



Viewing guide for *Loose Change*

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***Loose Change* – Pre-viewing guide**

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1. Introduction

Loose Change 2nd Edition (2006) is a documentary designed to expose “what really happened” on September 11th, 2001. Given its explosive claims—that the government was behind the attacks—it is generally seen as controversial and has garnered much debate and discussion in the news media and online outlets. Director and narrator Dylan Avery is the name most visibly associated with the project. Avery, along with 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 founders of a movement to find the “truth” about September 11th.

Loose Change's primary argument is that the United States government was behind the attacks of September 11th in order to retain power through fear. Some of the claims of the film are:

- United Flight 93 was redirected to Cleveland, the passengers removed, and in-flight phone conversations fabricated.
- A missile was shot at the Pentagon.
- The Twin Towers and World Trade Center 7 were destroyed through a controlled implosion to mask the secret transfer of gold.

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 the movement's claims. It slickly presents itself, given the project's limited budget. Visual evidence is altered or enhanced, Avery narrates in a hushed, accusatory tone, and an original techno score dominates the majority of the film.

Loose Change is readily available online, has been translated into several languages, and, to date, entering the phrase “Loose Change” into a search engine yields around twelve million hits. The original version was created in 2004 when Avery was developing a fictional screenplay about the events of September 11th, but changed his focus to a documentary expose. The content of the second edition does not differ greatly from the first, though it is edited to address and correct early criticisms of the film.

A “final cut” is anticipated in the near future and, according to Internet gossip, it may reach local theaters. Avery presents the film as an attempt to reconcile the feelings of citizens worldwide who still find themselves troubled by the events of September 11th.

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 toward a wide audience. The documentary has attained a modicum of popularity given its polished presentation, shocking claims, online availability, and the existing emergence of government-centered conspiracy theories surrounding September 11th.

2. Questions to keep in mind before watching the movie.

- What would be a filmmaker's motivation for making such a documentary?
- How much is known about the events of September 11th? Where does this information primarily derive?
- What are some of the conventions of documentaries designed to inform as well as agitate?
- What would be the best way to research these claims? What are considered reliable sources?
- What is the appeal of conspiracy theories and the questioning of government activities? Why is it considered a viable genre? What is its audience?

3. Where to obtain copies of this film.

- New copies at the [Loose Change Store](#).
- Downloads provided on [Question911.com](#).
- Available on [Google Video](#).
- New copies on [eBay](#).

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1. Overview

Regardless of whether any or all of *Loose Change's* claims are true, the film brings up interesting questions in regards to presentation, visual elements, and the concept of "truth." While it presents itself as a factual documentary, it is not held to the same standards as its professional contemporaries. Because of the film's underground, guerrilla, agit-prop reputation (and the amateur status of the creators), less emphasis is placed on accurate supporting evidence, and more on how this information is presented. Some sources are emphasized, while others are glossed over.

In addition, where Avery places certain material impacts his message and the film's conclusion. The initial shots feature a long timetable of events leading up to September 11th. This segmenting of material to suggest association makes up a majority of sequences throughout the film. The timeline of building fires works up to September 11th. The listing of these events, and their disassociation with the fires of the World Trade Center, asserts a problem with the government's original claims.

The long montage of news stations claiming secondary devices or explosions within the buildings ties in to Avery's hypothesis about controlled implosion. The plethora of footage inundates the viewer: introducing evidence and quickly moving on, in order to refute the mounting contradictions of the government's story with a mountain of evidence, instead of expanding on a select few.

This structure of inundation leads to Avery's inevitable conclusion about government involvement in the September 11th attacks. As the narrator, Avery's tone shifts greatly as the film progresses. In the beginning, he presents himself as even-toned and dispassionate. As time goes on, however, his tone shifts to one of increasing anger and outrage. By the end, Avery demands the audience take action. He by no means wishes to engage a passive viewer. The way in which the film is structured, and the evidence presented, intends to elicit a visceral reaction.

Given *Loose Change's* previous incarnation as a fictional screenplay, these imagined elements contribute to the structure of the film, and the way material is presented. This big-budget appearance—complete with dramatic music, emotional narration, stark visuals, and a fantastic storyline—somehow adds to the film's believability. Its purpose is not to attain legitimacy in the documentary filmmaking world, but to present claims and evidence in lay terms.

A work of fiction presents itself in its own reality, and this perceptual shaping alters the audience's view of it. In science fiction, the viewer accepts exciting space dogfights and talking green aliens. Avery takes a cue from this shaping and presents *Loose Change* with a combination of fiction and truth: a world full of unbelievable plots orchestrated by a nefarious, omnipotent villain. By presenting the material in an associative fashion, Avery is able to tell a story with a distinct beginning, middle, and end.

2. Useful resources

a. Related resources about September 11th conspiracy theories

911 Truth (<http://911truth.org>)

A collaborative informational website, 911truth.org's purpose is to expose "the official lies and cover-up surrounding the events of September 11th, 2001" in an attempt to educate the public about the attacks and why such events occurred.

911 Blogger (<http://911blogger.com>)

911blogger.com is a collaborative weblog linked from *Loose Change's* official website. Centering on activism, this website updates daily to reference new information, evidence, and events related to September 11th.

"Debunking the 9/11 myths," Popular Mechanics, 2006.

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

This article is an extensive cover story debunking numerous claims made by *Loose Change* and other September 11th conspiracy theorists. A number of *Popular Mechanics'* points are indirectly addressed in *Loose Change's* later incarnations, as certain dubious claims (like explosives under the planes) are removed from the film.

b. Related resources about the documentary film genre

Bill Nichols, Introduction to Documentary, 2001.

(<http://www.amazon.com/Introduction-Documentary-Bill-Nichols/dp/0253214696>)

Nichols writes a broad textbook that goes through the history of documentary film and its methods. The book gets at the core concerns of documentary filmmaking such as: ethical considerations, social and political issues, methods, topics, and types of documentaries.

Documentary Films (<http://www.documentaryfilms.net>)

Documentary Films is an online weblog, forum, and review section dedicated to documentaries. It features updates about recent releases and user-made reviews, with a cadre of underground, abstract, and mainstream documentaries. The site also includes sections on film festivals and graduate schools.

David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson, Film Art: An Introduction, 2004.

(http://www.amazon.com/Film-Art-Introduction-David-Bordwell/dp/0072484551/sr=8-1/qid=1166057419/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1/103-4314482-9664621?ie=UTF8&s=books)

Though not specifically related to documentary film, this comprehensive guide addresses film history, genres, techniques, and terms. This includes a chapter on "Documentary, Experimental, and Animated Films," an analysis of mise-en-scene, and samples of film analyses. This book offers a good starting point for those

unfamiliar with film terms and techniques, vicariously translating into a greater understanding of documentaries.

c. Glossaries of useful film terms

Movie Terms Glossary, 2006.

(http://www.bravotv.com/Project_Greenlight/Movie_Terms//index.shtml)

Project Greenlight's section on *Bravo's* website features an extensive glossary of movie terms related to filmmaking. Most of these terms focus on vocabulary during production, such as camera angles and writing techniques. This guide is useful for the film layman who does not know specific terms and wants a general understanding of terminology.

Film Terms, 2006. (<http://www.filmsite.org/filmterms.html>)

This website features a vast and heavily-detailed glossary guide for all kinds of film terminology. This is particularly helpful for writing about film, as it contains definitions for many techniques, as well as examples from particular movies. This guide is useful for the more experienced film analyst, who knows specific terms and wants an ample guide for finding and expanding upon definitions.

Roger Ebert's Glossary for Film Terms.

(http://academic.sun.ac.za/forlang/bergman/tech/glossary/ebert_glos.htm)

Though not entirely related to production techniques or documentary film, this glossary, featured in *Roger Ebert's Video Companion* (Ebert, 1996), features numerous fun words to define particular film clichés and devices in mainstream movies. While this may not pertain directly to *Loose Change*, they offer a list of overused devices which may help pinpoint the motivations behind some of Dylan Avery's visual and auditory choices.

d. Film reviews

Randy Serraglio, "More people believing that the 'official' Sept. 11 explanation is more fiction than truth," 2006.

(<http://www.tucsonweekly.com/gbase/opinion/Content?oid=oid:82090>)

Serraglio's article is a laudatory review for a showing of *Loose Change* at the University of Arizona, and claims that the film is "a level-headed, clear-minded analysis of Sept. 11," with evidence presented factually and logically. The review is not only of the film, but the event itself.

R.L. Shaffer, "Loose Change: 2nd Edition (A 9/11 Documentary), 2006.

(<http://www.dvdfuture.com/review.php?id=805>)

This review is an emotional and cursory look at *Loose Change* and how it affected the author. While it may not provide a lot of debunking or factual information, it provides a look at the kind of audience Dylan speaks to. Shaffer spends a majority of the review jumping back and forth between support and doubt, even claiming that the film shook him "to the core." The review looks mainly at how the evidence is presented, rather than debating the veracity of the information itself.

Jack Cashill, "No, Virginia, a missile did not hit the Pentagon," 2006.
(http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=50172)

Cashill skeptically reviews *Loose Change* by using layman's logic to dispute the claims and sarcastically refute Avery's assertions. In it, the reviewer poses the question "why?" when debating the claims, and goes through accusations made by the documentary to see if such a nefarious plan makes logical and tactical sense.

e. Scholarly treatments of the film

Michael B. Green, "'Loose Change' An Analysis," 2005.
(http://911research.wtc7.net/essays/green/loose_change.html)

An analysis of the original version of *Loose Change*, Green debunks factual aspects of the film. The review prefaces itself by acknowledging the author's inherent paranoid tendencies, but then proceeds to tear the film apart in spite of his susceptibility to conspiracy theories.

Erin Cooper, "Examining factors contributing to the *Loose Change* conspiracy," 2006.
(<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/e.cooper.2006.loose.change.pdf>)

Cooper's analysis of *Loose Change* is a personal quest to discover why the film is so innately popular; discussing the nature of conspiracy theories and why they garner so much attention. She concludes that such a film is popular because of the polarized dichotomy of its haters and supporters, and how *Loose Change's* controversy and outrageous claims fuel this fire.

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 analyzes the unique nature of *Loose Change's* presentation and existence in an age of instant communication and uncertainty. He notes the inherent manipulation and visceral nature of a documentary constantly changing to criticisms and new evidence.

3. Video-clip analysis

a. Explanation and set-up

This clip presents a montage of news footage featured in *Loose Change 2nd Edition*. These clips feature renowned television networks with respected anchors commenting about secondary explosions, or the possibility of explosive devices within the World Trade Center.

It is a long montage divided into two parts: the initial, music-less introduction, and the proceeding series of long news clips complete with sobering, melodic techno music. All of these clips suggest the claim that there were "secondary devices" within the buildings, and the towers were the target of a "planned

implosion.” All of the clips are taken directly from major network news footage on September 11th, 2001, and every comment is made the moment it occurred.

b. Link to the video clip



c. Analysis

This clip occurs in the middle of the documentary. While repetitive, it is a sizable break from the consistent voice-over narration throughout the film. As a result of this interval, the footage is intentionally off-setting and oddly placed. By including it in the middle of the documentary, Avery supports his claims about secondary devices and planned implosions. Instead of saying it himself, he lets CNN, ABC, FOX News, and other major news networks say it for him.

The purpose of this footage is not to provide new and earth-shattering evidence—the clip is over four minutes and contains the same message over and over again—but to inundate the audience with Avery’s theory. His hope is that the audience will cave in to this massive amount of supporting evidence, failing to give the viewer enough time to process the footage’s pitfalls.

Each clip is taken from September 11th, 2001, and represents numerous knee-jerk reactions on the part of news commentators to tragic occurrences as they happened. Instead of allowing time for processing or reflection, Avery gets what he wants out of the clip—usually the line about possible secondary devices, along with the clout of the respectable commentator and news logo—and moves on to the next.

Since each clip is nearly identical, the segment is both hard to ignore and highly contentious. While it is sobering that each commentator and witness would say the same thing, Avery offers no contrasting evidence or expanded context. CNN says the same thing as FOX News. This partnership of differing news outlets shows the general initial support of Avery’s claims. They work to convince the

viewer of an overarching agreement about secondary devices and planned implosions.

The segment works well to provide an unusual break to the general structure of the film; acting as an intermission to the typical style and narrative. By doing so, it stands out as an unusual inclusion of supporting evidence brought forth by reliable sources. Despite the fact that these sources were working under duress—stating any and all information the moment it arrives—the footage works structurally to provide a level of legitimacy to the film.

4. Discussion questions

- How is *Loose Change* presented differently from other documentaries about September 11th, or conspiracy theories in general? What provides its uniqueness in popularity, while other theories similar in their claims are brushed off as the workings of crack-pots? Does it have anything to do with existing doubts and feelings about the attacks, or an inherent truth in the film's claims?
- How are visual devices and conventions used? Numerous footage and documents are visually altered to make them appear more important, nefarious, or legitimate. Is this manipulation backhanded or justified?
- What are Dylan Avery's persuasive techniques in the film? What devices, word-choice, or sentence structure does Avery use in his narration that suggests legitimacy for his claims? Is it the evidence itself, or the way it is presented?
- The evidence in *Loose Change* is highly refuted amongst skeptics. Are these claims justified, or the workings of those unwilling to accept an alternate theory? Are these counterarguments missing the entire point of the film, or voicing legitimate complaints as to the film's dubious claims?
- The music plays a big role in the documentary's presentation. Unique in a film of such morose subject matter, does it add to or detract from the claims? Was the techno score included to support the film's strong, irrefutable evidence, or shy away from its outrageousness?
- Given the nature of *Loose Change* as a "living documentary," does this constant altering of the evidence and claims show an attention to detail, or does it exploit the amateur and underground nature of the film? Should other documentaries stick to their initial claims—standing alone as a testament to their release dates—or provide alternate evidence and hypotheses as they develop?
- In his choice of structure and narration, Avery tells an active, associative, and fantastical story about September 11th. Does this make the material compelling, or detract from its claims?

5. Closing thoughts

Regardless of skeptics' claims of incomplete, deceptive, or manipulative evidence, Dylan Avery's *Loose Change* offers a unique perspective into the nature of conspiracy theories, why they develop, and how they are presented. Whether the audience agrees with *Loose Change* or not is a moot point. Many of the documentary's claims are consistently up for debate, and neither side will concede to the other, no matter the level of supporting evidence.

However, the film is important to analyze not for facts, but style. *Loose Change* offers an amateur perspective into the production of documentary film. It shows that a filmmaker does not need to go by the professional routes of Ken Burns or Michael Moore. One may, however, borrow their techniques and develop them into one's own style. Avery does this by actively providing his perspective in the film—one so strident it is hard to ignore.

6. About the author of this guide

a. Short biography

This guide was written by Nick Nobel for Dr. Aaron Delwiche's "Documentary Film" class at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. Nobel is a Junior undergraduate Communication major, with experience in film analysis, production, and online ethnographic research.

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

This guide was created for a class, and represents the author's personal opinions, and not that of the professor, fellow students, or Trinity University. The introduction was initially a collaborative effort amongst Erin Cooper, Lizz Glomb, Pat Regan and Nick Nobel. If you wish to use this guide for personal or academic purposes, please cite the author when doing so. Also, if you feel any portion is particularly exemplary or lacking in any way, feel free to use the provided e-mail address to voice your opinions.