



Associated Press

Mike Wallace, host of the special, was removed by police from the 1968 Democratic convention.

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Review: *Television*

A look at the fateful

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INQUIRER TELEVISION CRITIC

If nothing else at all had happened in 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson's refusal to seek a second term would have made the year historic.

But that was overshadowed by the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy, who seemed at the time to be the leading candidate to replace him.

And his slaying, with all apologies to the Kennedys and their sincere supporters, may not even have been the year's most significant assassination. The loss of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the most distinguished American civil rights leader, the only one who had a multiracial national following in his time, probably had a more profound effect on America.

The double loss was devastating. "These were generational people," says journalist Earl Caldwell, in tonight's *CBS Reports: 1968*. It is an uneven chronicle of a pivotal year in American history, but a program that does offer big doses of nostalgia for those who were there and perhaps a little understanding for those who weren't.

"King could talk to white people and black people at the same time," says Caldwell, "and so could [Robert] Kennedy, and nobody even tries to do that anymore because it's so hard."

Hosted by Mike Wallace, the program gazes back a quarter of a century to a year in which young America — and France and Czechoslovakia, among other places

year of 1968

— lost an awful lot of hope, and more than a few older Americans breathed a deep sigh of relief.

The 30-second montage at the beginning sums it up:

Johnson pinning a medal on a soldier; a military helicopter landing in Vietnam; a phalanx of police; black athletes raising their fists at the Olympics; police clubbing people in a crowd; young people marching and waving an American flag; police dragging a black man along a street; the crowning of Miss America; a battered young person; students marching; Dustin Hoffman being told to go into plastics in *The Graduate*; police charging a crowd; a bandaged young person; draft cards being burned; hippies; a white man with a painted

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President Lyndon Johnson in 1968 announcing his decision to end his campaign for re-election. *Robert F. Kennedy and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. were assassinated that year.*

Review: *Television*

Special looks back 25 years, to a time torn by war, unrest and assassination

YEAR from E1 head; a black man with a painted head; a man wearing a toga and a long fake beard; a protester in a motorcycle helmet; somebody smoking a joint; somebody else smoking a joint; the Who's Pete Townshend smashing his guitar; a huge rally; another huge rally; two people flashing the V peace sign from a police van; weird-looking people on a psychedelically decorated school bus; hippies; three peace flags; Jimi Hendrix singing "Purple Haze."

The Graduate and "Purple Haze" were released in 1967. The program is imprecise. It also goes out of its way for striking visuals, showing dreadfully gory footage of the My Lai massacre, for instance, implying that it was a big factor in early presidential campaigns, even while Wallace is saying that the country didn't find out about it for months.

But what should you expect from an hour on commercial television that's supposed to cover a whole year?

However, there are some insights, including some remarkable tape of Johnson rehearsing a speech as his aide Joseph Califano comments:

CBS Reports: 1968

Executive-produced by Linda Mason and produced by Maurice Murad for CBS News. Hosted by Mike Wallace. Airs tonight at 9 on CBS (Channel 10).

"I'd say, 'Mr. President, this speech has no ending.' He said, 'Don't worry about that. Don't worry about that.'"

For his ending, Johnson announced that he wouldn't run again.

Later, Califano describes how riots broke out in about 130 cities after Dr. King's assassination and then-White House counsel Harry McPherson talks about Johnson's worries about maintaining order.

Other people looking back with comments include author Charles Kaiser, journalist John Laurence, former Black Panther Party leaders Kathleen Cleaver and Bobby Rush (now a Democratic congressman from Illinois); then-radical, now-California State Sen. Tom Hayden; feminist Robin Morgan; Yolanda King, Dr. King's daughter; and Blair Clark, Eugene McCarthy's campaign manager, who still seems to hold a grudge against the antiwar senator

from Minnesota for not fighting hard enough in his presidential campaign.

From a television standpoint, one moment in 1968 is particularly powerful. It is CBS anchor Walter Cronkite commenting, on the TV news, about the Vietnam War:

"It is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out ... will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy and did the best they could."

It is difficult to imagine any of the current TV news crowd being allowed to express opinions as controversial as that one was at the time, and it is flatly impossible to imagine any of them having the credibility and impact that Cronkite did.

"We became a generation of might-have-beens," says Hayden. "From the point of [Robert Kennedy's] death, a mythology grew in which you always would wonder what might have been."

Despite its flaws *CBS Reports: 1968* provides a significant look into that shattering time, into a country that seems so far from America today.