

FILMING FOR CHANGE:

The Art of Influencing Public Policy through Documentary Filmmaking

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Abstract

Documentary filmmaking is a very useful tool for bringing an issue to public attention and pushing for political action and policy change on that issue. This form of documentary filmmaking, Filming for Change, has been employed successfully and unsuccessfully by many different filmmakers. There are a few keys to making a successful documentary when Filming for Change, and the first is to appeal to the correct demographic. Those who have the political power to influence policy will tend to be white, male, and between 35 and 64 years of age. These people do not like propaganda or a slanted film. They prefer a slower, more methodical and thoughtful approach that doesn't rely on quick, jumpy edits. They prefer a feeling of intimacy with the subjects, and tend to be more emotionally connected if they can relate to the subjects' experiences. But the subjects' experiences must also be tied to a broader picture and be used in connection with factual data. Using these key points, documentary filmmakers can Film for Change and frame policy debates over any issue that the filmmaker feels isn't adequately addressed.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1.....	1
Introduction: What is “Filming for Change” and why do we need it?.....	1
Chapter 2.....	3
Review of Literature: The best practices in appealing to those with money and influence.....	3
Who has the money and influence?.....	3
What appeals to these people?.....	4
Chapter 3.....	6
Methodology: Gathering research and interviewing local notables.....	6
Gathering Scholarly Research.....	6
The Magic of the Google Search.....	7
The Interviews.....	8
Delimitations and Limitations.....	10
Chapter 4.....	11
Data Analysis – What do the interviews reveal?.....	11
Chapter 5.....	18
Discussion - What the research shows about the best practices.....	18
Conclusion: Where do we go from here?.....	21
References.....	22
Appendix A.....	25
“Homeless in Paradise”: Putting these findings into practice.....	25

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: <i>Do you watch documentaries regularly, occasionally, rarely, or not at all?</i>	11
Table 2: <i>What do you like most in a documentary? What attracts you to a documentary?</i>	12
Table 3: <i>What do you like least in a documentary? What turns you off to a documentary?</i>	13
Table 4: <i>When watching a movie or video, do you prefer fast-paced editing and lots of quick cuts, or slower, more methodical pacing?</i>	14
Table 5: <i>When you watch a movie or video, which do you respond the most to: broad facts and figures, or specific, intimate details about individuals?</i>	15
Table 6: <i>When you watch a movie or video, does it help you to connect to the film if the people you see are relatable to your own experiences?</i>	16
Table 7: <i>What documentaries, if any, have been influential to you and why?</i>	17

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: “*Homeless in Paradise*”25

I. Introduction: What is “Filming for Change” and why do we need it?

People living in desperate poverty on Indian Reservations (Trizao, 2010). Women kidnapped and forced into sex slavery (Bienstock, 2006). Overcrowded prisons struggling to control gang violence within their gates (Wallace, 2005). We don't see these problems in our everyday lives; we live in our nice houses, drive to and from work, and go on vacations without ever encountering anyone touched by these problems. Many people don't even know there is a problem at all.

That is why we need activist filmmakers – documentary filmmakers that identify a social problem that is hidden from view and expose the problem to the world. People can't fix a problem they can't see; activist filmmakers bring problems to light so they can be addressed. This is different from propaganda; the filmmaker isn't trying to tell the audience what to think, only to bring awareness of the issue to the audience. Having said that, it is crucial that the documentary not only is seen by lots of people, but is seen by the right kind of people. The activist filmmaker must get the attention of the people with the power and influence to do something significant about the problem. Remember, the goal is a policy change that addresses the issue.

This puts activist filmmakers in a bit of a predicament. It is great if a film has mass distribution and is really popular with the general public. The general public, though, has only limited ability to impact public policy. They can vote, they can protest, they can petition, and they can donate to charities. They have no political office, and can't write laws except by petition and referendum – a difficult process. They don't have the wealth and resources to bankroll

political campaigns or to push the local Chambers of Commerce and business community into action. They could theoretically run for office or set up nonprofit organizations, but such activities are prohibitively expensive and few people have the time, money, or motivation to do so. This year, according to Massachusetts state records, one man running for a municipal office spent \$4,632 on his campaign in two weeks (Office of Campaign and Political Finance, 2011). Political campaigns are expensive, so they are restricted to those with the resources to run them.

Thus, it is crucial that the documentary in question must appeal to the people that have money and political pull. Such people can make a concerted push for policy change. If they have political office, or are close to somebody in a political office, they can call for an investigation into the matter. If they are influential businesspeople, they can take action by contributing to nonprofit campaigns and political candidates who seek to address the problem.

That is what “Filming for Change” is about. Filming for Change is an attempt by an activist filmmaker to identify an issue that has little awareness but needs to be addressed, and then film a documentary about the issue in such a way as to appeal to those with wealth and political influence. Filming for Change seeks to create a debate over the issue that leads to a policy change. The key question that must be answered is how exactly to appeal to these influential people.

Appealing to influential people is the part that will make or break a documentary that seeks to Film for Change. There are those that have succeeded, such as *Harvest of Shame*, a film about the plight of impoverished farm workers that was produced by CBS News and aired on Thanksgiving in 1960 (Schaefer, 1994). It had a huge cultural impact, and only two years later César Chavez founded the National Farm Workers Association that helped push for better wages

and treatment of migrant farm workers (United Farm Workers, 2006). Then there are those that have failed, such as *Food, Inc.*, a film that attempted to shake up the food and beverage industry by exposing their most unseemly business practices (Sabo, 2009). This film came and went and was virtually unnoticed, with no impact to how businesses grow or prepare their food (Sabo, 2009). What *Harvest of Shame* understood that *Food, Inc.* didn't was how best to appeal to the influential. Specifically, the best practices in Filming for Change are to make your film slow-paced, thoughtful, intimate, and relatable. Each of those four points is crucial to appealing to a target audience of well-to-do, influential people.

II. Review of Literature: The best practices in appealing to those with money and influence

Who has the money and influence?

The U.S. Census Bureau lists a number of key characteristics of households earning more than \$100,000 per year ("Earnings in the Past 12 Months", n.d.). This population is predominantly male and highly-educated ("Earnings in the Past 12 Months", n.d.). That said, there are a fair number of women in this group ("Earnings in the Past 12 Months", n.d.). The Census Bureau also records that people that earn more than \$75,000 per year are primarily between the ages of 35 and 64, with the population peaking between 45 and 54 years of age ("Table 702", 2010). Looking at incomes over \$100,000 per year, there is a trend that the higher the income, the fewer individuals who are of a race that is something other than non-Hispanic white ("Table 705", 2010). Thus, we see that our target demographic is going to be predominantly white, male, and between 35 and 64 years of age.

What appeals to these people?

With this picture of the target audience in mind, it is time to look at what appeals to this demographic.

Seungjo Lee of the University of Indiana (2007) conducted a psychological study on the reactions of people to public service announcements to test their effectiveness. He found that people feel most positive after watching PSAs that tried to evoke joy and most negative after watching PSAs that try to invoke anger (Lee, 2007, p. 77-78). PSAs that invoke anger also appeared to get the most attention from viewers (Lee, 2007, p. 81). Although this study is dealing with documentaries, not PSAs, this information is still relevant to Filming for Change, as these forms of documentaries could be seen as really long public service announcements.

In an article for the New York Times, Randy Kennedy (2005) reported on a new television network that seeks to appeal only to the wealthy, and airs only in major resort locations. Documentaries are one of the network's staples (Kennedy, 2005), which is good news for documentary filmmakers who seek to Film for Change – their main target audience is already interested in watching documentaries. One of the key features of the network's programs is the sense of intimacy that they create; as Kennedy puts it, "Sometimes, the local programming can feel decidedly homemade." (2005)

Intimacy is one of the key features of a documentary that appeals to a well-to-do audience. Shawn J. and Trevor Perry-Giles looked at the making of the successful 1993 documentary *The War Room*, and discussed the intimate feel that this film created (1999, 30-34). The film achieved this through a number of techniques. It used cinema-verité (Perry-Giles & Perry-Giles, 1999, 30), a technique that simulates a "fly-on-the-wall" feel by simply being in

places and filming what happens and what people say with no script or editing. It followed Bill Clinton's presidential campaign staff from city to city and speech to speech, catching candid images of the preparations for campaign events (Perry-Giles & Perry-Giles, 1999, 31-34).

Another important example for the purposes of this study is *Food, Inc.*, an expose by Robert Kenner of the food industry in America and its many unsavory practices (Sabo, 2009). The film was thoroughly unsuccessful in its attempt to Film for Change, and left almost no impression on its audience (Sabo, 2009). As Lee Weston Sabo (2009) called the film "political pornography for environmentalists, vegans, socialists, and others already predisposed to agreeing with its argument and following its advice, while others are likely to interpret it as patronizing propaganda and get mad at the filmmakers instead of the corporations that are ruining the food supply." The reason for the film's failure, according to Sabo, is its overly fast-paced, heavily-edited style that tries to cram too much information into its 94 minutes (2009). Sabo (2009) muses, "A documentary aiming to cover the whole of the situation would have to rival Ken Burns' *The Civil War* in length and scope."

In contrast, Sabo (2009) compares *Food, Inc.*'s failure to the success of one of the most well-known documentaries of all time, *Harvest of Shame*. Edward R. Murrow's expose of the plight of America's migrant farm workers brought national attention to the issue (Schaefer, 1994), and was followed within two years by the founding of Cesar Chavez's National Farm Workers union, that began the push for better working conditions through organized boycotts (United Farm Workers, 2006). This film is slow-paced, methodical, thoughtful, and not heavily edited at all (Schaefer, 1994). Its interviews are long, and practically uncut (Schaefer, 1994). This is partially an accident, as they used 35mm newsreel cameras to film the program, and that

meant it took longer to set up and take down the cameras (Schaefer, 1994). The end result, though, allows the audience time to digest what they just learned and think about what was being said.

It is true that *Harvest of Shame* was aired in 1960, and that times have changed and audiences have changed. That said; the extreme commercial success of the slow-paced, methodical, thoughtful, and not heavily edited *March of the Penguins* (Butler, 2005) is evidence that slow-paced films still carry weight with modern audiences. *March of the Penguins* earned \$70 million at the U.S. box office (Butler, 2005), without any explosions or costumed heroes.

Two more illustrative movies were discussed in two interviews published in *Afterimage* (Horne & Kahana, 1998). One covered the film *Inextinguishable Fire* by Harun Farocki about the invention of Napalm; the other covered the film *What Farocki Taught* by Jill Goodmillow about the making of *Inextinguishable Fire* (Horne & Kahana, 1998). This is an example of the need for audiences to relate to the film. *Inextinguishable Fire* was a hit in Farocki's native Germany, but was ignored in the United States (Horne & Kahana, 1998). *What Farocki Taught* was essentially a remake of *Inextinguishable Fire*, but had a very different emphasis (Horne & Kahana, 1998). Goodmillow spliced in sequences that made the subject relatable to American audiences, such as sequences of people shopping at K-Mart and herself speaking in front of the camera (Horne & Kahana, 1998).

III. Methodology: Gathering research and interviewing local notables

Gathering scholarly research

This study began by researching scholarly journals for articles that dealt with Filming for Change or similar subjects. One source of particular use was the peer-reviewed film publication *Afterimage* that was filled with articles on documentary filmmaking and filmmaking in general.

One article that stood out was “Comparing *Inextinguishable Fire* with *What Farocki Taught*”, a pair of separate interviews conducted by Jennifer Horne and Johnathan Kahana (1998). One interviewed Harun Farocki, the maker of *Inextinguishable Fire*, and the other interviewed Jill Goodmillo, the maker of *What Farocki Taught* (Horne & Kahana, 1998). Through the interviews, the article compared and contrasted the two films and also went into some detail about the motivations behind the two filmmakers (Horne & Kahana, 1998).

Another scholarly source that was uncovered was Shawn J. and Trevor Parry-Giles’s thesis “Meta-Imaging, *The War Room*, and the Hyperreality of U.S. Politics.” This paper was primarily arguing the film *The War Room* was a political act of image-making by the Clinton campaign, but along the way provided some useful information about the film and why it succeeded (Perry-Giles & Perry-Giles, 1999, 31-34). Similarly, Richard J. Schaefer’s “Reconsidering *Harvest of Shame*: The limitations of a broadcast journalism landmark,” published in the scholarly journal *Journalism History*, was primarily an argument against the popular perception of the “success” of *Harvest of Shame* (1994). Although the author disagreed with Schaefer’s assessment, the article contained factual information that was important and useful for this study, and was thus included (Schaefer, 1994).

The magic of the Google search

Though these scholarly sources formed the bedrock of this study’s thesis, more information was needed, and the author chose to find some other sources to buttress these findings. One key finding was Lee Weston Sabo’s review of *Food, Inc.* in the online trade publication *Bright Lights Film Journal* (2009). Sabo’s critique of *Food, Inc.* was revealing; it was a demonstration of what pitfalls a documentary filmmaker can run into while filming (2009).

It also helped that the review contrasted the failure of *Food, Inc.* with the success of *Harvest of Shame* and other films (Sabo, 2009).

Another useful feature of the simple online search is the ability to find movies online. The author was able to watch *Harvest of Shame* and *Inextinguishable Fire* himself, and assess the truth of the assertions made by these research sources. The author could not find all of these movies, though. He could only find the trailer and a few clips for *The War Room*. He couldn't find some more recent films like *What Farocki Taught* and *Food, Inc.* That said; he found plenty of websites about these films.

Still, this study required original data. Thus, it was decided that interviews with local notables were necessary for a more complete picture.

The interviews

The author contacted three local notables and asked them seven questions seeking to gauge their tastes in documentary films and to address key points of this study. The interviewees were selected based on their belonging to the target demographic for Filming for Change, and their actual political power and influence within San Luis Obispo County, California. The questions are included below:

1. Do you watch documentaries regularly, occasionally, rarely, or not at all?
2. What do you like most in a documentary? What attracts you to a documentary?
3. What do you like least in a documentary? What turns you off to a documentary?
4. When watching a movie or video, do you prefer fast-paced editing and lots of quick cuts, or slower, more methodical pacing?
5. When you watch a movie or video, which do you respond the most to: broad facts and figures, or specific, intimate details about individuals?

6. When you watch a movie or video, does it help you to connect to the film if the people you see are relatable to your own experiences?
7. What documentaries, if any, have been influential to you and why?

Bruce Gibson, 58, is a County Supervisor of San Luis Obispo County, California. He has a master's degree from the University of Hawaii and has had three careers – first as a seismologist, then as a farmer, and finally as a public official. He has been active in various political groups such as the Land Conservancy and Hearst Ranch Conservation NOW, and has been a County Supervisor since 2007. He was selected because he is a current policymaker and because he has a known passion for documentary films. People like Gibson are exactly the sort of audience *Filming for Change* has to reach.

William Yates, 64, is the current mayor of Morro Bay, California. He has been mayor three times: from 1993-1996, 2003-2004, and 2011-present. He owned a jewelry store for 13 years, and has a sailboat that he takes long-distance sailing (W. Yates, personal communication, October 31, 2011). He was selected because of his long history of political involvement, and because of his conservative political tendencies. This would balance Gibson's liberal political views to ensure both sides of the political spectrum were represented.

Katcho Achadjian, 59, is a member of the California State Assembly and represents San Luis Obispo County as well as a part of Santa Barbara County. An immigrant from Lebanon, he graduated from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo and served on the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors from 2001 to 2006 (California State Assembly, n.d.). He was selected because of his political power within the county, which is significant not only

because of his office but also because of the money he makes at his business and the fact that his name is very well-known in the county. He is also a political conservative.

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitations to this research were used to determine the perceived applicability of the various sources to the subject of this study and their reliability as scholarly sources of information. The first delimitation was the method used to find the sources: the author found them through online databases. Specifically, the scholarly sources were found through the research databases of the Robert E. Kennedy Library at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. The non-scholarly sources were found through Google. The searches were run using the most specific terms possible, and gradually broadening the scope of the search until a good pool of possible sources was achieved. Among these, the author scanned the abstracts to eliminate those that were not useful and select those that were. Though non-scholarly sources were used in this study, it was determined early on that the main points should come from the scholarly sources and that non-scholarly sources should only be used as a supplement to illustrate the data. This further delimitation meant fewer sources could be used to uncover the main data, but the author felt the quality of data so uncovered was more important.

In conducting the interviews, the author's main delimitations were how "local" and how "notable" the interviewees were. The author selected people (based in part on some advice he had received) that were important and well-known political figures within San Luis Obispo County. A further delimitation was the political position of the interviewees; the author sought to balance liberals and conservatives as best as he could.

The main limitation to the research was time. The author needed to find the sources in a limited space of time, and this limited the quantity of available data. The author hoped the quality of data uncovered would compensate for this. Another limitation was the number of scholarly articles available from the Kennedy Library’s database. Although this database was quite extensive, the author understood it could not contain all scholarly articles relevant to the subject that had been published.

The chief limitation to the interviews was the self-selection of the respondents. The author called a dozen people over the course of the study, and only three people replied. Some the author was unable to reach at all. The author ended up communicating with Katcho Achadjian via e-mail, rather than by phone as he had with the others. This limitation may have changed the sort of answer Achadjian gave, as he had more time to think and plan his response.

IV. Data Analysis – What do the interviews reveal?

The first question, presented in Table 1, is meant to assess whether the interviewee watches documentaries as a genre generally, and if so, how often. This is an important variable, as it does not serve our study if a subject has a habit of rejecting documentaries sight unseen.

Table 1: Do you watch documentaries regularly, occasionally, rarely, or not at all?

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Answer</i>
Bruce Gibson	Regularly
William Yates	Regularly. I’m a documentary junkie: I’ve seen them all.
Katcho Achadjian	I watch documentaries occasionally. Often I view them on PBS or the History Channel.

All interviewees watch documentaries at least occasionally, a good sign for this study.

The second question, presented in Table 2, is a broad, open-ended question to see if a pattern emerges between the interviewees regarding characteristics of documentaries they enjoy.

Table 2: What do you like most in a documentary? What attracts you to a documentary?

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Answer</i>
Bruce Gibson	The chance to learn. Different documentaries take on odd subjects or find a new perspective on political questions. I like the opportunity to gain a new point of view.
William Yates	Truth. Most documentaries try to put out the truth, but I'm not a fan of a slanted documentary whose filmmakers have an agenda.
Katcho Achadjian	The first thing that attracts me is the title and I often am drawn to subjects that have to do with cultural and historical subjects including political leaders.

Gibson's answer is instructive as to why people in the target demographic watch documentaries.

In essence, they are already conditioned to be receptive toward Filming for Change.

The third question, presented in Table 3, is also a broad, open-ended question to see if a pattern emerges between the interviewees regarding characteristics of documentaries they don't enjoy.

Table 3: What do you like least in a documentary? What turns you off to a documentary?

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Answer</i>
Bruce Gibson	When I can tell that a documentary has an extreme point of view. When it is very biased, with preconceived notions and not trying to get another point of view. I'm sensitive to hammering an overly simplistic point of view on a complex political subject.
William Yates	Untruth. I hate a heavily slanted film with an agenda. <i>Frontline</i> usually does a good job of being fair, but they can be slanted, too, sometime.
Katcho Achadjian	I do not enjoy it when a documentary plays loose with the facts or slants the coverage of a subject to suit a particular opinion. I am much more impressed when the facts are laid out there and it allows someone to come to their own conclusions.

This is an important reminder that Filming for Change can't be biased or a blatant propaganda piece. The target demographic does not find such material appealing at all.

The fourth question, presented in Table 4, addresses the hypothesis that slow-paced films appeal to the target audience more than fast-paced ones.

Table 4: When watching a movie or video, do you prefer fast-paced editing and lots of quick cuts, or slower, more methodical pacing?

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Answer</i>
Bruce Gibson	It all depends. That is the art of the documentary. Each one is made by different people with different skill sets and styles. But if the subject is a complex matter of public policy, a deliberative style makes more sense.
William Yates	Slower, generally. I've liked documentaries in both styles, and it depends on the filmmaker. But when there are 74 edits in 90 seconds and it's jumpin' -jumpin', it gets on my nerves. Slower films are more thorough.
Katcho Achadjian	For me the editing might be either faster or slower paced as indicated by the subject matter. In general, the long shots in some documentaries sometimes make the films longer than they need to be.

The first two favor slower filmmaking styles, but for different reasons. It is also noteworthy that all have liked films that were faster-paced, and all think that pacing can vary depending on the subject. Gibson thinks slower films are more appropriate for political issues, which applies to *Filming for Change*, but does not reject faster-paced films outright. Achadjian rejects pacing that is too slow, an important outlier to consider.

The fifth question, presented in Table 5, addresses the hypothesis that intimacy is important to the target audience.

Table 5: When you watch a movie or video, which do you respond the most to: broad facts and figures, or specific, intimate details about individuals?

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Answer</i>
Bruce Gibson	It really is interplay between those factors. You need the ability to provide information, but you also must present individuals. The documentary must artfully use both. It's about how those are mixed.
William Yates	Both, but if you are going to press me on one, I'd say the latter. I like <i>American Masters</i> and <i>Biography</i> , and both of those get very intimate.
Katcho Achadjian	I respond to all if it in its totality. I enjoy the various elements including specific details and I am looking to see the maker of the documentary help draw the bigger picture from these facts.

In this area, the literature seems to contradict the answers of the interviewees. They all say that intimacy is good, but must make connections to a broader picture. This has significant consequences for Filming for Change.

The sixth question, presented in Table 6, addresses the hypothesis that relatability is important to the target audience.

Table 6: When you watch a movie or video, does it help you to connect to the film if the people you see are relatable to your own experiences?

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Answer</i>
Bruce Gibson	Sure. The art of the documentary is about bringing people into connection with the audience. People in similar circumstances will have a natural connection, but the filmmaker must also strive to make a more universal connection.
William Yates	Yes, I suppose it helps. It doesn't have to be, though.
Katcho Achadjian	It does help if I have had an experience with the subject matter or people in the film to help make a connection. It allows me to be able to sift out the facts from the fiction in the presentation.

All agree that relatability is important, but to different degrees. Yates is an interesting outlier in that he doesn't feel relatability is completely necessary. On the other hand, Achadjian really supports relatability as a crucial factor to his enjoyment of a documentary.

The final question, presented in Table 7, seeks to find further evidence of patterns in the interviewees' tastes in documentary films.

Table 7: What documentaries, if any, have been influential to you and why?

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Answer</i>
Bruce Gibson	<i>An Inconvenient Truth</i> , because it was the first attempt to take such a complex and technical subject as global warming and present it to a wide audience.
William Yates	I watch so many, I'm not sure I can pick one. I will say that <i>Frontline</i> is the best show on TV.
Katcho Achadjian	I have always been impressed by documentaries that depict the sufferings of people, whether it is the Jews or the Armenians, and to see how they were able to persevere by hard work and effort to get through the toughest times. It makes me recognize the little bit of faith we all need to get through our own troubles. A movie like <i>Schindler's List</i> is one example of a documentary's ability to influence through its depiction of great courage under dire circumstances.

It appears Gibson's pick of *An Inconvenient Truth* is consistent with all that has been found in the literature. The author has seen it and concludes that it is slow-paced and intimate; both due to

its “PowerPoint presentation”-like format, while there are parts of the film where Al Gore relates his personal experiences, making the film relatable to people in the target demographic. Also important to note Achadjian’s words: “I have always been impressed by documentaries that depict the sufferings of people”. Though he means it in the past tense, *Filming for Change* seems to not be a very far departure from his comfort zone.

V. Discussion - What the research shows about the best practices

The first lesson seems to be that *Filming for Change* must be a slow-paced affair. When the finished film is shown, the audience needs time to digest and think about what they have just learned. A rapid-fire, fast paced film doesn’t give the viewer the thinking time to understand what he or she has just seen. Although Achadjian seems to prefer faster-paced films, everything else seems to point to slower pacing.

One technique for doing this is to use long, uncut stretches of ambient b-roll. *Harvest of Shame* used this technique to brilliant effect. By doing this, the film not only provides the time needed for the viewer to absorb the information, but also sets a somber mood and sad tone that resonates with him or her and has an impact on how the information is received. Gibson stated that he liked *An Inconvenient Truth*, another highly-influential documentary that successfully practiced *Filming for Change* by getting politically influential people interested in tackling global warming. Al Gore’s film is essentially a long PowerPoint presentation that is hardly edited at all. It is slow, methodical, analyzing its points one by one in great depth. On the other hand, Sabo couldn’t make heads or tails of *Food, Inc* (2009). In his review, he states, “Audiences don't like being treated like candy-addicted children who need to be tricked into consuming something good for them... Kenner may have had good intentions when he wrapped his film in

colorful graphics and slick editing, but it just further confuses the difference between journalism and light entertainment.” (Sabo, 2009)

Kennedy’s report on the “homemade” feel of the new network catering to the interests of the wealthy is a good example of the appeal of intimacy to this group (2005). Intimacy, for this study’s purposes, is the sense one gets when one feels he or she knows the people on the screen, or at least can appreciate that they are actual people and not just abstract characters. When we reduce people in our minds to caricatures, it is easy for us to dismiss them and their needs. It is impossible to do those things to another human being, once you see them as another human being. *Harvest of Shame* was brilliant on this score as well. It used long, uncut interviews with its subjects, some of them several minutes long, discussing their plight and poverty. The subjects gave specific examples of their suffering that pull more weight on the heartstrings than statistics or charts. That’s not to say *Harvest of Shame* didn’t bring up statistics, though; as the interviews showed, intimacy must be carefully paired with a broader picture to produce results.

Although not necessarily a Film for Change like *Harvest of Shame*, it is undeniable that a large part of the success of *The War Room* was its use of cinema-verité to make its subjects, the Clinton campaign managers and employees, seem real and not like characters (Perry-Giles & Perry-Giles, 1999, 31-34). Shooting them in candid moments, capturing their conversations, filming their work, made the campaign come alive for the audience (Perry-Giles & Perry-Giles, 1999, 31-34). It was this intimacy, tied to the broader picture of how American elections work, that sold the film.

Tied with the concept of intimacy is the concept of relatability. *Harvest of Shame*’s long interviews and *The War Room*’s candid moments were not only good for making the people

seem real, but also for helping the audience relate to their struggles. Gibson spoke during his interview about a “universal connection”. This is true, but when the audience can see how they are personally connected to the issue presented, and then it becomes more than just sympathy. It becomes a motivation for action.

Nothing illustrates this better than contrasting *Inextinguishable Fire* and *What Farocki Taught*. Watching *Inextinguishable Fire*, the author could understand why the film did not catch on to American audiences. The film was depressingly pessimistic while at the same time cold, lifeless, and distant. The reason for both of these is the lack of a connection with its subject – the invention and development of napalm – to the audience. The film did not relate napalm to the audience. It scientifically described what a horrible weapon napalm is, but at the same time, it failed to relate this fact to the audience in any way. What was the audience to do about it? How could it possibly affect them, other than seeing it in the news? These were questions the film didn’t satisfactorily answer.

What Farocki Taught was filmed by Jill Goodmillow as a remake of *Inextinguishable Fire*, going so far as to recreate whole sequences shot-for-shot (Horne & Kahana, 1998). However, unlike the original, Goodmillow’s remake did try to connect the audience to the napalm development process, showing how the audience participated, however unknowingly, in a system that allowed such a weapon to be born and used (Horne & Kahana, 1998). This audience connection makes the subject relatable to their experiences, and helps the audience understand what it could do to make a difference. Isn’t the point of Filming for Change to motivate people to make a difference?

Conclusion: Where do we go from here?

Having looked at examples of what does and does not work, and getting the opinions of a small sample from our target demographic, we now have a blueprint for Filming for Change. If the goal of a documentary filmmaker is to create a policy change in an issue that has not been adequately addressed, he or she must try to appeal to wealthy and influential people who have the political power to make those policy changes. He or she must take into consideration the characteristics of that demographic – that they will be predominantly highly-educated white males between 35 and 64 years of age.

The filmmaker must take care not to turn their film into an act of propaganda for a particular position, as this will clearly offend the audience. What works better is to make the film slow-paced, methodical, and thoughtful. Quick editing and fast-paced information will go over the audience's heads, but slow editing with long pauses and mood-setting will help the audience think about what you are telling them. The film should have an intimate feel, helping the audience get to know the people being presented to them. It should also be relatable to their everyday experiences, not only to help create sympathy but also to help the audience reason a course of action to take to aid the situation. Together, these elements will motivate the audience to take action, and bring positive change to the problem or issue.

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Appendix A

“Homeless in Paradise”: Putting these findings into practice

Figure 1: “Homeless in Paradise”

Accessible at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kC7NhfEmiTg&feature=youtu.be>