

REEL TIME POLITICS IN VENEZUELA

by Ana Mallen

Laymen rarely catch a glimpse of the wars waged by political elites. In ordinary politics, ordinary citizens become aware of proceedings behind closed doors through broad general statements that convey the results of months of wrangling between influential interest groups, political organizations, and socioeconomic interests. If information on the workings of ordinary political life is scant, information on extraordinary political events is normally accessible only through the pen of the historian. It takes years for historians to explain revolutions, coup d'états, and civil wars.

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“The Revolution will not be Televised” offers the spectator a unique look into raw politics. The documentary chronicles the coup d'état against Venezuela's president, Hugo Chavez Frias and the countercoup that restored his presidency 48 hours later. It takes its public to the inner sanctum of the coup, and from the presidential palace, it highlights the events that take place in “real time.”

But does it adequately portray the Venezuelan conflict? Critics of the film have cried foul play. They rightfully assert the documentary simplifies the sociopolitical conflict that has divided Venezuelan society. Mimicking the crisis it attempts to explain, the film has fallen prey to the polarization that pervades the country. It lauds President Chavez and maligns the opposition, painting a black and white picture of a conflict characterized by many shades of gray. But it does not distort the facts. “The Revolution will not be Televised” accurately chronicles the actions taken by decisive powerholders to seize the reins of the country on April 11, 2002 and the events that followed, culminating in Chavez's reinstatement three days later. It is a visual account of how the usual suspects (political elites, economic interests, and the United States) attempted to undermine a regime hostile to their interests.

On April 11, alongside Venezuela's middle-class, political and economic elites convene a march to demand the president's resignation. During the protest, anti-Chavez groups decide to march on the presidential palace where pro-Chavez groups had gathered to manifest their support for the president. As the groups meet, violence erupts, and snipers kill protesters on both sides. The private media portrays the shootings as the actions of overzealous Chavez supporters. National television stations falsify images to give international credence to the opposition's claim that Chavez massacred peaceful opposition protestors.

