

Allan Siegel - a very brief bio

Some brief background on Newsreel and my history...

The veneer of civility and social equality that had framed the assumptions of democracy, pluralism and global benevolence in post-World War Two America had been stripped away by the civil rights movement, the Bay of Pigs, the Kennedy Assassination and now finally the escalation of the war in Vietnam. In disenfranchised communities, in the pockets of the disillusioned on campuses there was a growing impetus toward a massive (the full spectrum of institutions) social transformation. In cities, the full gamut of the anti-war movement was gaining momentum and was moving from the social fringes to a mass movement..

Unknown to each other, unaware of the existence of, in the midst of all the activity directed toward The Pentagon event, were various groups of filmmakers clustered in their own areas but also concerned about the forthcoming Washington demonstration. One group was centred on Blue Van Films and included Robert Kramer, Norman Frutcher, Robert Machover and Robert Lacativa. Another, was based in my filmmaking workshop at the Free University of New York. This group included Nick Doob, Rene Lichtman, Shawn Walker, Stu Bird, Karen Mitnick, and Melvin Margolis. A third group was based out of Marvin Fishman's film studio on East 3rd St and was mainly Marvin and Oe Masanori. Newsreel was formed out of these three basic nuclei. And, the catalyst that brought them together was the Pentagon Demonstration.

In Washington, in the streets, on the steps of the Pentagon, filmmakers from around the world (including Chris Marker from France whose Pentagon and Paris '68 films were soon in the Newsreel distribution network) coalesced (unknowingly) to produce a massive collective portrait of a country undergoing the paroxysms of change.

In the weeks following Jonas Mekas and Melvin Margolis¹ were the ones instrumental in organizing the first filmmakers meeting, at the original Anthology Film Archives cinema in Soho. From this gathering Newsreel was formed. There, 60-70 filmmakers and interested parties met at the Mercer St. theatre (I think that's where it was) to talk about making a film about the recent events.

I was the organiser (or leader) of the Free University workshop group and all of us became Newsreel members except for Nick. As cameraman or editor I was associated with many of the early Newsreel films. My last film was **America** which also became the subject of considerable controversy. At this point I became more involved in political organising and lived in Vermont and Cambridge where I joined a collective showing films in prisons in the Boston area. From this experience I directed the film **We Demand Freedom** about prisons in the United States. It was one of the reasons that I reconnected with what had become Third World Newsreel: a small energetic collective of three people working out of a loft on 23rd St. in Manhattan; the group was finishing Teach Our Children about the Attica Prison Rebellion. Subsequently, I began working with TWN. I worked on a number of films and was instrumental in getting some of the initial funding and help transition the organisation into more of a self-sustaining entity. The last film I did at TWN was **No Time to Lose** (broadcast on PBS) which I co-directed with Patricia Benoit.

¹ We know about Jonas' interest in Newsreel, but Melvin – who died of cancer – was never a filmmaker but a major motivator – in mysterious and often unfathomable ways – in the organisations growth.

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In 1991 I moved to Chicago where I began teaching video at the School of the Art Institute and where I produced and directed a number of documentaries - **Lifting the Fog: Intrigue in the Middle East** and **The Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki** as well as a short dramatic film based on the Ernest Hemingway short story **A Clean Well-Lighted Place**. I subsequently co-produced and Directed the documentary **JUBA: Masters of Percussive Dance** for Chicago's PBS affiliate WTTW.

My colleague (and University of Illinois professor) from Chicago, Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle invited me to help him with video installations for the Mies van der Rohe exhibitions at the Whitney Museum in New York and MCA in Chicago. Soon after this, with a pal from my Newsreel days, Rene Lichtman we made the documentary **Hidden Children** about Jewish children concealed in different homes in Poland during World War II.

I left Chicago with an unfinished film project about the Assassination of Malcolm X. In 2001 I moved to Budapest and began teaching in the Intermedia Department at the Hungarian University of Fine Arts. Here I directed the feature length documentary **Usti Opre** about Roma musicians in Central and Eastern Europe. I have curated, and produced art work for, a number of exhibitions in Hungary, Russia and the UK about market halls. And in 2016 I received a PhD in curatorial studies from the University of Reading, in England and a year later published the book **Close Encounters of the Food Kind - cities, public space and democracy** and since then have been working on the film about the Malcolm X assassination.