



William Kunstler: Disturbing the Universe

William Kunstler (1919-1995) was one of the most reviled figures of the 20th Century. For he was an attorney who not only represented controversial causes and unpopular people, but his approach in the courtroom involved exposing the racism and classicism permeating the legal justice system.

Always ahead of his time, Kunstler's lifelong commitment to civil rights began when he went to Mississippi to defend Freedom Riders being arrested for trying to integrate lunch counters and other public accommodations. No hypocrite, he cared just as much about equality in his hometown of Rye, New York, where he successfully sued on behalf of a black couple trying to move into the lily-white enclave in 1960.

Over the course of his career, his services were retained by everyone from Malcolm X to Dr. Martin Luther King to H. Rap Brown to Stokely Carmichael to Abbie Hoffman to the American Indian Movement to Adam Clayton Powell to the Berrigan brothers. But he really first became a household name in his own right during the trial of the Chicago 8 who were arrested in the wake of the 1968 Democratic National Convention. That's when he grew his hair long to match the manes of the hippies being railroaded, and when he was held in contempt of court for calling the judge a bigot.

Kunstler hated racism, and fundamental to his political philosophy was the notion that "lawyers shouldn't be immune from the oppression" affecting their clients. Consequently, he gave his all, and was willing to put his own life on the line. Unfortunately, this approach took a toll on his family, especially his daughters, Emily and Sarah, the co-directors of William Kunstler: Disturbing the Universe.

## Kunstler bio-pic set to premiere on PBS June 22nd at 10 PM

Written by PBS-TV Review by Kam Williams

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In this bittersweet bio-pic they not only recount their father's exploits, but how they had to grow up with the specter of daily death threats and demonstrations in front of their home. Sadly, their father would only be posthumously vindicated for his spirited representation of innocent Harlem teens accused of raping the Central Park jogger.

But it is of little comfort to the African-American defendants that their names were belatedly cleared only after they'd already served lengthy prison terms. There had been a rush to judgment at the time of the trial which had the boys tried and convicted in the court of public opinion by everyone from Mayor Koch to Donald Trump who called for the death penalty in a full page ad in the New York Times.

A very moving tribute to an underappreciated hero who spent his life as a tireless defender of the defenseless.

Excellent (4 stars)

Unrated

Running time: 87 minutes

Studio: Arthouse Films

Distributor: PBS

William Kunstler: Disturbing the Universe will air on the PBS series POV on Tuesday, June 22nd at 10 PM. (Check Local Listings)

To order a copy of William Kunstler: Disturbing the Universe on DVD, visit:

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B002ZTQV98?ie=UTF8&tag=thslfofire-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B002ZTQV98>

To see a trailer for William Kunstler: Disturbing the Universe, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6PSsZfhDw0>