



Viewing guide for *Loose Change*

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Loose Change (2nd Edition) – Pre-viewing guide



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1. Overview / Introduction

The movie *Loose Change* (Rowe, 2005) is a documentary designed to expose “what really happened” on September 11, 2006. It is generally seen as controversial and has garnered much attention in the news media and online sources. Director and narrator Dylan Avery is the name most visibly associated with the project. Dylan Avery, Korey Rowe (producer), and Jason Bermans (producer and designer) are three undergraduate students who collaborated on the project. They consider themselves both the creators of the film and the founders of a movement. The main argument of *Loose Change* is the implication that sectors of the United States government had some degree of involvement in the attacks on the Twin Towers. The documentary proceeds by analyzing a quantity of events that appear inconsistent to the filmmakers. Among the questions raised are the reality of the crash of United Airlines Flight 93, the collapse of the Twin Towers and World Trade Center 7 due to an internal demolition. Additionally, they examine whether the damage to the Pentagon building was caused by an airplane crash, as well as other alternative “real” explanations. In posing these arguments, the film is seen as part of a larger discourse often referred to as the “9/11 Truth Movement.” Though not the first of these September 11th conspiracy theories, it is the most popular representation of these claims.

This film is widely available online, has been translated into several languages, and, to date, entering the phrase “*Loose Change*” into a search engine yields around 12,000,000 hits. The original version was created in 2004. The content of the second edition does not differ greatly from the first in its message, though it is edited in a slightly different format. A “final cut” is anticipated in the near future, and according to Internet gossip it may reach local theaters. The film can be seen as an attempt to reconcile the feelings of citizens worldwide who still find themselves troubled by the events of 9/11. It offers people who see the film a direction from which to approach their concern about how the terrorist attacks were able to happen. *Loose Change* raises more questions than it answers, urging moviegoers to take a very active role in watching the documentary. It is a call to action by the filmmakers directed to the audience. Many viewers watch the documentary out of sheer curiosity, and to educate themselves about the event.

2. Questions to keep in mind before watching the movie

- What feelings does this film evoke? Pay close attention to tone. The events of September 11th are emotionally charged for many people. How does watching the film make you feel?

This viewing guide for the documentary film *Loose Change* (Rowe, 2005), was created by Erin Cooper as part of “Communication 3325: Documentary Film” at Trinity University in Fall 2006.

- Who and what organizations are cited as sources in the argument of the film, and when are they cited?
- What role does 9/11 play in contemporary societal discourse? Looking back on its recent 5-year anniversary, has the discussion about September 11th changed in any manner? How does *Loose Change* fit into talking about patriotism, the news media, and the government?
- Who is the audience at which this film is aimed? While watching, do you get a sense of to whom the filmmakers are trying to appeal?

3. Where to obtain copies of this film

- The [OCLC World Catalog](#) identifies 32 libraries in the United States that contain this item on DVD. Just enter your postal code to find the one nearest you.
- New and used copies are available on [eBay](#).
- Downloadable versions on Google Video in [English](#), [Spanish](#), [French](#), [German](#), [Finnish](#), and [Korean](#). Versions in additional languages (dubbed and with subtitles) are also available with a simple [Google Video search](#).
- The [filmmakers' website](#) sells copies of the 2nd edition.

Loose Change (2nd Edition) – Post-viewing guide

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1. Overview

This post-viewing guide is intended to deepen the audience's critical engagement with the film *Loose Change*. It is targeted at anyone with an interest in exploring documentary and conspiracy theory from an academic standpoint. This guide may be used to facilitate an understanding of what media are being produced in the context of a post-911 world, specifically one that has recently marked a 5-year anniversary of those events. After watching *Loose Change*, most audience members divide themselves into two groups: those who agree with the film's basic tenets and those who do not. In academia and the news media, the film is generally accepted as a conspiracy theory, though participants in the blogosphere and creators of personal websites tend to be more divided in opinion.

One of the major criticisms of the film concerns factual errors. Many sources are not cited properly, and those that are cited are often non-authoritative (i.e., contain a lack of scholarly evidence). A certain sector of critics are devoted to “debunking” the assertions made in the film. It is also important to take note of the fact that *Loose Change* is not the only conspiracy theory, but rather simply one of the most prominent. Other participants in the discourse of the “911 Truth Movement” make similar assertions. Dylan Avery is not the only person to claim that planted bombs destroyed the Twin Towers, or that the plane that crashed into the Pentagon was a United States military plane. Since *Loose Change* is such a cultural phenomenon, however, it is easiest to attack Avery's presentation of these conspiracy theories.

I must admit a personal bias towards regarding *Loose Change* as a conspiracy theory.

While I've been convinced of the invalidity of its arguments, I am more interested in examining why it is so popular and convincing to many viewers. Regardless of my perspective, it is still imperative that viewers understand for themselves the arguments for and against *Loose Change*. I've included several useful resources concerning September 11th conspiracy, documentary film, reviews, and scholarly articles about the film. Using the general documentary film guides provides a vocabulary with which to examine this particular genre of film. There is also a video clip and discussion questions. I urge viewers to explore the links and references to gain a fuller understanding of the role that *Loose Change* is playing in the current socio-cultural moment. It is my aim to open up well-informed dialogue about the anti-United States-government movement that seems to influence a sector of worldwide participants. Being well informed as to the weaknesses in the film and various studies of conspiracy allows viewers to decide for themselves how they choose to participate in this discussion.

2. Useful resources

a. Related resources about 9/11 Conspiracy

911 Commission Report Online (<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/911>)

This United States government website features the content of the final version of *The 911 Commission Report*. It is broken up into sections as an HTML page, and the site also contains a link to a downloadable PDF file that features the report in a continuous format.

The Top September 11 Conspiracy Theories
(<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=pubs-english&y=2006&m=August&x=20060828133846esnamfuaK0.2676355>)

This United States government website contains a posting from the U.S. Department of State and the Bureau of International Information Programs listing the top 8 conspiracy theories associated with 9/11, as of October 25, 2006. It also contains rebuttals for each theory.

Patriots Question 911 (<http://patriotsquestion911.com>)

This website features around 50 "U.S. military officers, intelligence services veterans, and government officials [who] have expressed significant criticism of the 9/11 Commission Report." It supports the "9/11 Truth" movement in which *Loose Change* takes part.

Screw Loose Change (<http://screwloosechange.blogspot.com>)

Creators Pat and James B. describe themselves as "dedicated to exposing the lies, distortions and myths in the movie" and have blogged since May 2006 to further this aim. While this site's content is often distracted by commentary, it's worth a perusal to get an idea of the opposition to the *Loose Change* movement. In case the title doesn't present a clear enough example of the writers' antagonism towards the film, Pat's first entry reads: "This blog is dedicated to exposing the truth about Dylan Avery's nutty conspiracy flick."

Truth, Lies and Conspiracy (<http://www.cbc.ca/sunday/911avery.html>)

This August 22, 2006 interview with Dylan Avery aired on Canadian Broadcasting Company's C-TV. This site features a transcript of the interview by Evan Solomon. It includes information on the motivation behind making the film, as well as commentary from Avery on its impact since

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Version 1 was released in 2004. Be sure to check out the exchange between Solomon and Avery in the arena of factual concern.

Debunking the 9/11 Myths

(http://www.popularmechanics.com/technology/military_law/1227842.html)

This is the online version of the article featured in the March 2005 issue of *Popular Mechanics*. It consists of a team of panelists who consulted experts in various fields to address the most popular contentions about the events of 9/11 from a technical standpoint.

b. Related resources about the documentary film genre

Barnouw, Erik. Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film. Oxford University Press, 1993.
([Google Books](#))

Erik Barnow's second edition book on documentary film is a general introduction to the history of the medium, and is presented in a textbook-like format. Most of the text is available on Google Books.

Nichols, Bill. Introduction to Documentary. Indiana University Press, 2001.

This book provides another history of film, highlighting the different types of documentary. It also includes a section on ethical concerns of making documentary about national political and social concepts, which is useful when evaluating *Loose Change*.

Documentary Educational Resources (<http://www.der.org>)

This website was created and is maintained by independent documentary filmmakers. The "resources" section contains information on teaching documentary film for different age levels. It also has a very comprehensive selection of recommended books on documentary film.

c. Glossaries of useful film terms

Useful Vocabulary for Film Studies (<http://www.duke.edu/web/film/Filmterm.htm>)

This website, hosted by Duke University for a cinema course, contains excerpted versions of several film textbooks and dictionaries. It is a beginner's glossary of film terms. Especially useful are the sections on editing, shot composition, and camera movement.

Reading a Film Sequence (<http://web.uvic.ca/geru/439/seq.html>)

This is another course website for a New German Cinema class at the University of Victoria in Canada. It is useful for any general student of film and includes sections on evaluating narrative, staging, editing, and sound.

A Glossary of Film Terms

(http://cepa.newschool.edu/~schlejoj/film_courses/glossary_of_film_terms/glossary.html)

Joel Schlemowitz created this site for the New York City New School's Film Production department. It is designed to be a review for film students. It contains a comprehensive glossary with short definitions of production terms, and is organized alphabetically.

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d. Film reviews

Why the 9/11 Conspiracies Won't Go Away

(<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1531304,00.html>)

This article from the September 11, 2006 issue of *Time* magazine includes a review of *Loose Change*. While examining the motivations behind various conspiracy theories, it also references the increasing percentage of Americans who believe that there are still unanswered questions regarding the 9/11 happenings.

Click Here for Conspiracy

(<http://www.vanityfair.com/ontheweb/features/2006/08/loosechange200608?currentPage=1>)

Vanity Fair's Nancy Jo Sales reviews the film for the August 2006 issue. She also interviews Dylan Avery, Korey Rowe, and Jason Bermas, attempting to better understand the conspiracy surrounding the "9/11 Truth" movement.

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(<http://www.reel.com/movie.asp?MID=142466&buy=closed&Tab=reviews&CID=13 - tabs>)

James Plath reviews *Loose Change* for movie review site Reel.com. Plath notes several positive and negative elements of the production. It one of the few reviews that encompasses both polarized views surrounding the film, urging viewers to examine it for themselves.

e. Scholarly treatments of the film

Erin Cooper, "Examining Factors Contributing to the Popularity of the Loose Change Conspiracy," 2006.

(<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/e.cooper.2006.loose.change.pdf>)

This is my personal academic treatment of the film, which focuses on the appeal of conspiracy in the wake of September 11th, 2001. It examines the factors of the postmodern conspiracy theory, national identity, and the character of the filmmakers as reasons for the notoriety of *Loose Change*.

Alexandra Sedeno, "The Blasphemy of Loose Change," 2006.

(<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/a.sedeno.2006.loose.change.pdf>)

Sedeno's essay focuses on what she refers to as the "propagandistic" elements of *Loose Change*, specifically the misrepresentation of information and statistics in the film. She implicates Avery as opportunistic and exploitive of American audiences who are vulnerable to manipulation concerning information associated with the 9/11 attacks.

Jenny Stalder, "Conspiracy Theories in Loose Change," 2006.

(<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/j.stalder.2006.loose.change.pdf>)

This essay evaluates factors such as the sources, soundtrack, and editing in *Loose Change* that yield an unconvincing documentary. Stalder argues that if Avery had taken into account these elements, the film would have been more believable.

Nick Nobel, "Louder than words: The manipulative use of *mese-en-scène* in *Loose Change*," 2006. (<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/n.nobel.2006.loose.change.pdf>)

Nobel presents *mese-en-scène* as the most important factor in examining *Loose Change* as an ineffective film. He explores framing as well as narration, shot choice, color usage, and authoritativeness of sources as the main reasons the film is manipulative.

Pat Regan, "Loose Change and the emergence of the living documentary," 2006. (<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/p.regan.2006.loose.change.pdf>)

Regan examines *Loose Change* as a constantly evolving documentary, often being re-edited by individuals. He also takes some time to review how the film typifies the rise to popularity often associated with YouTube, as well as evaluating the potentially negative consequences of a feature-length version to be released in theaters.

Lizz Glomb, "Loose Change: The persuasion techniques of Dylan Avery," 2006. (<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/l.glomb.2006.loose.change.pdf>)

Glomb goes through the film, critiquing the rhetorical style Avery uses to persuade viewers. Her final verdict is that *Loose Change* is a "clever" documentary, despite the fact that its goals are thwarted by the amount of material available online that discounts the claims.

Featherstone, Mark, "The Obscure Politics of Conspiracy Theory." In J. Parish and M. Parker (Eds.) *The Age of Anxiety: Conspiracy Theory and the Human Sciences* pp. 31-45. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.

As no published scholarly treatments of the film are available to date, it's helpful to explore an academic treatment of conspiracy theories. Featherstone presents motivations for individuals to take part in a discourse of conspiracy, which is particularly useful when considering the appeal of *Loose Change* to its supporters.

Birchall, Clare, "Conspiracy Theories and Academic Discourses: the necessary possibility of popular (over)interpretation. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, Volume 15, 2001, pp. 67-76.

Though not about conspiracy in documentary film, Birchall presents an academic study of conspiracy theory in recent modernity. Using the example of Princess Diana's death, Birchall examines the appeal of conspiracy, specifically in the realm of the Internet.

3. Video-clip analysis

a. Explanation and set-up

This video clip is a great way to get an understanding of the film in under 2 minutes. It presents one of the arguments in *Loose Change*—that the Twin Towers collapsed due to an internal explosion caused by a planted bomb—in a way that is indicative of the film's signature style. Avery's inflammatory tone, highly stylized composition, and hip-hop soundtrack are easily observed in the clip. It is an excellent way to summarize the general "feel" of the documentary for viewers who don't have time to watch the entire production.

b. Link to the video clip

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Link: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-3573187458623523477&pr=goog-sl>

c. Analysis

This clip is attempting to show how explosions throughout the Twin Towers preceded the collapse by several floors. Avery presents the argument that the plane crashes into the buildings did not cause their collapse. This perspective is indicated as he begins the clip by asking, “Do ya still think that jet fuel brought down the World Trade Center?” To the filmmakers, believing that the planes’ impacting the Twin Towers was the cause of their collapse is almost laughable. The highly sarcastic tone proves that. This clip is one of the most contested sections in the arguments of *Loose Change*. It goes on to show in high-contrast color these examples of the explosions captured in cross-hatches. This particular section somewhat evokes the sense of a video game. Avery contrasts the images of the World Trade Center collapsing with images of firefighters and others in the general chaos associated with the collapse. Like much of the footage in the documentary, it makes the viewer feel like he or she is experiencing the events of 9/11. It is fast-paced, strongly influenced by the hip-hop music in the background. Some people find the clip believable while others see it in a more fictional light. It is slightly blurry, and at times it is hard to see the indicated explosion clouds. The purple color makes it easier to recognize them, and is a new addition to the second edition. It was much more difficult to understand the filmmakers’ point in the first edition of *Loose Change* because the explosions were indistinguishable from the background. Many scientists have proposed that these puffs of explosion are not the result of bombs but the structure of the towers buckling under the pressure of structure collapse (e.g., windows and beams breaking). Avery et al also argue that the shaking of a tripod indicates the shaking of the ground as if from this potential bombing. They also highlight how “something is knocked off the right-hand side of the building” as proof of this nefarious activity. Overall, this clip sums up both sides of the argument as to why people agree with or disagree with *Loose Change*. For those who believe in its claims, the clip showing the World Trade Center explosions is a clever discovery. For those who disagree with the film, the clip is circumstantial and speculative. Either way, it’s an excellent indicator of the style and content of the film as a whole.

4. Discussion questions

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- Why do you think that *Loose Change* is so popular? Why do people feel so strongly about it in both directions (support and criticism)?
- Are Avery and Rowe opportunists? Do you think that they are using the emotional responses of a world still affected by 9/11 and the techniques of manipulation often present in conspiracy theories to further their own goals? What are the filmmakers getting out of making this documentary?
- Whether you agree with its entire message, were you intrigued by any of the points brought up in the film? Why were you or were you not convinced?
- Do you think conspiracy theories have a place in society? Consider other theories such as the assassination of JFK, aliens in Area 51 of Nevada, serial killer mysteries like those associated with Jack the Ripper, and implications of AIDS as intentional immuno-warfare. Why do these ideas proliferate, and who takes part in them?

5. Closing thoughts

Watching *Loose Change* is interesting, frustrating, emotional experience. I think it's important that groups of people are exposed to as many of the films and documentaries about 9/11 as possible because it's important to take part in the *au courant* dialogue about international affairs. As an informed audience member, the individual is able to both more clearly articulate a personal stance on the issues as well as better understand those with opposing viewpoints.

6. About the author of this guide

a. Short biography

Erin Cooper is a senior at Trinity University. She is an English major who happens to find researching documentary film from a critical studies perspective particularly intriguing, which is probably why she minored in media studies in addition to Spanish.

b. Contact information

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c. A note to teachers, students, and anyone who uses this material in a group setting

This viewing guide for *Loose Change* was created both for my documentary film class and for the larger aim of facilitating an academic approach to the film for viewers of all kinds. It is divided into a pre-viewing section and a post-viewing section; read the pre-viewing section before watching the film, and the post-viewing section afterwards. Feel free to use or link to this material—it was designed to stimulate dialogue—but also please contact me via email if you would like to further discuss the content of this viewing guide. It does not reflect the views of the filmmakers, and falls under Fair Use of this public material.