

Viewing guide for *Loose Change*

Vic Jackson (james.jackson@trinity.edu)
 Trinity University, December 2006

Loose Change: 2nd Edition – Pre-viewing guide

Vic Jackson, December 2006
Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas

1. Overview / Introduction

Loose Change is an independent, expository documentary film that offers a highly controversial account of the tragic events that took place on 9/11/2001. It was written and directed by Dylan Avery, and produced by Korey Rowe with researcher Jason Bermas. Avery narrates the film in a rhetorical, conversational style that exudes hushed, conspiratorial overtones. The film is now in the form of a 2nd edition, which has been through several recuts.

Loose Change presents a wide array of conspiracy theories that have been advanced by those who do not accept the official explanations that have been offered by the government. According to the *Loose Change* [official website](#), “The central premise of *Loose Change* is that the United States Government was, at the very least, criminally negligent in allowing the attacks of September 11th, 2001 to occur.” Furthermore, the site explains, “when one looks deeper into the evidence, one might come to the startling conclusion that our own government might have been directly responsible for the attacks themselves.” Indeed, if one takes the version of “facts” presented by Dylan Avery at face value throughout the movie, they will embark on a journey of endless and hapless suspicion of the U.S. Government. There are many underhanded persuasive techniques contained in Avery’s *Loose Change* which may prove convincing enough for someone to do exactly that. However, there are many websites (such as this one) that exist merely to assist the viewer in recognizing the techniques utilized by Avery for what they are: propaganda techniques designed to persuade you to believe the U.S. Government got away with the biggest cover-up of all time.

Loose Change is a form of documentary propaganda, but it uses the expository documentary style to convey almost all of the information. An expository documentary relies heavily on the narrator to carry the story. The assertions made by Avery throughout the documentary should seem quite disturbing or frightening to the audience – that is the filmmaker’s primary intention. However, once the viewer realizes the sheer number of errors in fact, misquotes, mistruths, quotes taken out of context, and opinions masquerading as fact, it’s very hard for someone to take this documentary seriously.

Avery and team are currently working on, and planning the release of, a 3rd edition of *Loose Change* that will purportedly open in theatres starting in 2007. According to the [website](#), this film will contain many ‘fixes’ for the errors that have been exhaustively highlighted on numerous websites since *Loose Change* was originally released. In actuality, we’ll simply have to wait and see.

This guide should serve as a platform for further discussion of the movie *Loose Change*, as well as an interpretive framework and reference point for understanding the events that took place on 9/11 according to ‘official explanations’ as well as those of a more... creative nature.

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

- What do you think of the editing style? What does this add/subtract from the movie?
- What do you think of the combination of narration/music? What kind of effect do they have on the watchability? On the believability?
- Can you notice any logical fallacies that are made apparent simply by the information provided in the movie? Do you notice any slippery-slope arguments being made?
- Who do you think this documentary’s target audience is?
- Why do you think Dylan Avery made this film?

3. Where to obtain copies of this film

- *Loose Change* from [DivX – Stage6 \(Download/Play\)](#)
- *Loose Change* from [Google Video \(Play\)](#)
- Purchase from the [Loose Change Store](#)

Loose Change: 2nd Edition – Post-viewing guide

Vic Jackson, December 2006
Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas

1. Overview

This post-viewing guide is intended to deepen the audience's critical engagement with the film *Loose Change*. It is targeted at youthful academics that are most likely to appreciate the production style utilized in the film and, therefore, more likely to become interested in the information which it presents. This guide will prove very useful to those who would like to engage in a critical analysis of the contents of *Loose Change* and, at the same time, learn more about the language of film studies and the documentary genre.

Having now watched *Loose Change*, it is likely that you have formed some sort of opinion on the movie. These opinions, in turn, are likely to have fallen within two different camps: those that believe something is probably wrong with the official explanation provided by the government, and those that think something is wrong with the information offered up by Dylan Avery.

Regardless of how *Loose Change* might have affected your personal interpretation, it's important to keep an open and objective mindset whilst interpreting the events that occurred on 9/11. Avery's *Loose Change* presents only a narrow, conspiratorial view of the events that took place that day. As such, the assertions made within the film must be taken with a grain of salt; the information which he provides must be cross-checked against other sources if it is to be believed. To be thorough, one must also look at other 9/11 myths that may prove to be more or less believable than those which Avery decided to include.

Loose Change is very persuasive, utilizing a number of techniques that pull the audience into the story and focus any feelings of distrust and skepticism over the events that occurred on 9/11 into a frenzied, accusational fervor. Avery does this in a number of ways, but the most central has to do with the way he engages with the audience: the narrations. Starting off as passively informational, Avery later begins to further engage the audience by slipping in some conversational dialogue. Finally, in the closing moments, Avery references the audience directly in a call to action. His tone also progresses throughout the film, from calm and objective at the beginning of the documentary, to emotionally involved and angry at the end of the piece. This creates a surprisingly effective emotional pull to agree with the narrator. He believes what the audience believes; he's only asking questions, he's doing it for the sake of America. He buries himself (including his arguments) behind a shield of associative images and rhetorical manipulations, causing the audience to first question their own beliefs before questioning his.

2. Useful resources

a. Related web resources

- [September 11th News](#)

The contents of this site are implied by the title – it's an expansive compilation of the news related to the tragedies that occurred on 9/11. Boasting multiple timelines, chronicles of both national and international newspaper and web stories, and so much more, this site serves as an excellent springboard resource for gathering more information about the events of 9/11 as told by media sources throughout the world.

- [“911 Truth”](#)

One of the most inclusive 9/11 conspiracy theory websites, “911 Truth”, is dedicated to the premise that 9/11 was orchestrated by and then covered up by the United States Government. This website offers priming material aimed at those who have not been exposed to 9/11 conspiracy theory, as well as the more in-depth arguments by the most outspoken 9/11 conspiracy theorists.

- [Screw Loose Change](#)

“Screw Loose Change” was one of the first websites to specifically focus on uncovering the misquotations, mistruths, errors of fact, quotes taken out of context, and use of opinions as fact in Avery’s *Loose Change*. Updated regularly, this is a good resource with which to begin the critical analysis of the documentary’s content.

- [The National Institute of Standards and Technology \(NIST\) & The World Trade Center](#)
Website dedicated to the most rigorous official investigation into the collapse of World Trade Center buildings 1, 2, and 7. After the World Trade Center building collapses, the NIST launched a “3-year **building and fire safety investigation** to study the factors contributing to the probable cause (or causes) of post-impact collapse of the WTC Towers (WTC 1 and 2) and WTC 7”. The project’s budget exceeded \$20 million and hundreds of experts from pertinent experts in professional fields, academia, and the NIST’s internal investigators were consulted.

b. Related resources about the documentary film genre

- Bill Nichols. (2001). *Introduction to Documentary*. Indiana University Press. ([Purchase at Amazon.com](#))

Used as the textbook in the Documentary Theory class from which this Viewer’s Guide is a product, Nichols’ book provides a cursory examination of the history of documentary film, a rhetorical framework useful for categorizing different documentary forms, and contains summaries/analyses of the pertinent ethical concerns that documentarians should address at the creation of a documentary.

- “Non-Fiction and Documentary Films: A History” ([link](#))

This is a neat web-page hosted by Because Films Inspire (BFI), which is an educational resource for the study of film. This piece explores the recent success of the documentary genre on the big-screen, the history of the genre, the influence of television on the genre, and concludes with a speculation of the direction documentary is headed.

- *DocumentaryFilms.net* ([link](#))

This website is a website that provides news pertinent to the field of documentary, a forum for the discussion of documentary, and a group of documentary film and film festival reviews, all in one easily navigable site. This is a great place to find a film festival.

c. Glossaries of useful film terms

- *A Glossary of Film Terms* ([link](#))

Adapted for the web by Joel Schlemowitz, this glossary is the New York City New School Film Production Department’s comprehensive list of film production terms. It’s a quick and easy resource to consult when trying to find the definition of an unknown production term.

- *Useful Vocabulary for Film Studies* ([link](#))

As suggested by the title, this Duke University-based vocabulary guide is designed for students that are new to the rhetoric of Film Studies. It provides a basic introduction to terms that describe types of shots, camera movements, scene analysis, and much more. A useful guide for anyone starting to learn the language of film.

- *Screen and Media Studies: Glossary* ([link](#))

Yet another approach to a film term glossary, this site very clearly delineates the terms into clear groupings, including general, sound, image, movement, editing, and ideology. This site also includes example pictures from films and diagrams that illustrate what the term attempts to explain.

d. Film Reviews

- “Sifting Through *Loose Change*: The 9-11 Research Companion to *Loose Change 2nd Edition*” ([link](#))

This review is a scene-by-scene analysis of the Avery's documentary using an illustrated script and featuring well-cited refutes to most (if not all) of the false conclusions drawn in *Loose Change*. If you doubt anything that is said in *Loose Change*, this would be a terrific place to begin further research because of its scene-by-scene analysis.

- *Who Knew George Bush was so Goddamn Smart?* – review by Dustin Rowles ([link](#))
This interesting review makes a surprisingly lengthy point-by-point case revealing each major argument put forth by the filmmaker and individually rebutes them all in virtually the same way: by analyzing them from the perspective that George W. Bush couldn't possibly be that smart. This review takes a refreshing and sarcastic look at the documentary, which, amidst all the ultra-stratified opinions about *Loose Change*, seems almost necessary.

- *Loose Change, 2nd Edition* – review by James Plath ([link](#))
This is a short, critical review of *Loose Change*. The reel.com-user review acknowledges *Loose Change*'s tendency to go overboard with its poorly cited and unreferenced material that backs the rash conclusions reached, while at the same time recognizing Avery's video-editing skill and advocating that people should watch the documentary in order to determine if Americans really should stand up and ask more questions about 9/11.

e. Applicable scholarly treatments

- Richard Hofstadter (1964) "The Paranoid Style in American Politics". *Harper's Magazine*, November 1964, pp. 77-86 ([link](#))
Perhaps one of the most defining essays for the practice of academic analysis of conspiracy theory, Hofstadter traces the tell-tale path of "paranoid style" throughout American history. He proceeds to analyze the causes and the outcomes of "paranoid style" thought from the framework of American politics.

- Nick Nobel (2006) "Louder than words: The manipulative use of mise-en-scene in *Loose Change*" ([link](#))
An excellent study of the manipulative use of mise-en-scene ("what's on screen") in *Loose Change*, Nobel goes on to question the validity of the truth claims made in documentaries by those filmmakers which use manipulative persuasive tactics.

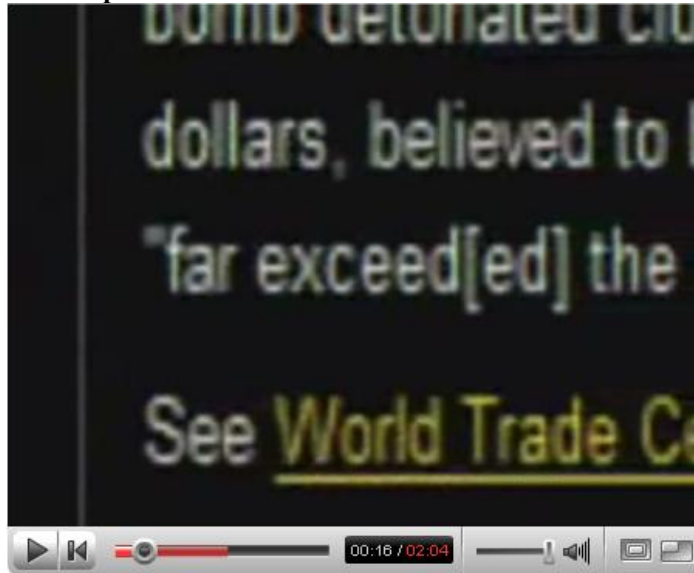
- Vic Jackson (2006) "*Loose Change*: Flashy Facetiousness, Sorry Substance" ([link](#))
The author's academic treatment of *Loose Change*, focusing on the manipulative persuasive techniques used throughout the film and concluding that the film is an irresponsible venture in propagandic documentary.

3. Video Clip Analysis

a. Explanation and Set-Up

In this clip, Dylan introduces a theory, based mostly on the information obtained from Wikipedia (which can be edited by any individual at any time), that most of the \$167 billion being stored in the vaults underneath the World Trade Center buildings were moved in a convoy in an attempt to escape the impending fall of the towers.

b. Link to the Video Clip



c. Analysis

Please take a brief moment to analyze this section of the transcript from the clip above:

Loose Change scene partial transcript

So where did all the gold go? Remember the gold that was found in November, 2001? Reuters reported that it was discovered in the back of a 10 wheel truck, along with several cars in a delivery tunnel underneath World Trade Center 5. (Narration)

Now, compare this bit of narration with the actual news release that it's referencing:

Treasure Found in World Trade Center Rubble

NEW YORK - Over \$230 million in gold and silver was recovered from a delivery tunnel beneath 5 World Trade Center Wednesday... Officials finally reached the trove Tuesday after removing a 10-wheel truck and several cars that had been crushed by the debris. No bodies were recovered. ... The contents of the vaults had to be removed because authorities need to demolish the building. -Reuters and New York Daily News

There are several things one must pay close attention to at this particular sequence in *Loose Change*:

- 1) The main source of information used in this sequence is Wikipedia. A Wiki refers to a site which the users control the information which is displayed. Anyone can edit the contents of Wikipedia entries, and so it's not a good point of reference, especially when the entry isn't cited (as it apparently is not in the clip).
- 2) \$230 million in gold and silver was recovered. Avery admits this was recovered, but fails to convey that this is the amount that was always recorded as being there ([source](#)).
- 3) Avery says "Reuters reported" the gold was discovered in the back of a 10-wheel truck. Reuters actually reported that officials finally "reached the trove" – the trove meaning the vaults – after "removing a 10-wheel truck and several cars that had been crushed by the debris" (emphasis added).
- 4) Avery makes assertion of an uncited rumor (pure speculation) that actually \$160 billion worth of gold was being stored underneath the World Trade Center, and has the audacity to conclude that the truck that was transporting the gold away from the (in a cased-closed tone) with the statement, "167 billion dollars in gold. 200 million is found. And that's just the money"

These general errors in fact are prevalent throughout the film. Due to the inflated numbers of these errors, Avery's film almost invariably loses rapport when his audience catches at least one or two throughout the film.

4. Discussion Questions

- What are the probable impacts of *Loose Change* on individuals that might take all of the assertions, proof, and evidence cited in the documentary at its face value? How might the tendency for people to submit to the “paranoid style” (outlined by Hofstadter, see above) affect the construction of historical “truth”?
- Do the combinations of flashy visual effects, professional editing techniques, and catchy hip-hop beats come together in *Loose Change* to make it more believable? If so, then should Avery be held to a higher standard than other amateur documentarians in regard to portraying accurate, verifiably cited information in his documentary?
- Does the film inspire thought, skepticism towards the government’s ‘official account’, and further research on the topic? Is there any ethical issue concerning distributing a documentary – about such an emotionally loaded and historically significant event – that contains as many errors of fact and use of speculation as witnessed in *Loose Change*?
- Do new-age media distribution outlets like YouTube, Google Video, and the DivX-Stage6 project raise the expectation of amateur documentarians’—now able to easily and rapidly disseminate content on a worldwide scale—to concern themselves with the ethicality of releasing their documentaries?

5. Closing Thoughts

Whether or not *Loose Change*’s audiences agree with the film, the issues raised by its huge success—as an independent production made entirely by amateur filmmakers—warrant serious critical attention and analysis of the contemporary state not only of *Loose Change*, but also the Documentary film genre as a whole. Faced with increasingly available free worldwide distribution outlets—from which content is easily duplicated and redistributed—the amateur documentary filmmaker of today must be more concerned than ever with the ethical ramifications of releasing material that he/she considers to be “truth”.

While the author of this viewer’s guide has several, strongly-negative, opinions about *Loose Change*, he also believes that attempting to censor works like these would only be a step in the wrong direction. Rather, the focus should be on two different things: 1) The increased awareness and discussion amongst amateur documentarians as to the ethical responsibilities one has to consider before the worldwide release of a documentary, and 2) the elimination of belligerent errors of fact, bad citation practices, and quotes that are taken out of context in works that claim to “tell the truth”.

Some very useful tools are made available throughout this page, that cover basic film terminology, to information about the arguments put forth in *Loose Change* to other conspiracy theories surrounding the events of 9/11, to useful links that will prove helpful to anyone seeking further understanding of those tragic events. These will best serve the visitors of this page as a kind of springboard into further research and subsequent understanding of Avery’s *Loose Change* and the disasters that occurred on 9/11.

6. About the author of this guide

a. Short Biography

Vic Jackson is a Communication/Athropology major set to graduate in December of 2006. Originally from La Porte, TX, he graduated from La Porte High School and moved to San Antonio to attend Trinity University in 2002. He is experienced in the areas of documentary production, web design and ethnographic research methods.

b. Contact Information

E-mail: etherwar@hotmail.com

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

Feel free to make use of any of the information contained on this page (properly cited, of course). This site was created specifically for the use of students and educators, alike. Feel free to contact me with any questions, comments, suggestions, regarding the work presented here. The statements made in this viewing guide do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the school, faculty, or student body at Trinity University. It is simply opinion, so please take it as such.