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The Length of Day

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The Length of Day

Abstract

This is a review of the short film, *The Length of Day* (2021), directed by Laura Conway.

Keywords

HUAC, Communist Party

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Author Notes

John Lyden is Professor of Religious Studies and the Blizek Professor of Religion and Film at University of Nebraska-Omaha. He was been the Editor of the *Journal of Religion & Film* since 2011. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (NYU Press), and the editor of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture*. He also co-edited, with Ken Derry, *The Myth Awakens: Canon Conservatism, and Fan Reception of Star Wars* (Wipf and Stock 2018).



The Length of Day (2021), dir. Laura Conway

Laura Conway's grandparents, Shirley and David Bramhall, were American communists. In this film, Conway uses footage of her grandparents that she filmed before their deaths, as well as FBI records (disclosed to her by the Freedom of Information Act) and her grandmother's memorabilia, to paint a portrait of their lives as young idealistic social reformers. She also interweaves clips from old Italian movies, which are clearly not of her grandparents, but her own subtitles to these adds an imagined conversation with her dead grandmother, seeking revelations and closure. Her film technique is imaginative and whimsical, as well as deeply personal.

Her grandparents were called up before the House Unamerican Activities Committee in 1956, protested against US involvement in Vietnam, worked for civil rights and labor rights, all of which we see documented at a dizzying speed that clearly is not concerned about giving detail so much as an impression of lives with a purpose. Conway's wistful treatment of this suggests a meditation on how distant these ideals still seem from being fulfilled, as our nation has so pointedly failed to deal adequately with poverty, militarism, or minority rights.

In the end, Conway's imagined conversation with her grandmother tells her to "invent your own future. You can't have mine." Although looking back has its value, looking forward is what her grandparents' values were all about. They imagined a better world, and joyfully worked together towards it with love and hope.