodness and patience and time and chance didn't just happen along to advance the enfranchisement of the black American. *Eyes* makes clear just how much brains and organization had to do with it. Communities were made ready by preachers and teachers and groups like the NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and, later on, CORE and SNCC.



PASSIVE AGGRESSION: Freedom riders, Montgomery, Alabama, 1961.

People had to argue and improvise and decide where, when, and how long to march, sit-in, freedom-ride; which suit to file in which court; where to register the vote; how to challenge a state delegation at a national convention. A charismatic leader was required, like King. And then resented, like King—not everybody read Gandhi or bought passive resistance. In its attention to the details of this decision-making, *Eyes* makes political sense of what seemed at the time accidental and haphazard. It doesn't simplify what happened but gives it texture.

Of course, the movement petitioned the media along with the government for redress of grievance; it needed the cameras to tell the country what white America was trying to deny. Its leaders prepared statements for the black students integrating Central High in Little Rock to read to reporters. It selected a sheriff like Selma's Clark because it knew he was easily riled. Rosa Parks was not the first black person to refuse to yield her seat on a Montgomery bus, but she was the most appealing. Almost incidentally, *Eyes* teaches us about the beginnings of TV journalism as another, semi-offi-

cial eye on ugly realities, an alternative to government statements.

We learn that even moral imagery must be orchestrated; it competes with so many other messages, so many debased meanings. And it couldn't change history. *Eyes* inspires, but it does not comfort. It concludes with Watts, and we know that King will die. We also know that his successors will sound alarmingly like the young James Forman—“If we can't sit at the table, let's knock the f---in' legs off... excuse me”—and whose fault is that? The same people who couldn't buy lunch in Greensboro, North Carolina, twenty years ago can't buy pizza in Howard Beach today.

Lost Empires (SUNDAYS, STARTING JANUARY 25; 9 P.M.; PBS) will be with us on *Masterpiece Theatre* through March 8. Based on a 1965 novel by J. B. Priestley, it's the story of an orphaned young man (Colin Firth as Richard Hencastle) who joins his uncle Nick (John Castle) in a touring variety show shortly before the outbreak of World War I. English innocence and the British Empire and the British musical theater will all suffer

greatly from this war. Variations are played on the themes of war as theater, Europe as music hall, empire as illusion, and so forth. Not for nothing is Uncle Nick a magician dressed up as an Indian and calling himself Ganga Dun.

You may think you can resist this heavy breathing, but after the first two hours, I admitted defeat. First, there was Sir Laurence Olivier, as if borrowing himself from Osborne's *The Entertainer*. Next I got used to young Richard, who seemed the very first lad ever to be torn between sex and art. Then I began to grind my teeth at Uncle Nick, heartless, perfectionist, misogynistic even if he does make a suffragette disappear in front of the police. Finally I began to root for the older woman in Richard's life (Carmen Du Sautoy) and against the ingenue (Beatie Edney). Now I am trapped.

As usual, the acting is splendid. As usual, England looks better on television than it does in person, as though all the Granada cameramen were Lake poets. And, as usual, *Masterpiece Theatre*, loving itself so much, stops just short of that nostalgia laced with contempt that is the essence of camp.

TRY NOT TO MISS THE SECOND HALF OF Shirley MacLaine's extravaganza **Out on a Limb** (January 18 and 19; 8 P.M. and 9

P.M.; ABC). MacLaine leaves her own body for another astral plane, somewhere in the Andes, where she is also told by an Indian fortune-teller that her good friend Bella Abzug will lose out to "a bald man" in the race for mayor of New York. You may not believe in reincarnation, flying saucers, magic bracelets, night growls, or Atlantis, but MacLaine does, as she explained in the best-seller upon which this mini-series is based. She was there, or not there. Think of the enterprise as *Sweet Charity Meets Edgar Cayce*, with Bella Abzug as the reality principle.

Bella is played by Anne Jackson, with considerable humor. Charles Dance, late of *The Jewel in the Crown*, plays the English Socialist politician with whom MacLaine is having a multinational love affair. John Heard—whose performance is amazing because we believe him as much as we believe MacLaine, and *he's* acting, whereas she is just telling her own heart-felt, moony story—plays David Manning, an artist known to traffic with extraterrestrials. MacLaine plays herself, "guru-hopping" in search of her "karmic destiny," which raises all sorts of epistemological problems. Nothing is real, everything is real, MacLaine is either out-of-body or out-of-mind, and I loved her, and so should you.

In brief: ALTHOUGH THEY SOUND JUST fine when they're singing, when they're not, the Pointer Sisters in **The Pointer Sisters . . . Up All Nite** (Friday, January 23; 10 to 11 P.M.; NBC) mug a lot and scream too much as they wander around Los Angeles after-hours, meeting people like Bruce Willis, moonlighting a mean harmonica in "Respect Yourself," and Whoopi Goldberg, who has almost nothing to do in a brief restaurant scene. . . . Like Bruce Willis, Don Johnson has a new spiked haircut, and we see a lot of it on **Heartbeat** (HBO, various January dates), a one-hour music video during which the *Miami Vice* cop sings his entire new album while pretending to be a cameraman at one or another Latin American war. Despite some weird, Fellini-esque pretensions, he doesn't fantasize in the same league with, say, David Lynch and doesn't sing as well as, say, Johnny Cash, and you have to wait almost a whole hour for the nude scene. . . . The comedian Garry Shandling returns to Showtime (Friday, January 23; 8:30 P.M.) with his odd and amiable sort-of-situation comedy, **It's Garry Shandling's Show**, which includes audience participation and a ridiculous plot involving the deportation of a Guatemalan maid who confuses herself with Maria in *West Side Story*. ■

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