

The Temperature at which Partisanship Spreads: A Genre Analysis of American Partisan Political Documentaries

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Inception

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Abstract

This paper presents a genre analysis of a selection of American partisan political documentaries released between 2004 and 2012, including Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* and Dinesh D'Souza's *2016: Obama's America*. Since the release of Moore's film, the genre has achieved commercial success despite a relative polarization between the critical responses towards liberal films and conservative ones. This essay determines that both liberal and conservative documentaries assign heroic and trustworthy roles to individual reporters and selections of interviewees, while leaders of the opposing party are villainized exclusively through selected archival video clips. However, while liberal documentaries are more prone to demonstrate a range of emotional appeals, conservative documentaries are more likely to rely on fear-mongering and angry aesthetics to persuade viewers.

Introduction

In 2004, Michael Moore released what would become the highest grossing political documentary of the past twenty-five years (Benson & Snee, 2008, p. 2; "Documentary - Political," n.d.). *Fahrenheit 9/11*,

which has achieved a lifetime gross of over \$119 million, offered audiences an entertaining critique of George W. Bush's presidency, accusing him of using anti-terrorist rhetoric and the Iraq war to serve personal financial interests ("Documentary - Political," n.d.). The film was one of many other political documentaries released that year, including some that attempted to directly refute Moore's claims (Benson & Snee, 2008, pp. 2, 3, 10).

Thomas W. Benson and Brian J. Snee (2008) claim that, with the release of *Fahrenheit*, "the era of the new political documentary had begun" (p. 2). The film was released amidst a high-stakes presidential election, utilizing the developing technology that allowed filmmakers to easily produce and distribute low-budget films (Benson & Snee, 2008, pp. 2, 3, 1, 10). As Robert Greenwald and Michael Moore went on to establish themselves as prominent liberal documentarians, their work was soon to be rivalled by right-wing filmmakers through the Citizens United organization and, eventually, the successful work of Dinesh D'Souza (Borda, 2008, p. 63; "Documentary - Political," n.d.). D'Souza's film *2016: Obama's America* has grossed over \$33 million in its lifetime, putting it in second place behind *Fahrenheit* for highest grossing political documentaries of the past twenty-five years ("Documentary - Political," n.d.).

When comparing public reactions to liberal and conservative films, popular liberal documentaries tend to receive more positive critical acclaim than conservative ones. On Rotten Tomatoes, *Fahrenheit* and Robert Greenwald's *Iraq For Sale: The War Profiteers* have received the scores of 82% and 100% respectively ("Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004) – Rotten Tomatoes," n.d.; "Iraq For Sale," n.d.). In contrast, D'Souza's *2016: Obama's America*, his most acclaimed film to date, received 27% ("*2016: Obama's America* (2012)—Rotten Tomatoes," n.d.). If both liberal and conservative documentaries can achieve box office success, what—beyond political affiliation—is the formal difference between these documentaries?

In an era of political polarization within public discourse, as has been outlined in Angela Nagle's book *Kill All Normies*, it seems timely to acknowledge cinema's ideological potential, which can be drawn from the work of Jean-Louis Baudry: "Projection and reflection take place in a closed space and those who remain there, whether they know it or not (but they do not), find themselves chained, captured, or captivated" (Baudry, 1974, p. 44). Any claim that documentaries are less ideological or biased than any other film, Bill Nichols (2010) points out, is a misconception: "The story a documentary tells stems from the historical world but it is still told from the filmmaker's perspective and in the filmmaker's voice. This is a matter of degree, not a black-and-white division" (p. 12).

This paper will present a genre analysis of the "partisan documentary film," focusing on a selection of American films to identify similar characteristics and stylistic choices that lead to the critical divide between liberal and conservative examples (Benson & Snee, 2008, p. 1). The liberal films within the scope of this analysis include *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Moore, 2004), *Iraq For Sale* (Greenwald, 2006), *John McCain vs. John McCain* (Brave New Films, 2007), and *McCain's YouTube Problem Just Became A Nightmare* (Brave New Films, 2008), and the conservative films include *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Peterson, 2004), *Hillary: The Movie* (Peterson, 2008), *Occupy Unmasked* (Bannon, 2012), and *2016: Obama's America* (D'Souza & Sullivan, 2012).

The documentaries presented here all contain three fundamental elements: heroes, villains, and a highly emotional style through which the heroes and villains contrast, encouraging viewers to choose a side. The last of these three elements explains what separates liberal and conservative films: while Michael Moore and Robert Greenwald present a wider range of emotional appeals in their work, the conservative films attempt to incite fear in viewers with intense music, sensational antagonizing rhetoric, and the tough appearances of muckraking 'experts.'

Trustworthy Heroes

The first characteristic of partisan political documentaries is the imposition of a strong sense of heroism among certain individuals representing the film's ideological position. Embodying a political affiliation, these heroes aim to uncover the negative secrets about the opposite party. In *Fahrenheit* and *Obama's America*, the filmmaker plays the role of the film's onscreen hero, exemplifying what Bill Nichols (2010) calls the "Voice of Authority": "This creates the sense that the film is making a proposal to us about the nature of the historical world: 'Things are like this, aren't they?'" (p. 76).

In *Fahrenheit 9/11*, the trustworthy hero that the audience is expected to relate to is Michael Moore himself, as he is seen and heard through much of the film. Along with providing voice-over narration, Michael Moore is seen engaging in memorable humorous antics, such as driving an ice cream truck around Capitol Hill while reading the Patriot Act over a megaphone, or spontaneously asking members of Congress if they'd be willing to enlist their children into the army (Moore, 2004, 01:02:51, 01:55:00). Seen wearing a baseball cap and jeans, and heard using a relaxed tone of voice, Moore tries to represent an 'average American' who is frustrated with the political system.

Michael Moore wasn't met with a substantial rival in the partisan genre until the release of Dinesh D'Souza's *2016: Obama's America*, a film that accuses Barack Obama of being a radical and anti-American presidential candidate. Aside from being a notable box office success, *Obama's America* rivals *Fahrenheit* by similarly implementing a direct relationship between the filmmaker and the audience ("Documentary - Political," n.d.). D'Souza spends portions of the film onscreen, engaging with interviewees and talking directly to viewers through voice-over narration. Unlike Moore, D'Souza seems to take his appearance and his rhetoric more seriously: displaying a wardrobe ranging from business casual to business

professional, D'Souza is seen employing the image and rhetorical tone of an investigative journalist, or an archetypical scholar (D'Souza & Sullivan, 2012, 00:20:49, 00:40:35).

Of the documentaries under analysis, the only other film to emphasize a single individual to fulfill the "Voice of Authority" is Steve Bannon's *Occupy Unmasked*, in which Andrew Breitbart is posed to offer the voice of reason that the Occupy movement supposedly lacks (Nichols, 2010, p. 76). Like D'Souza, Breitbart's outfit signifies professionalism, including aviator sunglasses and a suit jacket in the film's opening: Breitbart tells the audience, "The battle for the soul of America took an interesting turn in September of 2011, when out of the blue, according to the mainstream media, one finds a group called 'Occupy' occupying town squares, city halls, Zuccotti Park. Who were these people? . . . This is the organized left" (Bannon, 2012, 00:04:53). Breitbart confronts the liberal movement with a level of aggression unparalleled by D'Souza and Moore: at the end of the film, Breitbart is seen confronting a group of Occupy protestors and shouting "behave yourselves!" while being forced out of the area, further asserting Breitbart's appearance as a symbol of reason and bravery (Bannon, 2012 01:10:36).

Many of the films under analysis rely on a multitude of clips from interviews with partisan pundits who speak negatively about the opposite political side, such as conservative pundits like Dick Morris, Ann Coulter, and Frank Gaffney in *Fahrenheit 9/11* and *Hillary: The Movie*. These films also often feature interviews with victimized individuals that the audience is supposed to sympathize with, which Bill Nichols (2010) notes is common in the genre of the "Social Issue Documentary" (p. 250). In *Iraq For Sale*, much of the film's interview footage consists of civilian interviewees who suffered because of the careless services conducted by private companies working for the U.S. government in Iraq. In one clip, Katy Helvenston-Wettengel, the mother of a deceased Blackwater security employee, tells viewers that "Men over there working for Blackwater are still dying," and in

another, two employees who served as truck drivers for KBR and Halliburton in Iraq recount an instance in which they were both attacked by gunfire while on the road, emphasizing the carelessness of the private companies that served Americans in Iraq (Greenwald, 2006, 00:13:00, 00:38:36). In *Hillary: The Movie*, Billy Dale, the former director of the White House Travel Office, is interviewed to assist in constructing an antagonistic account of Hillary's conduct while Bill Clinton was president (Peterson, 2008, 00:11:53). These interviewees represent the Americans for whom these films' 'heroes' are trying to provide justice.

Elitist Antagonists

In contrast to these films' protagonists, the antagonist roles are filled by elite politicians who represent an opposing political affiliation and are only presented through archival clips that support the films' respective arguments. In *Fahrenheit 9/11*, following an interview in which a member of the U.S. army states that they're unwilling to kill "other poor people," an archival clip is shown of President Bush speaking from a podium, wearing a tuxedo, joking to an upper-class crowd: "Some people call you the elite. I call you my base" (Moore, 2004, 01:38:17). This clip is defended in *Fahrenheit 9/11*, in which it's explained that the event shown was held for charitable purposes (Peterson, 2004, 00:29:14). As is suggested by the title, Michael Moore is the primary villain in *Fahrenheit 9/11*; the film opens with archival footage of Michael Moore stating, "There is no terrorist threat," before immediately beginning a series of rebuttals against claims made in Moore's film (Peterson, 2004, 00:00:00).

Iraq For Sale doesn't focus on a single individual 'villain,' as the film aims to discredit many corporative CEOs and the politicians linked to them (Greenwald, 2006, 00:11:20, 00:31:28, 01:02:34). President Bush is seen prominently only once in the seventy-five-minute film, through an archival clip from a press conference in which Bush is asked about how private contractors are being held accountable: "I

don't mean to be dodging the question, although it's kind of convenient in this case [laughs]. I really will, I'mma call the secretary and say 'you've brought up a very valid question, and what are we doing about it?'" (Greenwald, 2006, 00:30:28).

Amid the 2008 presidential election, Brave New Films published short clips on its YouTube channel to attack Republican candidate John McCain's credibility, garnering millions of views (Musser, 2009, pp. 209-210). Among these clips include *John McCain vs. John McCain* and *McCain's YouTube Problem Just Became A Nightmare* (Musser, 2009, pp. 209-210). Both videos utilize archival news and interview clips featuring McCain that, when viewed in succession, contradict each other. In *John McCain vs. John McCain*, for instance, a clip of McCain speaking against political affiliations with religious groups is followed by a clip of McCain offering an address at Liberty University (Brave New Films, 2007, 00:01:25).

In *Occupy Unmasked*, amid the film's archival footage depicting the Occupy movement as loud and chaotic, Lee Stranahan is seen at one point arguing that President Obama borrowed rhetoric from the Occupy movement, using phrases such as "fair share" (Bannon, 2012, 01:04:45). The film chops and cuts the footage of Obama saying "fair share" to imply the extent to which Obama utilizes this rhetoric that "'Echo[es] Occupy'" (Bannon, 2012, 01:05:32).

In *2016: Obama's America*, archival footage of Barack Obama speaking at rallies is used to make Obama appear like an authoritarian leader with a secret agenda; it's this secret agenda that the documentary sets out to uncover (D'Souza & Sullivan, 2012, 01:05:00). Moreover, soundbites from the audiobook recording of Obama's book *Dreams from My Father* are used as a voice-over throughout the film (D'Souza & Sullivan, 2012, 00:23:54, 00:47:27). *Hillary: The Movie* aims for a similar depiction of Hillary Clinton, showing still photographs of Clinton, as well as excerpts of public

appearances and speeches (Peterson, 2008, 00:20:31, 00:46:40, 00:50:00).

Through the presentation of archival footage, these films' primary targets are left unable to defend themselves against the decontextualization performed by the documentarians. When it comes to "Inartistic proof," which includes archival footage, Bill Nichols (2010) warns that "This type of evidence lies outside the right of the orator or filmmaker to invent or create, although very much within his or her power to evaluate or interpret" (p. 78).

Rhetorical Strategies

Along with clearly positioning protagonists against antagonists, partisan documentaries carefully choose a style and tone with which to frame the information collected through interviews and archival clips. When comparing liberal and conservative films, it's noticeable that liberal documentaries use a wider range of emotional strategies to encourage viewers to criticize conservative politicians, while conservative documentaries often rely on scare tactics to convince audiences that left-leaning ideals aim to achieve a secret, anti-American philosophy.

While all these documentaries are organized into informational segments, *Fahrenheit 9/11* is organized chronologically, beginning with the controversial presidential election in 2000, and concluding with the Iraq war. Along with this, the story of Lila Lipscomb, a once proud and patriotic mother who becomes distraught by President Bush's leadership after her son is killed in Iraq, is interspersed through the film, offering an emotional overarching narrative unlike the other documentaries under analysis (Moore, 2004, 01:24:00, 01:33:51, 01:41:45, 01:52:41).

Fahrenheit 9/11 frequently moves from being humorously satirical to sombre and distressing. Moore (2004) presents George Bush and

the Republican administration as foolish and incompetent, evident at the end of the film, in which Bush's "fool me once" fumble is juxtaposed with Neil Young's "Rockin' In the Free World" (01:59:14). Similarly, near the beginning of the film, Moore (2004) presents a montage of President Bush on vacation, while The Go-Go's "Vacation" provides an upbeat soundtrack (00:07:37). To satirize the Patriot Act, Michael Moore (2004) shows footage of a Peace Fresno group meeting, telling the story of how the group was once under federal suspicion of terrorism: showing footage of the Peace Fresno group gathering together, Moore sarcastically says "Just look at them. A gathering of terrorists if I ever saw one" (00:56:25). By the time the film reaches its end, Moore (2004) leaves the audience with a reflective conclusion, acknowledging the link between social class and military service:

I've always been amazed that the very people who . . . have it the hardest are always the first to step up to defend that very system. They serve [in the military] so that we don't have to. . . . And all they ask for in return is that we never send them into harm's way unless it's absolutely necessary. Will they ever trust us again? (01:57:13)

Moore's (2004) film ends with a quote from George Orwell: "[the war effort's] object is not the victory over either Eurasia or East Asia, but to keep the very structure of society intact" (01:58:23).

Regarding the clips from Brave New Films, *John McCain vs. John McCain* uses triumphant trumpet music to sarcastically complement McCain's "straight talk" (Brave New Films, 2007, 00:00:11). In contrast, *McCain's YouTube Problem* aims for a more serious tone, and concludes with onscreen text stating that "The 'Straight Talk Express' has derailed[,] but the corporate media won't cover the story" (Brave New Films, 2008, 00:02:52).

Though Greenwald's work isn't fear-mongering, its rhetoric still incites concern. In *Iraq For Sale*, interviewee Aidan Delgado, an SPC Army Reserve who worked in the Abu Ghraib prison, describes

their experience as witnessing the destruction of the “dream of America,” and in the film’s conclusion, an interviewee proclaims, “I love our country, and I want our country to survive, and the survival of our country depends on us taking it back” (Greenwald, 2006, 00:33:25, 01:09:09). This last quote is supported with upbeat acoustic rock music, aiming for a hopeful view for the future of the United States’ workers and citizens (Greenwald, 2006, 01:09:09).

The conservative documentaries analyzed here use a different approach in decrying the liberal side, and aim to incite fear of a leftist world domination. These films view Democrats and liberal voters as threats to American values, and present key actors like Hillary Clinton, the Occupy Movement, and Barack Obama as self-serving world domineering villains. The music chosen for these films can be described as either frighteningly epic or creepy and sinister. As *Occupy Unmasked* leads towards its conclusion, the audience hears loud bass instruments providing the ‘dun-dun’ that one might expect from a *Transformers* movie, combined with footage of street chaos and rioting (Bannon, 2012, 01:09:50).

The conservative experts and interviewees are often seen as angry, using harsh sarcasm and volume to back up their statements. *Fahrenheit 9/11* aims to defend President Bush from Moore’s attacks, including explanations that President Bush was very busy while on the many vacations that Moore criticizes (Peterson, 2004, 00:27:41). Ann Coulter’s contributions to *Fahrenheit 9/11* and *Hillary: The Movie* mainly consist of sarcastic comments against members of the American left: rebutting Michael Moore’s supposed assertion that President Bush should’ve had a more active response to hearing about the 9/11 attacks while reading to an elementary school classroom, Coulter says “I would like liberals to explain to me what they think George Bush should’ve done, y’know, run out of the classroom, rip open his shirt, ‘let the bullets hit me first!’” (Peterson, 2004, 00:03:50). In *Hillary: The Movie*, Coulter, along with other interviewees, accuses Hillary Clinton of not being able to answer

questions consistently and coherently in debates during the 2008 election: “All that happened in that debate, was that, I think it was Tim Russert in that debate, engaged in the old journalistic practice of ‘the follow-up question.’ That’s all it took, and, y’know, all hell breaks loose because Hillary’s asked to actually tell us ‘what your position is” (Peterson, 2008, 00:53:43). Dick Morris, who’s also featured in *Fahrenheit 9/11*, appears in *Hillary: The Movie*, sarcastically saying near the beginning of the film, “Hillary Clinton scandals are a gift that keeps on giving” (Peterson, 2008, 00:02:33).

Dinesh D’Souza offers an exception to this loud and angry tone, and instead offers one that’s equally as sensational and cynical, but through the illusion of scholarly rationality, like that of a muckraking journalist. D’Souza’s film presents a theory that Barack Obama has radical anti-colonial sympathies that lead him to desire for the weakening of America as a world superpower (D’Souza & Sullivan, 2012, 01:17:50): “This insecure kid, who grew up in Hawaii and Indonesia, whose life is shaped by his father’s ghost, and whose ideology could not be more directly remote from what Americans believe or care about, is now the president of the United States” (D’Souza & Sullivan, 2012, 01:05:04). Many of the interviewees in *Occupy Unmasked* use this calmer tone as well, presumably to counter the supposed extreme and immature actions of the Occupy protesters (Bannon, 2012, 00:40:41).

Both *Hillary: The Movie* and *Obama’s America* aim to portray Clinton and Obama as secretive: over an hour into its runtime, *Hillary: The Movie* asks viewers, “Who is the real Hillary Clinton?” before addressing the Clinton Library and its many pending Freedom of Information requests (Peterson, 2008, 01:11:08). D’Souza similarly argues that many Americans voted for Obama without knowing the truth about his beliefs, as interviewee Dr. Shelby Steele states, “It was a racially motivated vote!” (D’Souza & Sullivan, 2012, 00:59:15).

In contrast with the liberal documentaries, which aim to encourage audiences to be critical of political elites, these conservative documentaries aim to incite fear through viewing Democrats and liberal Americans as radical and corrupt activists who threaten to destroy American freedom. *Fahrenheit 9/11* tells viewers that Michael Moore's film is nothing more than "one of the most effective propaganda movies ever made," and that, as Dick Morris states, terrorists are really "targeting every one of us" (Peterson, 2004, 00:56:00; 00:25:04). Actor Ron Silver is seen later in the film, stating, "I'm not trusting myself, or my children's safety, or our nation's safety, in the hands of Michael Moore's perspective on how to protect us" (Peterson, 2004, 00:54:50). Morris also concludes the film, narrating over patriotic music and images, "if you lose faith in yourself and your own country, the United States, you've undermined the only really consistent force for good in the world" (Peterson, 2004, 01:16:36). At the end of *Hillary: The Movie*, while on the topic of Clinton's 2008 presidential campaign, Mark Levin is seen saying "This vote comes down to one thing: liberty. Do you believe in liberty, or don't you? Economic liberty, free speech, protecting our borders, protecting our country from terrorism, the issue is liberty" (Peterson, 2008, 01:26:25).

In *Occupy Unmasked*, David Horowitz is seen telling viewers that "The left is a destructive force," along with footage of protestors carrying picket signs: "The left's ideas, how wonderful . . . 'we're going to liberate people from oppression.' But the practice of the left is quite the opposite" (Bannon, 2012, 00:41:56). Lee Stranahan is also seen in the film condemning the movement for advocating for a dictatorship, and for being oblivious to its control by the hacker group Anonymous: "And the people are all fools into thinking they're some sort of democracy. They don't know who's really running things behind the curtain" (Bannon, 2012, 00:25:25).

Critical Divisions

Conservative documentaries, with their rigidly fearful styles, are often accused of “enthymematic reasoning,” and are generally received negatively by film critics (Borda, 2008, p. 56). Critics tend to award liberal films with more sympathy, simultaneously recognizing the “emotional manipulation” that these films employ (Catsoulis, 2006). Commenting on *Obama’s America*, Stanley Fish (2012) observes that

. . . as the movie picks up polemical speed, philosophy, political theory and psychology are left behind and replaced by name-calling, and by a name-calling that brings D’Souza close to positions he rejects. . . . The argument founders on the fallacy of assuming that the adjective “American” has a fixed meaning with which everyone, or everyone who is right-thinking and patriotic, agrees.

Commenting on *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Jennifer L. Borda (2008) states that the film “address[es] assertions made by *Fahrenheit 9/11* only to redirect attention to other nonrelated issues,” and that it “emphasize[s] visceral, crude emotion rather than reasoned logic” (pp. 68, 70). Borda (2008) points out that, in response to Moore’s questioning of whether the war in Iraq was justified, *Fahrenheit 9/11* “justif[ies] the decision to go to war by shifting the debate: the issue is not whether Iraq threatened us in the past but whether that country constitutes a threat to the United States in the future” (p. 72). In the case of *Hillary: The Movie*, television advertisements for the film neglecting to provide political disclaimers were banned by an infamous court case, in which the film was criticized for “not address[ing] legislative issues and was produced solely to inform the electorate that Senator Clinton is unfit for office” (as cited in Musser, 2009, p. 207).

In contrast, while still being recognized for relying heavily on emotional filmmaking tactics, *Fahrenheit* and *Iraq For Sale* are offered extensive respect by critics. Robert Toplin (2005), in the

journal *Film & History*, recognizes that the main criticism levelled against *Fahrenheit* is due to its formal structure and presentation of evidence:

He could have provided his attackers a smaller target by leaving some non-essential segments out of his movie and by removing a few particularly provocative and contentious statements. . . . Moore's principal evidence is not inherently incorrect, but what one makes of it can, of course, excite animated disagreement. (p. 9)

Similarly, being recognized by writer Jeanette Catsoulis (2006) as an "NYT Critic's Pick," *Iraq For Sale* is described as "a horrifying catalog of greed . . . A febrile blend of facts, liberal outrage and emotional manipulation." While both liberal and conservative documentaries display strong political biases, critics seem to be more sympathetic to the liberal documentaries of Michael Moore and Robert Greenwald for encouraging viewers to criticize elitist powers and economic interests rather than demonize them.

Conclusion

This analysis has offered a description of the genre of the American partisan political documentary, which is defined by its positioning of heroes against villains, as well as a distinctive rhetorical style with which to encourage audiences to align with a specific political affiliation. Protagonists are presented through interviews as either experts or civilian victims, while the villains are alternatively presented through archival footage, which is decontextualized and stylized by whatever tone the filmmaker deems fit. In comparing the tones and styles of liberal and conservative documentaries, liberal films tend to appeal to a wider range of emotions, though ultimately serving to negatively criticize conservative elites and their personal economic interests. Conservative films, in contrast, are devout to the strategy of fear-mongering and demonizing the left for threatening abstract American values.

Though some of these documentaries were arguably unsuccessful in achieving their objectives, as is the case with the commercially successful *Fahrenheit 9/11* and its inability to prevent George W. Bush from being elected for a second term, the history of the documentary form contains many examples of films that ultimately led to social change. Famous examples of this include Errol Morris' *The Thin Blue Line*, which uncovered a devastating case of wrongful conviction, and Morgan Spurlock's *Super Size Me*, which successfully challenged one of the most powerful fast-food chains in the world (Martin, 2011; O'Brien, 2012). A possible and perhaps more successful alternative to these partisan documentaries could be one that criticizes partisanship or political polarization in the United States. A film adaption of a book like Angela Nagle's *Kill All Normies* could attract American voters with various political affiliations to criticize the abstract idea of 'political bias.' Future research beyond this analysis could include conducting genre analyses of partisan internet media, and whether there remains a split between the "emotional manipulation" of liberal media and the "enthymematic reasoning" of conservative media (Catsoulis, 2006; Borda, 2008, p. 56).

Filmmakers like Dinesh D'Souza and Michael Moore are still actively making documentary films. However, the box office earnings for their most recent movies—*Death of a Nation* and *Fahrenheit 11/9* respectively—appear to be nearly tied ("Documentary - Political," n.d.). Whatever may be drawn by this distinction, neither D'Souza nor Moore are approaching the commercial successes of their most popular works ("Documentary - Political," n.d.). If the study of the partisan documentary genre seems irrelevant in 2018, then, at the very least, it offers a glimpse into the history of political polarization in the development of digital media (Benson & Snee, 2008, p. 1, 2, 10). What remains to be seen is whether non-partisan media analyzing both left and right biases encourages the development of a collaborative public sphere.

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