



## Viewing guide for *Loose Change*

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## ***LOOSE CHANGE*-PRE-VIEWING GUIDE**

**PATRICK REGAN, DECEMBER 2006  
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### **1. Overview**

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

- 9/11 Conspiracy Theories have reached some prominence in the media today, both in traditional broadcast media (news channels, a parody episode in South Park) and over less traditional channels such as internet blogs, chatrooms, and forums. What preconceived notions have you brought to the viewing of this film because of the attention these theories have been receiving?
- Have you seen any of the earlier versions of *Loose Change*, the first edition or the original cut of the second edition? If so, how do you expect this version of the movie to differ from previous versions?
- Think about your own opinions on what was behind the events that occurred on 9/11. How did you come by those opinions?
- What other kinds of videos have you seen that used the internet as the primary distribution method? Have any of them had as serious a subject matter as this? Or have been as long as this?

## 3. Where to obtain copies of this film.

- The film can be streamed and downloaded through the [Loose Change website](#).
- It can also be purchased, in DVD form, from the [Official Loose Change Store](#)

## ***LOOSE CHANGE* – POST – VIEWING GUIDE**

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### **1. Overview**

For many, at first glance *Loose Change* is considered a shining example of what *not* to do when making a documentary film of some sort. It has been heavily criticized in multiple arenas, both scholarly, internet, and others for its poor citation, misuse of facts, manipulative editing, and deceptive use of mis-en-scene.

However, those who study the way internet media is expanding and changing the way we view media as a whole will notice something fascinating about the way *Loose Change* has been produced and distributed. Unlike previous documentaries, which released one version and were done with it, *Loose Change* has gone through three different versions, with a fourth “Final Cut” in pre-production.

There has been some precedent with this before, but generally only in already released fiction films in DVD format, with “Director’s Cuts” or “Extended Editions”, where the filmmaker can re-cut the movie to their “original vision”. In this case, though, the filmmakers are able to do even more. They are able to release new versions of the movie with new formats, different editing, etc, but are also able to release new versions of the movie with updated content. New evidence brought to light can be added in and scenarios now debunked can be taken out.

The purpose of this viewing guide is to explore this aspect of *Loose Change*. Other guides may critique the film on its various levels, but in this one we shall take a look not at the film’s production, but on its distribution. Hopefully, this guide will allow media students to see *Loose Change* for more than just the questionable documentary than it seems to be, but rather the potential idea it embodies.

The idea is a possible new method of how documentaries can be shown. Instead of being simple dead, unchangeable things, they can be seen as what I like to call “living documentaries”. If a critique is made in a very visible, popular forum, the filmmakers can take this criticism and use it to make a better documentary because of it.

It might be thought of as a very advanced form of audience testing. Instantaneous feedback and instantaneous (well, very fast) response. It’s somewhat similar to the YouTube concept, where anyone can make videos, and then other people can respond

with other videos. In a sense, this viewing guide is not so much about looking at *Loose Change* as a film. Many believe that the movie is lacking somewhat in that regard. However, we will instead look at it as what it might be. An almost revolutionary way of spreading information.

## 2. Useful Resources

### a. Related Resources about 9/11 and Loose Change

- [\*Debunking The 9/11 Myths\*](#)

This rather infamous article in Popular Mechanics magazine was aimed at debunking a number of the claims of the 9/11 Conspiracy Theories, drawing on a number of experts from around the country. It is not aimed specifically at *Loose Change*, but at the theories in general. The article came out around the same time the first version of the film was released, and influenced content in the second and third versions. One change was the addition of a cover of Popular Mechanics in the movie when Dylan Avery talks about his detractors. Another change it influenced will be covered later.

- [\*Screw Loose Change\*](#)

Of all the sites dedicated to disproving and critiquing *Loose Change*, this might be the most famous. It includes a blog following Dylan Avery's activities and a version of *Loose Change* with a running subtitle commentary that points out inaccuracies and manipulative techniques as those who wrote it see them. This is perhaps the epitome of the video critique and response, as it critiques the film in a multimedia format and is distributed along similar channels.

- [\*The 9-11 Commission Report\*](#)

This is the official website of the 9/11 Commission, the government body set up to investigate the events of 9/11, their causes, and their ramifications. It includes the entire report in both PDF and HTML format, minutes from the various hearings held on the matter, and staff monographs and statements.

### b. Related resources about the documentary film genre

- [\*Filmsite: Documentary Films\*](#)

Filmsite is an award winning and immense general repository of film, film types, and film knowledge in general. Their documentary films section has basic definitions as well as a history of documentary film. It includes a list of famous documentaries that have come out in the past century and more detailed articles on famous

documentaries and documentary film makers. A good starting primer for documentary film students.

- [Wikipedia Entry: Documentary Film](#)

While Wikipedia may have notorious credibility issues (such as in *Loose Change* itself), for a sort of general overview of the concept of documentary film, it will serve with relatively few problems. It should not be taken as the ultimate authority on the subject, as it can be edited and written by anyone, and therefore might contain false information, but can be relied upon as a sort of guide of the basics.

- *Introduction to Documentary* by Bill Nichols

(Citation: Nichols, Bill. Introduction to Documentary. 1st. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001.)

This book, available at Amazon.com and many bookstores such as Barnes and Noble, is an in depth overview of the documentary film genre, with a detailed time line, an in depth look at the various types of documentary, and a discussion of documentary ethics.

### c. Glossaries of useful film terms

- [IMDB film term glossary](#)

The internet movie database has become the ultimate resource for movie knowledge over the past few years. This enormously expansive glossary contains almost any term one might ever hear in reference to movies.

- [Filmsite Film Term Glossary](#)

The aforementioned flimsite.com's film glossary. As comprehensive as the IMDB glossary, but also includes examples and, in some cases, pictures. However, the way it is displayed is somewhat harder on the eyes.

- [A Glossary of Film Terms](#)

A glossary of film terms written by an independent filmmaker named [Joel Schlemowitz](#). Joel has made a number of independent films (his bio claims forty experimental films) and maintains a number of online filmmaking guides.

#### d. Film Reviews

- [DVDFuture Review](#)

A generally positive review of *Loose Change*, written by a user of the dvdfuture.com website. It also contains a response to those detractors of the film, namely that they should challenge, but that they are most likely motivated out of fear of the truth.

- [Tuscon Weekly Review](#)

Another positive review of *Loose Change* by a guest writer for the Tuscon Weekly Review, [RANDY SERRAGLIO](#). Randy actually attended a live showing of the film, rather than merely downloading it and watching it on his own, and thus has a somewhat different context for the movie than others might.

- [Worldnet Daily Review](#)

A negative critique of *Loose Change* by Jack Cashill, a commentator on the Worldnet Daily website. He writes a commentary called “Mega Fix”, about the media’s relation to 9/11 and the war on terror.

#### e. Scholarly Treatments of the Film

[\*Loose Change and the Emergence of the Living Documentary\*](#)

This paper (written by the author of the viewing guide, Pat Regan), presents the idea of the film as a living documentary in a more in-depth study of the idea, presenting a more complete picture of the story of *Loose Change*’s distribution.

[\*Louder Than Words: The Manipulative Use of mise-en-scene in Loose Change\*](#)

Another paper by an undergraduate student (Nick Nobel) on the film *Loose Change*. This one serves as an excellent study in *Loose Change*’s manipulative filmmaking and misleading use of facts, with a particular emphasis on mise-en-scene.

*How Real is the Reality in Documentary Film?*

(Citation: Shapiro, Ann-Louise. "How real is the reality in documentary film?." History & Theory 36(1997): 80-102.)

A scholarly article by Ann-Louise Shapiro discussing the reality claims of documentary films and the possible blurred lines between making art and making reality when making a documentary. Particularly relevant for our discussion of *Loose Change*, as Dylan Avery claims he began the film as a fictional depiction of what it

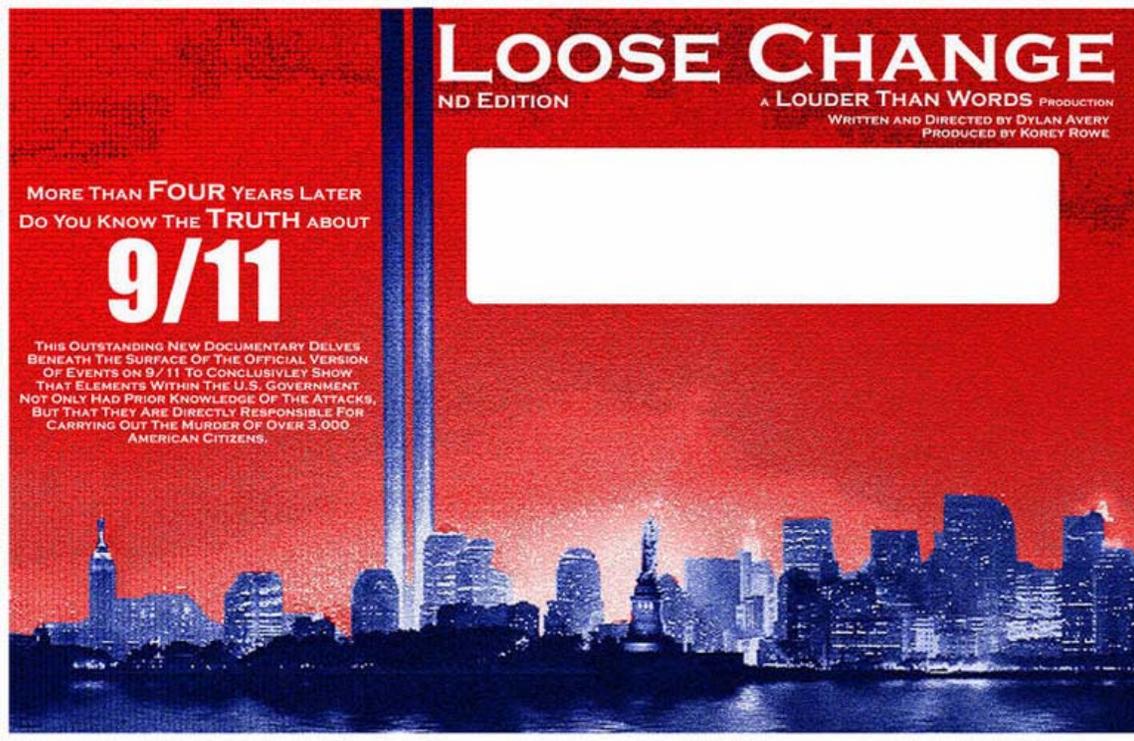
would have been like if the government were behind 9/11 and was convinced by the evidence he found in his research. While the reasons for his making the documentary are unknown to everyone but himself, he has gained a certain amount of fame for *Loose Change*, and there is a certain amount of manipulative artistry to the film.

### 3. Video Clip Analysis

#### a. Explanation and set-up

This particular film clip was chosen as it represents the largest change of all the changes between the first and second editions of *Loose Change*. In the first edition of the film, the claim made about United 93 was that, rather than the passengers overpowering the hijackers, causing the plane to crash, the flight was taken down by US fighter jets over Shanksville. When evidence came out (that will be discussed in the following section, it was changed to this;

#### b. Link to Video Clip



### c. Analysis

One of the important things to note about this clip is not precisely what it is, but what it *was* in previous versions. Currently, it is next to impossible to find footage of the first edition of *Loose Change* on the internet, or a copy of that would be produced as well.

As mentioned before, the original explanation for Flight 93 in *Loose Change* was that the plane was shot down by United States fighter jets over Shanksville. There were a number of pieces of evidence for this claim, but the strongest of all (for all conspiracy theorists, not just *Loose Change's* crew) was the supposed on-air confession of an Air Force. However, a man whom the Air Force pilot was flying that day finally came out and told the press where the pilot had been, giving him a credible alibi and destroying the “military pilot” theory’s most incriminating piece of evidence. This was most popularized in the Popular Mechanics article debunking 9/11 Conspiracy Theories that came out around the same time as the original version of *Loose Change*.

This clip from the second edition of *Loose Change* presents a different scenario that might have caused the events surrounding Flight 93. That no plane ever crashed in Shanksville. Instead, a mock-up of a crash site was produced and the real Flight 93 was landed in an airport in Cleveland. The second edition makes no mention of the previous claims of fighter jets, perhaps as an attempt to save credibility, but it is fairly reasonable to assume that it was removed due to the arising evidence that it was very definitely not a fighter jet that brought down United 93.

However, instead of removing that part of the film entirely, Avery instead came up with a new theory involving the landing of United 93 in Cleveland, based on evidence from the Shanksville crash site that he claims proves that there no plane crashed there, as well as evidence from the Cleveland airport that (according to Avery) implies that a plane landed there secretly.

If one is to accept that the truth behind the intentions of these claims, that Avery and company sincerely believe these things to be the truth and not a cynical attempt for fame, this is precisely what the living documentary idea is. Taking in of new evidence, both positive (proving a new theory) and negative (disproving an old theory), and effecting change within the film.

## 4. Discussion Questions

- Is there any sort of future in the distribution of major films over the internet, as *Loose Change* has? Note that by “major”, we mean important, relevant, and well known.
- Do you believe that there is any future in the idea of a “Living Documentary”? One that is changed and updated as new information comes out about the topic?

- Does this idea of a “living documentary” redeem *Loose Change* in any way, or are its manipulative use of film techniques and questionable source citing beyond redemption? Assuming you are among those who believe it to be false and manipulative.
- Can you think of any other subjects a documentary that is distributed virally over the internet might be appropriate for?
- Any that might benefit from a “living documentary” format?
- Is the concept of “living documentary” a viable one, or is it just an impossible concept, limited to only this film?
- Do you think that the “living documentary” format came about *because* of the noted inaccuracies in *Loose Change*?

## 5. Closing thoughts

In the end, it is always entirely possible that this idea of a “living documentary” is nothing more than a silly, goofy dream of an undergraduate and in the end, *Loose Change* is fundamentally what people are always claiming it to be: a manipulative documentary with large factual gaps and little redeeming value.

However, on some level, this cannot be true. It cannot be true that this film, which has garnered so much attention as to be the subject of a parody on *South Park* (a great honor if there ever was one) is completely and utterly without use or merit. Maybe, like the *Loose Change* filmmakers are always suggesting, we just have to probe a little further.

## 6. About the Author of this Guide

### a. Short Biography

Pat is a Junior English/Communication major at Trinity University with plans to graduate in 2008. He was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, but moved at an early age and grew up in the New Orleans, Louisiana area. Before attending Trinity he graduated from the Metairie Park Country Day high school. He’s still not sure what he wants to do in the future, but he’s pretty sure it involves working on film or TV in some way.

### b. Contact information

Pat Regan is reachable at [pregan@trinity.edu](mailto:pregan@trinity.edu)

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