

DEMOCRACY

Through the Looking Glass



Politics & Media in the Post-Truth Era

Filmed on location in New Hampshire and Massachusetts
Released May 2017 | Runtime: 76 minutes | Documentary

Director: Kevin Bowe | Producer: Kevin Bowe

A Story-Crafters Production

www.democracythroughthelookingglass.com

#politics #media #democracy #brokeninformationsystem #fakenews

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Official Trailer: [Democracy Through the Looking Glass Trailer](#)

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Logline

An American voter wants to find out why the political climate is so negative and joins the press to cover the New Hampshire Presidential Primary for nine months. While navigating the voters, media and campaigns on-the-ground, he also enters the untamed world of social media and digital tribalism. Ultimately he discovers that things are not what they seem with Democracy in America.



Short Synopsis

A citizen embeds himself with the media covering the Presidential election. So begins the journey down the rabbit hole of our broken political information system, where shiny objects hypnotize, truthiness empowers and paranoia runs rampant.

This 40,000-foot story is told from the trenches of press conferences, voter experiences and the campaign trail, with insights from veteran CBS journalist Bob Schieffer, *Boston Globe* Editor Brian McGrory, Harvard University's Nicco Mele and others.

Ultimately, this is a story about the immense challenges our Democracy faces in the digital age and the role "we the people" must play in renewing long-held national values in turbulent times.



Long Synopsis

The movie bridges the Americana image of democracy with the realities of today, exploring the state of media, the consequences of a generation of political polarization, and the impact technology on political discourse. The New Hampshire Presidential Primary served as the ideal field laboratory to observe and document behaviors.

For nine months, I collected experiences from more than 100 campaigns events, scores of press conferences, interactions with candidates, and a gazillion interviews by February, 2015. But as the story about media behavior was being distilled, things started getting weird. The intensity of social media meltdowns were more frequent and disturbing. A blizzard of memes begat an explosion of made-up news — much of it bordering on fantasy — but readily accepted by believers.

To explore these issues, I sought professional help and explored the possible consequences of this path.

Then, the possible became the reality. The ending was no longer a theoretical warning, but actually here. So, with 16 months of work in the rear-view mirror, I tripled down and got even more counseling from political shrinks and communication warriors.

The result: a journey down the rabbit hole of our broken political information system, where shiny objects hypnotize the media, people seek comfortable truths and the paranoid fringe that has haunted American history, now controls the executive branch of government.

In the end, the solutions are both obvious and elusive, as the *“uncontrolled acceleration of technological and social change (undermines) the power of the individual to make competent decisions about (their) own destiny.”**

Finally, this movie celebrates the strengths of both democracy and the positive role of new media technologies... despite the obvious overtones that indicate otherwise.

It demonstrates the access that one individual has in an open society to seek out answers for himself and to use technology to bypass the traditional power-brokers to affect change.

* Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, 1971



About the Production

This is the sole work of Kevin Bowe, derived from 23 months of field shooting, research and post production. Like most things in life, timing brought this movie to life. With a passion for history, politics and communication gadgets—dabbling in the former and working professionally in the latter—Kevin pursued a second (third?) career as a video producer 10 years ago.

Living 10 miles from New Hampshire, the light bulb went on in the Spring of 2015, to check out some presidential primary events. The result? The release of his first feature documentary, *Democracy Through the Looking Glass: Politics and Media in the Post-truth Era*.



Kevin is the Executive Producer of Story-Crafters, a video production company that specializes in examining broad social issues from the perspective of personal stories.

Past projects have focused on Post-Traumatic Stress in returning combat personnel, and the opioid epidemic that affects people throughout the U.S.

He has produced two short documentaries, “Bringing History Home” and “Honoring Ken” and created a 50-part web series “Stories from the New Hampshire Primary.”

Kevin worked in the cable advertising field during the 1980s — when cable was cutting-edge — before co-founding a sales automation software firm in 1994. Since 2004, he has been a communications consultant for non-profits and government agencies.

He has been involved in several political campaigns and was a campaign staffer for Wesley Clark’s 2004 New Hampshire Primary effort.

As far as journalism experience, some of Kevin’s best friends are journalists and, in the daze of college, he served as Editor in Chief of the (University of Massachusetts) *Daily Collegian*.

Previous to this,



Filmmaker's Statement

I'm a self-taught videographer who learned Final Cut X at an Apple store. I'm also a political junkie, who lives near New Hampshire. So I decided to have an adventure by following the Presidential candidates for a [video blog](#) I created.

While not knowing what the final subject would be, my goal was to stretch my passions into a full-length documentary. I shot, wrote, reported, interviewed, edited, voiced, etc. everything myself. I believe *Democracy Through the Looking Glass* addresses many critical issues that affect our society.

A political documentary often conjures up the image of an ideological polemic. My goal is the opposite: to apply a dispassionate and critical assessment of the state of media and politics today. American Democracy is being threatened by zealots on both the left and right, and technology is fueling their destructive behavior.

Research tells us that about 10% of presidential election media coverage deals with substantive issues like policy, campaign promises and personal character. This is a story about how the other 90% of the coverage is made. The wonders of technology have decimated the lifeblood of accountability journalism, but spawned thousands of alternatives that chase shiny objects, empower truthiness or feed the ever growing darkness of political paranoia.

However, let's not confuse media criticism, with demonizing the media or using their shortcomings as a weapon to undermine a free press. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, the mainstream media is the worst form of journalism, except for all the rest.

My hope is for this film to find its way into journalism schools as a case study of what is wrong with the current media system. Ideally, it influences news consumers to realize that they have to be far more media-literate in this social media age. More importantly, I truly hope this film begins a deep dialogue this country needs to have about the nature of democracy in the digital age.



Issues Explored

Democracy Through the Looking Glass documents the many failures of the mainstream media (MSM), which has left a vacuum of “trusted” news that is being filled by a litany of ideological or phony information (50 shades of truth) that news consumers have to parse.

- The MSM’s obsession with covering the optics of campaign strategy and horse race coverage creates a stark disconnect between the media and the concerns of voters.
- Tragically, this divide has life and death consequences. The film uses the heroin issue that emerged from the New Hampshire Primary to remind viewers that the opioid epidemic festered nationally for more than a decade before parents of dead children got the attention of politicians and the media. It took 12 years and 200,000 lives to get their attention, and even then, the coverage on the issue was shallow.
- The film highlights the MSM’s embrace of shiny objects (to the point of manufacturing news) at the expense of real people and their problems. This leads to distrust of the MSM and motivates people to look for “better” news sources.
- The focus of the film shifts to the impact of technology – not just the destruction of the newspaper industry and the driving force behind accountability journalism – but the very nature of the new communication technologies. Phone and tablet screens impact the way news is consumed and, therefore, created. Fragmentation of limitless media choices and the instant nature of new mediums like social media is amplifying the political discourse like never before.



- The film documents a dystopian underbelly of our media ecosystem, exaggerating differences, reinforcing conspiracies, connecting fringes, and turning up the volume. An already politically polarizing environment is on steroids. At the same time, the creation of the film itself is a good example of how technology allows an individual, in an open society, to create their own social commentary.
- We live in “truth bubbles” and we don’t seem to know how to get out of them. Ultimately, the media is just an accomplice to the enemy within us. We operate in a new and lawless land in this early digital age, where we are still exploring boundaries and have not yet established social norms for civic behavior.
- The not-so-subtle Marshall McLuhan influence (*the medium is the message*) now is self-evident. What is the impact of the early days of the digital age on Democracy? Will our printing press institutions and traditions be obsolete in the digital age? Many aspects of society will need to be “re-imagined,” taking old values and rebuilding institutions and traditions. But the current 20-minute news cycle we have will never let us contemplate the larger, more urgent issues that shape our society.

At this point in history, the story is still being played out.
“Stay tuned.”

***We have met
the enemy,
and he is us.***
- Pogo



Interviewees



Bob Schieffer is a veteran CBS journalist, most notably as host of *Face the Nation* for 24 years, the anchor of CBS Evening News and as a correspondent with *60 Minutes* from 1973 –1996.



Nicco Mele is the Director of the Shorenstein Center for Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University. Prior to this, Mele was Senior Vice President and Deputy Publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*. He was an internet strategist for Howard Dean's 2004 and Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaigns.



Virginia Sapiro is Professor of Political Science at Boston University. She has published extensively in the fields of political psychology, political behavior and public opinion. Sapiro is the recipient of the International Society for Political Psychology Harold Lasswell Award for distinguished scientific contributions in the field of political psychology.



Charles Sennott is the founder and Executive Director of The GroundTruth Project, a nonprofit media organization dedicated to supporting a new generation of journalists. He is an award-winning foreign correspondent, author and editor with 30 years of experience in journalism.



Carole Bell is an Assistant Professor of Communications Studies at Northeastern University. Bell's research explores the relationship between non-traditional news sources including entertainment media and sociopolitical attitudes and public opinion.



Melissa Zimdars is a Assistant Professor of Communications at Merrimack College. Zimdars is the lead researcher for OpenSources.co, a project dedicated to preserving the integrity and enhancing the transparency of information on the internet.



Gregory Payne is Associate Professor and Chair of Communications Study at Emerson College. His expertise is in political communication, crisis communication, and celebrity/spectacle media events.



Brian McGrory is the Editor of *The Boston Globe*. Prior to becoming editor, Brian was a columnist and White House correspondent for *The Boston Globe*.



Lawrence Lessig is the Roy L. Furman Professor of Law and Leadership at Harvard Law School. While a professor at Stanford Law School, he founded the school's Center for Internet and Society.



Andrew Smith is the Director of the University of New Hampshire Survey Center and his research and teaching is focused on survey methodology, elections, and public policy.



Jack Beatty is author and senior editor of *The Atlantic Magazine* and a news analyst for NPR's "On Point."



Dan Kennedy is an Associate Professor of Journalism at Northeastern University. His book, *The Return of the Moguls*, is scheduled to be released in 2017.

News and Awards

"A dismal report card on the media's Primary coverage last year." - Concord Monitor

Review by Ray Duckler – April 30, 2017 [Documentary on the N.H. primary says a lot – about all of us](#)

"...a splendid documentary...devastating... and it ought to be required viewing for every political reporter.." – Dan Kennedy, Media Guy, WGBH

Dan Kennedy – July 12, 2017 [Documentary Explores Flaws in How Media Cover Presidential Campaigns](#)

"(The movie) focuses on the media—their manipulations and distortions, their being themselves manipulated and denigrated— as a key factor in how we ended up in a "post-truth era."

– *The Boston Globe*

Peter Keough – July 6, 2017 [Democracy Endangered](#)

"(The director's) work truly is a stellar exposé of frauds... an indictment of a "media that [is] incapable of thoughtfully covering elections." – Dig Boston

Chris Faraone – July 5, 2017 [Nightmare Through the Looking Glass](#)

"...an insightful assessment of our political and media landscape... with a fresh and personal outlook..." – The Arts Fuse

Betsy Sherman – July 9, 2017 [Film Review: Democracy Through the Looking Glass; Take a Good Look](#)

Festivals

Flying Frame Film Festival / Dixon Springs, IL – April 21-23, 2017

Netroots Nation / Atlanta, GA - August 10-13, 2017

Anthem Film Fest / Las Vegas, NV - July 19-22, 2017

Breck Film Fest / Breckenridge, CO - Sept. 21-14, 2017



Press Releases

[North Shore Man Creates Documentary About Broken Political Information System](#)

[Kevin Bowe Wins Award in Impact DOCS Awards Competition](#)

Production Credits

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This film was created for the purposes of criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship and research.

Story Consultant	Julie Cook
Camera and Audio Support for Brian McGrory Interview	Kevin Friend
Audio Support	E.J. Ouellette Bob Lawless
Original Musical Score Composed and Performed By	Kate Sullivan
Opening Parade Sequence Arranged and Performed By	The Leftist Marching Band
Closing Music "Man with a Plan" Made Up and Performed By	Rod "The Flower Guy" Webber
Graphic Elements	Thom Barbour George Courage Mary Alice McParlane
Logistical Support	Julie McClain, NH Clinton for President Hope Hicks, Trump for President Shorenstein Center for Media, Politics and Public Policy Sarah Daniel and Susan Ocitti

I owe a great deal of gratitude to all who gave their time to be interviewed. Not all interviews were used, but insights gained made valuable contributions to this documentary. **Special thanks to:**

Arnie Alpert, American Friends Service Committee
Brenda Bouchard, Alzheimer's Activist
Jeff Greenfield, Veteran Journalist
Bob Holmes, Clay Dragon Studio
Wayne Lesperance, New England College
Peter Levine, Tufts University
Joanne Peterson, Learn to Cope
Perry O'Brien, Veterans for Peace
John Raby, Governing Under the Influence
Walter Shapiro, Veteran Journalist
Victor E. Sims, Foster Care Advocate

