

Film Review: Best of Enemies



Best Of Enemies is a documentary that focuses on the 1968 televised political debates between William F. Buckley and Gore Vidal as part of ABC's Republican and Democratic National Convention coverage. ABC was the last place network at the time and couldn't provide the comprehensive coverage of other networks so instead they opted to have the conservative Buckley and the liberal Vidal engage in a series of 10 nighttime debates to discuss the issues in what ABC dubbed their "Unconventional Coverage." Besides a rehash of the debates themselves, we are given a wealth of informative back-story for the conception of the debates, as well as background information on Buckley and Vidal for historical context. All of this wraps up with a look at how the debates not only affected the television news landscape, but also the long-lasting effect they had on Buckley and Vidal personally.

Filmmakers Robert Gordon and Morgan Neville crafted a truly illuminating documentary with *Best Of Enemies* that gives us a good understanding of the late '60s political landscape, as well as of the moment that television news and political commentary became less about the news or issue and more about the personality of the person discussing it. Through various interviews with columnists, contemporaries and archive interviews with Buckley and Vidal themselves, a full picture is given that focuses more on just those 10 debates. Although I don't want to downplay the entertainment value and historical importance of the debates, especially since the film features rare footage of the long lost 9th debate in which Buckley lost his composure and used some very regrettable language on live television.

I found this documentary to be invaluablely informative and entertaining, as someone born well after these debates happened. I had heard of them historically, but frankly knew little of the details surrounding them or of their content. I found the filmmakers' use of the actual debates, archive interviews, interviews with modern political journalists, as well as readings from the public and private writings of both Buckley and Vidal to add a great depth to the subject. No matter which side of the political landscape you fall on, I believe that *Best Of Enemies* is worth a watch and I highly recommend it.

Best Of Enemies will start screening Friday, August 21, at the Cable Car Cinema.

Best Of Enemies (2015); Director: Robert Gordon and Morgan Neville; Starring: Gore Vidal, William F. Buckley, Dick Cavett