

The 2008 U.S. Election Through the Lens of Andrew Taylor and Other Cameramen

On the night of November 4, I stayed up late in the living room of my parent's house in Canberra, unable to sleep. I flicked the TV remote aimlessly from channel to channel in the hope of finding something interesting to keep me entertained until I grew tired. I stumbled on an extremely interesting episode of Frontline called *The War Briefing* <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/warbriefing/view/> which gave an in-depth account of the still volatile situation in Afghanistan, and in the tribal region on the Afghan/Pakistan border. This remarkable documentary offered a detailed account of the day to day struggles faced by U.S. soldiers fighting in the country, as well as a complex and insightful reportage of the wider political and ideological issues that face the region and its people.

The War Briefing held my attention for over an hour, and it gave me an insight into the insanely complex web of politics that keeps the wheels of war and fighting in motion in Afghanistan. The documentary revealed just how crazy and cyclic the whole situation is. Being rather ignorant of anything more than what I occasionally read in the daily newspapers (which there really isn't much of about Afghanistan anymore) and online, I was dumbfounded at who pays off who, and who shakes one person's hand only to feed information to someone else....

After *The War Briefing* I came across a replay of the ABC's recent *Four Corners* episode *Scars and Stripes* by journalist Quentin McDermott. Considering that voting in the U.S. election had just begun (current Australian time is GMT-11), I felt compelled to watch the documentary, especially after having just seen a program that highlighted very serious aspects of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. This second documentary took a closer look at the U.S. on the eve of an historic election, but from the inside.

What immediately attracted my attention about the *Four Corners* program was the beautiful and intelligent photography that appeared on the TV. I was actually stunned by the pictures' quiet yet strong framing and the sensitivity of approach taken by the cinematographer. Shot after shot, the viewer was presented with moving images as mesmerising as still photographs; street scenes, portraits, landscapes and still lives. It was all very captivating and added immensely to the feel and strength of the documentary.

I became so moved by the images that I began to photograph the television screen. While watching the program I photographed the screen over and over, sometimes selectively cropping the frame and other times photographing the entire shot, just as it had been filmed by the cinematographer. I watched the entire documentary and photographed the television extensively, yet I didn't know who the cinematographer was, and it intrigued me greatly.

When the credits finally rolled, there it was; Cinematography Andrew Taylor ACS. I should have guessed. Somewhat of a legendary figure in Australian Broadcasting, and Senior Cameraman at the ABC, Andrew Taylor has filmed over 90 documentaries for *Four Corners*, as well as episodes of *Foreign Correspondent*, *Dynasties* and *Australian Story*. Taylor's work is well known and highly regarded amongst Australian cinematographers, and he is in fact Vice President of the Australian Cinematographers Society in NSW. Taylor's work on this documentary *Scars and Stripes* is first rate, and it greatly influenced me to watch the results of the U.S. Election and to photograph what I saw on TV the following day.

As excitement grew around the world for news of the Election result, American television networks *CNN*, *ABC* and *NBC* provided live feeds to Australian networks for information. Closely sitting by the television for most of the day with my camera fixed on the screen, I photographed scene after scene from newsrooms, interviews, file footage from rallies and finally the speeches from John McCain and the new President-Elect Barak Obama.

As a photographer, I needed to make photographs of this event. I wasn't anywhere near the real life action in the States, yet like billions of people around the world, I watched it all live from a multitude of different angles from different locations. In a way, I felt closer to the action

sitting in my parent's home in Canberra than I thought would ever have been possible. I was right in there with the cheering crowds in Ohio and New York City. I was right in front of John McCain as he conceded defeat and blamed himself for the Republican Party's loss. And I was right there in the thick of it when Barak Obama announced to a crowd of almost one hundred thousand people that his wife was to be the next First Lady of The United States of America. I have the photos to prove it.

Looking back at the thousands of photographs I have made in the last twenty four hours, I am very happy with *my* coverage of the Election, although none of it is really mine. Or is it? Looking at these images I feel extremely moved by them. Stills from moving pictures, all shot at 1/15th of a second, taken from a television screen in a pretty normal house in Canberra, Australia. There are further places I can think of from America, but my parent's place is still a long way from where all this historical stuff went down.

What interests me about photographing the television screen is that the camera will always produce an image, no matter what it is pointed at, and that image still contains the faces of people and the locations, from the TV, that enables the viewer to draw on their own emotive responses of the actual event. This election coverage provided amazing and emotionally moving images, over and over again, for hours on end; People crying, cheering, singing and applauding the first black President of the United States. Watching the event on television was my experience of the event, and therefore became the actual event that I personally experienced. I did not watch the Election, I watched a television that broadcast the Election. My experience of these events is intrinsically based around the television and the mass communication that enabled me, like billions others worldwide, to experience it. The images that appear in this portfolio then are not merely about the Election, they are representations of my immediate experience of it, and act as a personal diary about where I was, and what I was doing, when Barak Obama became the next President of the United States of America.

Sean Davey

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Note: "The War Briefing" was filmed and produced by Australian cinematographer Timothy Grucza.

Andrew Taylor ACS website <http://www.andytaylor.com.au>

Four Corners website <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/>

"The War Briefing" website <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/warbriefing/>